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**WHERE SPATIAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND SPATIAL DECISION MAKING MEET. PUBLICALLY DEBATING PARTICIPATORY SPATIAL PLANNING VIA A NEWSPAPER.**Liesbeth Huybrechts <sup>1</sup>, Sarah Martens <sup>2</sup> & Oswald Devisch <sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Hasselt University, [liesbeth.huybrechts@uhasselt.be](mailto:liesbeth.huybrechts@uhasselt.be) <sup>2</sup> [sarah.martens@uhasselt.be](mailto:sarah.martens@uhasselt.be)<sup>3</sup> [oswald.devisch@uhasselt.be](mailto:oswald.devisch@uhasselt.be)**Abstract**

This article reports on the in-between results of a Participatory Design research process in spatial planning in Godsheide, a small village in the Belgian Region of Limburg. The research explores how the language of newspapers enables citizens, policy makers, property developers and local organisations to build capacities (cfr. spatial capacity building) in 'scripting' their reflections on, but also actions in spatial change. In the heads of our participants, there existed a duality between - on the one hand - the participatory process wherein collective reflections can take place and - on the other hand - the actions of making these reflections concrete in decision-making (e.g. on the design, policy making, assigning responsibilities etc.). To provide a more nuanced view on this apparent duality, this article presents a literature study on spatial capacity building, decision making and scripting and an evaluation of a year of fieldwork. It discusses how the participatory scripting of spatial reflections and actions in the form of a newspaper, facilitated a closer relation between spatial capacity building and the process of spatial decision making on concrete matters of concern by paying explicit attention to publically debating spatial change.

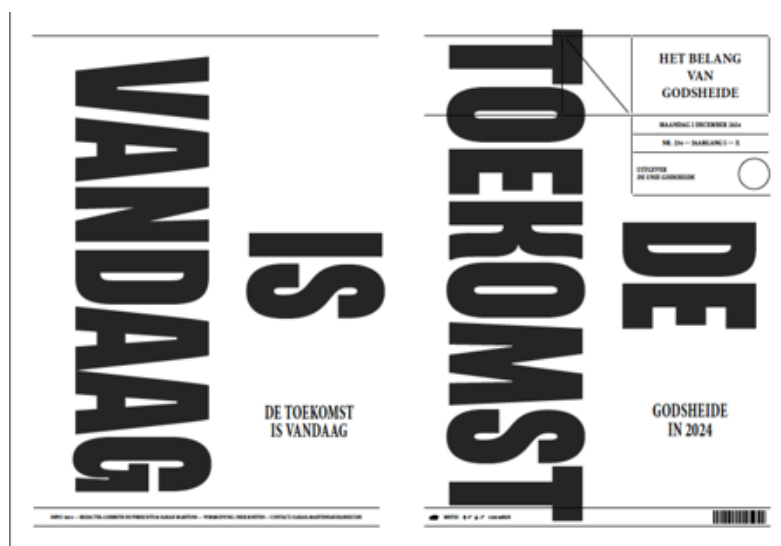
**1. Introduction**

"I do not want to be heard, I want to be included in decision making". This quote comes from one of the citizens we have been working with during the past year in a Belgian village, called Godsheide. A group of citizens, collected in the Unie Godsheide, were eager to work together with various stakeholders, such as property developers and policy makers, to constructively co-create spatial proposals for their village and its surroundings. The past ten years these citizens have been involved in participatory processes in the context of large-scale spatial studies and self-initiated artistic events in public space. They were disappointed by the impact that these participatory processes had on decision-making. They lost track of how their contribution got integrated by different authorities on different levels, arguing that as local experts they have a thorough knowledge of the concrete spatial context. They addressed the confusing, lacking or missing communication between different groups involved in spatial planning in Godsheide and asked for a more understandable and transparent decision making process. The citizens also explained that they were regularly heard in the debate about the why and what of spatial decisions (the juridical and policy aspects of the decision making process), but that they also want to be involved in how "the why and what" are concretely being implemented in the spatial context and by whom. In Latourian (2005) terms they thus not only want to be involved in providing and reflecting on "far away" facts, but to assemble with multiple human (policy makers, property developers,...) and non-human actors (a concrete spatial context, a fence, a mobile application,...) to address matters of concern via concrete actions. These concrete actions can entail policy decisions, design decisions, citizens' different uses or appropriations of buildings or spaces, co-operations between neighbours and so on.

The citizens associated reflecting and "hearing" with participatory processes and the "concretisation in decision making" with formal policy instruments. Based on previous experiences with participatory processes, also policy makers, architects etc. share the citizens assumptions on the - lack of - a link between participatory processes and decision making. Participatory processes have become a profession and industry in itself, next to policy, architecture or property development (De Bie, Oosterlynck & De Blust, 2012). This is not a problem in itself, but becomes one when this industry forms a d

politicised island, not addressing and including the other industries and - more important - the everyday context, conflicts and opportunities in the decision-making processes.

This paper explores how our research group got involved in researching how to demonstrate and enhance the close relations between the participatory processes and decision-making processes on concrete matters of concern in the domain of spatial planning. More precisely, we initiated a participatory process of spatial capacity building, which addresses both the processes of reflecting on a spatial change and acting on concrete matters of concern. For instance, the reflections both the inhabitants and the municipality shared about an underused school building generated a series of actions: an event that gathers people to discuss a school building in decay, a policy decision to rebuild the school, a design sketch of how it can be integrated in the context etc. However, even if the spatial capacity building process addresses both reflections and concrete actions, the participatory process might not lead to spatial change when too little relevant actors are involved in concretising actions (e.g. when only citizens organise an event to address the school in decay, but no policy decision follows to allow a spatial change to take place). Therefore, in this paper, we hypothesise that when the participatory process of spatial capacity building on the level of reflecting and acting is publically debated (Parkins & Mitchell, 2005) or made public (Latour, 2005), multiple actors have the opportunity to assemble around the matter of concern at stake and take part in spatial decision making necessary to generate spatial change. In this project we investigate the use of mass media - and their ways of 'scripting' (Goffman, 1976) everyday life - as platforms to support this public debate.



**Image 1.** De Toekomst is vandaag/ The Future is today

This leads us to the following question: "How can the use of newspaper in 'scripting' spatial capacity building processes and making them public, facilitate a closer relation between the participatory process of spatial capacity building and spatial decision making?" Can the newspaper and the public debate it generates, enhance the capacities of diverse groups of actors to reflect upon space in participatory ways and translate these reflections into concrete actions that impact the daily environment? In the following body of literature, we will discuss the concepts of spatial decision making, spatial capacity building and scripting public debate. Next, we will analyse our fieldwork in relation to these concepts. We will end with a discussion on the role of the newspaper and the public debate it generates in facilitating relations between capacity building and decision making, with close attention for the relation between citizens, policy makers, local organisations and property developers.

## 2. Literature: spatial decision making, capacity building and scripting public debate

We have made use of literature in the areas of PD, media theory and spatial planning to discuss spatial decision-making, spatial capacity building and scripting. We will start with providing more insight in what decision-making means in participatory spatial planning.

### 2.1. Spatial Decision Making

The core of our research in PD is spatial design, which implies introducing a spatial change in somebody's practice by means of an artefact (e.g. a model, a picture, ...). Bratteteig and Wagner (2014) recently made clear that making decisions about the spatial change, is crucial for the design result (e.g. different use of a building, co-operation between neighbours to set up a new service etc.), which implies that all people involved in the change should be included in the decision making. The authors state that design is a process of making choices among alternatives, a process that – following Schütz (1951) - only happens in situations that give rise to decisive new or uncertain experiences and we have to imagine ('project') the implications of a particular choice for future action. 'Decisions' are then selection processes among these choices, taking place in different 'design moves' (Schön, 1995): creating choices via exploring alternative futures, selecting choices, concretising choices and evaluating choices and the participatory design result. The authors address the fact that PD designers share power to make choices and decisions with users, but that not – although many PD designers would like to - every design move allows as much participation. Their research points out that in the creation and selection process of choices, participation has most opportunities in design processes, while in concretising choices designers have the largest role since they are trained in materialising ideas. In evaluating choices all participants have the opportunity to look back how opportunities were given to make choices.

As we already mentioned, one of the aspects that contributes to decision-making in a deliberative democracy, is public debate (Parkins & Mitchell, 2005). This study thus discusses how this particular participatory process fuelled public debate on the different design moves and – more specifically - how this debate enhanced and/or inhibited different actors' (involved and not yet involved citizens, policy makers, property developers designers etc.) contributions to decision making on the level of the – underexposed - concretisation process (policy decisions, design decisions etc.).

### 2.2. Spatial Capacity Building

Participation is described by Ehn (1988) as a meeting point between language 'games' of people with each their expertise or the specific languages, ways and rules of speaking that are associated with certain participant groups. This can refer to how community members speak about (the use of) their neighbourhood or how spatial designers use a certain vocabulary, maps or models in the design process. In participatory processes meeting points between different language games are more or less deliberately organised, in the form of arguing and acting together (Forester, 2000), functioning as parliaments wherein power relations are renegotiated and decision making processes are shared between participants (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014). They are also laboratories where new concepts, materials and ideas are tried out.

In discourses on participation in spatial planning authors often stress the instruments and procedures that make participatory processes possible (De Bie, Oosterlinck & De Blust, 2012). However, for participants (citizens, project planners, policy makers, designers etc.) to be able to take part in a participatory process and take it further when the designers leave the scene, they also need to possess capacities in participating in and initiating processes of spatial change. Capacity building refers to the process of improving the ability of a person, group, organization, or institute to meet a set of stated objectives (Brown et al., 2001), in this case to come to new ways of seeing and giving form to spatial issues, relationships and options (Forester, 2000). To formulate our approach to – what we call – 'spatial capacity building', we

draw on contemporary literature. We refer to Dindler and Iversen (2014) – building on Edwards (2010) - who state that if PD researchers want to achieve sustainable participatory processes, they should pay explicit attention to developing relational agency, a capacity that emerges in a two-stage process of 1. expanding an interpretation of an object or task with others, recognizing resources brought in by these others and 2. bringing the own ways of acting upon this expanded interpretation of an object or task in relation to how others act upon it. Also Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi (2014) discuss that participation can only generate 'durable civic engagement', when two requirements are taken into consideration, namely 1. triggering collective reflection or the ability of a group of citizens to receive, discuss, make sense of, re-interpret, circulate, and use mediated information and 2. building lateral trust, referring to the trust among citizens in acting upon this information. This leads us to pay attention to two aspects in the capacity building process mentioned by the above authors, namely enabling all participants to individually or collectively...

- Develop insight in and reflect on matters of concern, in this case spatial changes, e.g. who has responsibilities (who will take care/manage the actual physical site; who will organize it: planners, property developers etc.; who will use the space?); what the conditions are for change (what can be changed, what can be debated); what is broader spatial context is and what known future developments are (e.g. integration of citizens with potentially alternative visions on the spatial situation...).
- Act on these reflections, which refers to concretely assembling around the matters of concern in deciding upon e.g. what design decisions should be made on material use, sharing of garden space between neighbours etc.; what contributions participating actors can make on the level of expertise and use of time (e.g. policy makers with little time to spend on a specific issue)...

### 2.3. Scripting public debate

Bringing spatial capacity building processes in the public debate means to make them public: to visualise the ideas, discussions and results of what happens on both the level of reflecting as acting. This (public) documenting of the participatory character of spatial planning processes is important, since it is not taken serious by both policy makers and citizens precisely because –as we argued in the introduction- the difficult relation between decision making and participatory processes (see also Salgado and Salanakis, 2014). Documenting participation invites society to openly advocate it, enabling people to take up a more active role in the participatory process and its results (see also Schuler and Namioka, 1993) and thus to take part in the decision making process.

Diverse media can be used to document previous meetings between language games (Ehn, 1988) in the participatory process and move the conversations towards next steps. These documents are essential in infrastructuring processes – which refers to fostering sustainable crossing of language games (or ongoing participation) - enabling (unexpected) participants to make new steps, while building on the documents or re-minders of previous steps. In infrastructuring processes documentation can thus be used as a reference point for people who were not involved in the participatory process and can continue the process in their own ways and at their own time (Björgvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2012). Interactive media (Saad-Sulonen, Botero and Kuutti, 2012), board games (Eriksen, Brandt, Mattelmäki & Vaajakallio, 2014) or maps (Huybrechts, Dreessen, Schepers, 2012) have been used to document meeting points between different language games in spatial planning and move the process forward. These documentations do not copy the participatory process, they are 'scripted', a term inspired by Goffman's explanation that mass media make use of dramatic scriptings.

As we mentioned, in this case study we used a mass medium to bring the participatory process in the public debate. The dramatic scriptings used by mass media to document everyday life are careful constructions (Goffman, 1979, p. 84; Ytreberg, 2002). Like in the area of architecture, they are mock-ups of (both everyday as imagined) life. Via using different forms of technology (newspapers, radio, television, the live stage, social networks sites and so on), scheduling and dramaturgy, these scriptings give form to various forms of representation (Goffman, 1986, p. 53), such as making everyday interactions more condensed and entertaining to open it up for participation of an audience. These scriptings produce similar forms of identification with audiences as in everyday interaction, but Ytreberg (2002) – working

further on Goffman - explains that it works in a different way. Mass media are hyper-ritualised (Goffman, 1979), which means that in the scriptings mass communicators compensate for the fact that the interpretations of mass media information are difficult to control. Therefore they perform rituals that are characterised by standardisation, exaggeration and simplification, paying close attention to power struggles and uncertainties. Also, since mass media allow a multiplicity of readings, audiences are strict on what is communicated via mass media, for instance on twisted readings of problems that are addressed. They are thus hyper-critical in relation to the hyper-ritualisation of the media (Ytreberg, 2002).

In the case study we describe in this paper, we made use of newspaper language and build on McQuail's (1994; 2010) description of the language of newspapers to specify ways of 'scripting' everyday life. McQuail indicates that the newspaper is characterised by its sense of social and ethical responsibility, its recognised role as opinion maker, its (intended) freedom from one specific actor (e.g. policy or private interest), its professional approach to the sources, form and style of the messages and images, its emphasis on human interest and diverse audiences and on entertainment. This paper looks into how participants used the newspaper language to 'script' their reflections and actions on the spatial situation in Godsheide and how this generated public debate in relation to the several design moves where decisions could take place.

## **2.4. Conclusions**

We wanted to bring participatory processes and decision-making processes closer together. Therefore, we used this literature overview to learn that decision-making takes place in relation to several design moves (creating, selecting, concretising, evaluating choices and the participatory design result) in a participatory process. We also defined our approach to participation as spatial capacity building, wherein people are enabled to reflect and act on spatial changes. We gained insight in the ways in which newspapers can support actors to 'script' everyday life. In the fieldwork, we experimented with how making a newspaper supported participants to script the different reflections and actions - taking place in different design moves - bringing them in the public debate and as such sustain reflection and/or action, enhancing relations between participation and decision-making.

## **3. Methodology and case study**

We evaluated the relations between the spatial capacity building and decision making during a participatory trajectory of approximately a year in an Action Research approach wherein reflecting and acting go hand in hand (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a, p. 1). We did a qualitative analysis of the documentation of the Action Research process to create diverse samples that are seen as a representative of an aspect of the studied phenomenon. The documentation consists of our field notes, the newspaper and the evaluations of the actions that were related to what was depicted in the newspapers in the form of group and one-to-one in-depth interviews (Billiet, 1996). We roughly use our literature study as a starting point for the sampling based on our fieldwork, creating a grid with on the horizontal axe the spatial capacity building process of reflecting, acting and publicly debating and on the vertical axe the newspaper language's values such as responsibility, opinion making, freedom, professionalism, diversity and human interest and entertainment. The role of decision-making will be more thoroughly debated in the discussion.

During one year we engaged in the context of Godsheide, to explore future scenarios for this village in close collaboration with citizens, policy representatives, property developers and local organisations. We asked the participants to answer the question: How will life look like in future of Godsheide and what can you do yourself to achieve this perspective? The future horizon is set on 2024, 10 years from the start of the workshop. Citizens, policy makers, private organisations and (spatial) design researchers were asked to use the 'dramatic scriptings' of newspapers to produce a set of articles, headings and images about how they saw Godsheide in 2024, opening their views on the spatial situation. In a scenario workshop small stories were told in short newspaper headings and texts. These texts were then used to produce newspaper images, made by the participants who collaboratively performed the stories in the spatial context of Godsheide. This performance was then translated in a still image, a "tableau vivant". The stories

were thus not only depicted by, but also embodied by the participants, activating them to address spatial challenges in daily life. For making these images we were inspired by the use of drama and props by



Brandt and Grunnet (2000), Binder's video scenarios (1999), Ehn and Sjogren's scripts for action (1991) and our own experiments with using performance as a method in PD (Huybrechts & Jansen, 2009).

#### 4. Findings



To be brief, we summarised the results in a grid, preceded by a small history of the project. We will describe two iterations of the fieldwork. The first iteration is discussed in the first two columns (reflection and action) and involves the making of the newspaper as a first capacity building process among citizens, designers and local organisations. The second iteration is discussed in the third column (public debate) and involves the public debate about the newspaper, being a second capacity building process among a larger group of people, during which some initial reflections or actions are taken up, new ones are generated, etc.

In December 2013, a study that would result in a GRUP or regional spatial implementation plan Hasselt-Genk (which includes Godsheide) was open to participation on a formal and juridical level by means of a 'public investigation', in a period of 60 days. The format of communication of this GRUP with the community was limited to a 'public declaration' printed on yellow posters in the neighbourhood. As a reaction to that, in February 2014, 27 inhabitants sign a notice of objection to express their concerns. In May 2014 one of the representatives of Unie Godsheide – a collection of citizens of Godsheide – contacts our research group to support their civic actions in relation to this GRUP. In preparation of the participatory process 'De Unie Godsheide' again present their organisation and ten needs of Godsheide to the board of aldermen. Also, one of our researchers participated in formal working groups to prepare a new housing policy plan for Hasselt (including Godsheide). The study leader of this plan wants to remain involved in the Godsheide case, but he warns us that there is a strong reticence of the policy makers to formalise participatory initiatives. We invite an alderman and the executive chief of spatial policy to join in the workshop, but the policymakers, at long last, decide that no one of the policy administrators can participate, because of the contested procedure of the GRUP and the conflicts between the policy-makers of Hasselt on this matter.

Although both the citizens of Godsheide as the researchers/designers saw most value in the workshop if also policymakers join, they decide to go along with the workshop, envisioning that the capacity building process continues via the public debate that is generated via the newspaper. The process of making the newspaper, was thus mainly driven by citizens, representatives of local organisations and researchers/designers. We call them the first group of participants, next to the second group of participants who became involved in a later phase. The policy makers and people from the local community who were not involved in the first part of the process, joined the festive presentation of the newspaper on a winter barbecue in the village and in art centre Z33, where the newspaper articles are translated into small food dishes to make them debatable with people (e.g. greenly coloured dishes represent one of the pleas in the newspaper to turn the golf track also in a public green space for the community). Policy makers, public, private organisations and property developers also start responding to the content of the newspaper when it gets spread in the village, city and via social network-sites. The newspaper as a documentation tool made it possible to focus the attention of the first and second group of participants on the participatory process and to let go of their preconceptions (e.g. The city was planning new housing in Godsheide, since the city of Hasselt inevitably has to expand because of a growing amount of inhabitants. However, the citizens were worried about losing green space). These are the main conclusions from our sampling exercise, summarised in a grid:

	<b>Iteration 1: Making of newspaper</b>		<b>Iteration 2: Debate over newspaper</b>
	<b>Capacity building: reflections</b>	<b>Capacity building: actions</b>	<b>Capacity building: public debate</b>
<b>Scripting documentation: responsibility</b>	Via the newspaper articles citizens scripted (wrote about) their responsibilities in spatial change	<p>The citizens embodied these responsibilities in public space, e.g. via performing a new cooperative organisation in Godsheide providing food and services, using the bridge as a connection; via setting up a neighbourhood centre in the previous church... <b>(Image 2)</b></p>  <p><b>Image 2. The church and the co-operatives' bridge</b></p>	The articles generated a debate between aldermen, policy advisors, citizens and researchers on diverse fora (e.g. policy meetings, social networks) on taking and sharing responsibilities in spatial planning, instead of attributing them to one party (e.g. policy or citizens)
<b>Scripting documentation: opinion making</b>	The citizens scripted engaging articles (often activist and collaborative in nature) that reflect upon and articulate their role as opinion makers about a particular spatial change. E.g. in one of the articles a group of citizens present an initiative wherein they re-created and re-opened a school building via using crowdfunding by the community. In the article, the participants reflect on how they engage outsiders via a series of silent protests in the crowdfunding initiative.	<p>These reflections were often translated in performing and organising inviting events where proposals were discussed to mobilise spatial change. E.g. the citizens actually organised this silent protest before the school so they could include it in the picture and provoke discussion in the neighbourhood <b>(Image 3)</b>.</p>  <p><b>Image 3: Silent protest before school</b></p>	These opinion-generating proposals were spread and discussed by 2 traditional newspapers and newssites and by some individuals (e.g. an alderman) on social networksites. Also the school group responsible for the school building in Godsheide and some project developers responsible for building housing in Godsheide were engaged (although not always directly through reading the newspaper) to react to and even act upon the proposals



<b>Scripting documentation: freedom</b>	<p>The freedom associated with newspapers stimulated the citizens to script critical reflections on their surrounding space. E.g. a silent picnic was organised on the golf terrain to reclaim the green space for the community <b>(Image 4)</b>.</p>  <p><b>Image 4: Silent picnic</b></p>	<p>This freedom was also translated in performances in public space that were organised in-between policy makers and citizens to reflect that they were not only dependent on individual interest, but looked for a common interest. E.g. The church as neighbourhood centre.</p>	<p>The common, but critical character of the proposals and actions in public space triggered the debate of passers by, media and policy makers on the freedom of citizens and policy makers to take spatial decisions. However, because the articles were mainly focussed on the common good, the impact of individual decisions and properties on spatial planning were underexposed.</p>
<b>Scripting documentation: professionalism</b>	<p>The citizens scripted their articles/images in such a way that they represented their good team work and skills in fact checking. E.g. One of the proposals talks about an activist group protesting to reopen the debate on the role of the bridge in reconnecting two sides of Godsheide by placing their request in a respectful relation to history. It talks about the history of the bridge that got bombed in World War I and replaced by a ferry boat, until in 1941 thirty-five children died on the boat because a teacher overloaded it and it sunk. Since then, the bridge remained a taboo subject for many inhabitants.</p>	<p>The articles lead to performances in public space, representing qualitative teamwork among the members of the redaction teams, citizens, project developers and policy makers. E.g. One picture depicts group work among the activists reclaiming the bridge <b>(Image 5)</b>.</p>  <p><b>Image 5: Activists reclaim bridge</b></p>	<p>The professionally and collectively created articles and images generated public debate on the facts and fictions surrounding spatial change in Godsheide among the citizens, the aldermen, etc. E.g. New policy meetings were set up to continue the participatory process in Godsheide after a long break.</p>
<b>Scripting documentation: diversity and human interest</b>	<p>The participants scripted the articles and images in such a way that they had a clear 'face': the roles of the necessary actors to make the proposals work in reality were clearly expressed.</p>	<p>Different protagonists (e.g older citizens, activists, physically impaired citizens, local entrepreneurs, youngsters etc.) took ownership over different proposals and took the first actions in public space. E.g. the repurposing of the church as a community centre was driven by a physically impaired woman, aiming to turn the centre in an example of respect for diversity.</p>	<p>The proposals deepened and further informed the existing debate in the city – that was already drafting a proposal for becoming an inclusive city – on inclusion and diversity.</p>
<b>Scripting documentation: entertainment</b>	<p>The participants scripted the articles as joyful events to motivate others to engage with the content of the proposals.</p>	<p>The articles were materialised in public events that took place in public space, where people could gather, e.g. the festive opening of the church, the food reception in the art centre, a winter barbecue at the church celebrating the release of the newspaper etc.</p>	<p>Because of the joyful character of the events, policy makers engaged with the sensitive contents of the articles and even presented the process as a good-practice on the board of aldermen</p>



## 5. Discussion: the newspaper and decision making

It is fair to say that the main objective of the newspaper was to investigate how the newspaper could help to turn reflections (which were often already present among the stakeholders, given the long participation history) into concrete spatial decisions, a step where design can play a large role. In this discussion we would like to look a bit deeper into how the public documentation via the newspaper of (the reflections and actions during) the participatory process interacted with decision-making and who was involved. Although in this article most attention was paid to the concretisation phase, we refer back to the different design moves (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014) where decision-making can take place in a PD process to point to some areas of debate.

The participatory scripting of articles and images allowed citizens, researchers and local organisations to take part in exploring and sharing alternative futures and thus in creating choices. The policy makers – because of the political conflicts surrounding the Godsheide context – remained absent in this exploration phase. However, in a ‘discreet’ meeting with the policy makers following the newspaper making process, they expressed their regrets about not participating in the first part of the process. They proposed us to subtly convince one alderman who did not believe in participation to set up a new trajectory by demonstrating a diversity of good participatory practices and by working directly with the property developers involved in Godsheide. To optimally include these policy makers, without excluding the citizens in the phase before taking a next step in the participatory process wherein more actors are involved, we should question the limits and possibilities of publicly documenting this type of discreet meetings where citizens are not invited. How suitable is the language of the newspaper to script the content and form of these types of meetings into articles and images for 2024? Could the newspaper become a periodical that slowly progresses towards 2024, where both the discreet and more public meetings become documents for next steps in the participatory process? How do the ways of scripting newspapers differ between groups of actors (e.g. should we organise scripting sessions with policy makers that are optimally integrated in daily meeting schedules)?

Once the proposals of alternative futures got spread and became part of the public debate, discussions on some proposals were continued (selection between the choices), resulting in new design moves. Rather than the individual proposals (e.g. the debate on the school building was continued by policy makers and the school group), the more general debate on spatial planning, housing and infrastructure in Godsheide was continued by the citizens and policy makers. The citizens used the newspaper as a vehicle to take new steps in negotiating with policy on the GRUP. Policy makers – after seeing the newspaper – contacted our research unit to discuss a structural cooperation on participatory spatial planning in the framework of Hasselt (and thus also Godsheide), with quick visible actions in Godsheide to demonstrate the good intentions of Hasselt policy in that village. Although they felt obliged to react and engage with the newspaper, they also ‘rejected’ the newspaper, as embodiment of the request for participation of inhabitants of Godsheide, who are perceived as activists, rather than concerned villagers. This slow shift to more and more diverse groups of participants – although with conflicting visions – participating in different degrees in the selection processes, raises questions on keeping the relations

between capacity building and decision making strong. Two questions pop-up: How can the medium that is used to script documentation evolve in relation to the phases and the needs of the project (as is also discussed by Devisch, Poplin, Sofronie, 2015), e.g. when proposals start taking the form of plans and models or when more people start to become involved in the debate? Can IT play a role in this?

Some reflections during the participatory process were concretised into choices for material performances in public space and were photographed. Actually performing the articles about the future of Godsheide in space, using proposals, changed the initial reflections and proposals and rooted them deeper into reality. For instance, the initial vague complaints about the school building became – through the action – concrete in performing a series of silent protests with community members, addressing concrete material aspects of the building and its location and eventually resulting in an article on a crowdfunding initiative by the protesters to rebuild the school. These concretisations were mainly a playground in-

between the citizens and the researchers/designers, but they attracted the attention by community members, private and public organisations and policy makers as potential participants in the process. When we want to involve these 'other' participant groups – next to the citizens – in the decision making on the concrete actions, we have to question how these actors can act as much as possible in the concrete spatial context with the people who are active there, taking into account the expectations and possibilities of a concrete participant group e.g. the little time policy makers have for travelling to the concrete worksite.

The participation of diverse actors in making choices in the Godsheide process was evaluated – and is still being evaluated - with citizens, researchers/designers, policy makers and project developers. This evaluation took place through the action, but also via organised in-depth interviews with some of the citizens and group discussions with policy makers, advisors and project developers. It appeared that although the citizens and researchers would have liked to have policy makers more actively involved in the newspaper making process, they still felt that they made next steps in achieving their goals of impacting decision making since over time more and more actors became involved that could further concretise spatial actions using their expertise (e.g. investing money, making policy decisions, baking a cake for the meetings...). When – which is often the case in spatial planning - actors can't be involved simultaneously, it is a challenge to keep the relations between capacity building and decision-making close. Therefore, we have to question how policy makers, planners and property developers can be approached in simultaneous ways with the citizens. And when no simultaneous workshops are possible, the question is how to keep the different participatory instances with diverse groups closely in interaction with each other, without forgetting people on the long road of the planning process (see infrastructuring, Björgvinsson et al, 2012).

The results of this participatory process are diverse and change over time. First, as researchers, we were very interested in the newspaper as a method to allow the participatory process to enter the public debate, which we considered as a result in itself. The second tangible result was important for us and the citizens, namely the newspaper containing the spatial proposals. A third result was very important for the citizens, being the intentions of policy makers to put the participatory trajectory in Godsheide back on the political agenda. However, we noticed that - in relation to this third result - policy makers/administrators approached the researchers as experts and mediators, which could threaten the close contact with the citizens in this process. When we want to keep close relations between participatory capacity building and decision making, we have to question how to advocate for seeing participation in decision making as an equal result to the spatial planning proposals themselves.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper we hypothesised that when the participatory process of spatial capacity building - on the level of reflecting and acting - is publically debated (Parkins & Mitchell, 2005) (Latour, 2005), multiple actors have the opportunity to assemble around a matter of concern and take part in spatial decision making, necessary to generate spatial change. Therefore we explored the research question "How can the use of newspaper in 'scripting' spatial capacity building processes and making them public, facilitate a closer relation between the participatory process of spatial capacity building and spatial decision making?". The findings showed that the newspaper generated public debate around the spatial reflections and actions by citizens, local organisations and researchers/designers, which invited a second iteration of reflections and actions by multiple stakeholders.

In the discussion we debated how this this second iteration of reflections and actions, related to decision-making by various actors. As Bratteteig & Wagner (2014) already indicated, participation in decision-making has most potential in the creation and selection phase and often diminishes in the phase of concretising ideas. Via the performance of the proposals in the spatial context, the participants became a very active part in concretising the spatial proposals, but it was a challenge to involve other participants, such as policy makers, in this concretisation phase of acting in space. However, it was especially the participation of the citizens in the participatory results that raised most questions. The most important result for the citizens was that they would be involved in the spatial decision-making, instead of only

“being heard”. Although the citizens were involved in many aspects of decision-making (e.g. choices of issues to address, concrete locations etc.), the newspaper rather became an indirect informant of the policy meetings where we as researchers, instead of the citizens, were invited to talk about the spatial participatory process. While not all participants need to be present at the same time in all decisions, we should be careful that this participatory process does not become - again - a way of “hearing” the citizens, instead of making them equal part of the spatial planning team.

This article showed that for the participants this issue of not always being able to attend all meetings where decision making takes place was addressed by not only reflecting and acting on spatial changes in participatory ways, but also allowing the participatory process to enter the public debate. By publicly documenting the participatory process (and thus making the questions, decisions, actions... transparent), all actors – also those not present - can at all times take an active role (e.g. Schuler & Namioka). Public documentation thus becomes a platform for infrastructuring. This has advantages:

- It shifts part of the attention from the end results to the participatory process, allowing the participants to let go of prejudices about these results, leaving openness for surprises.
- The public documentation offers the participatory process a stage that gets – just like e.g. a museum collection – a value in itself so it can be shared online, via peoples’ windows and in exhibitions; becoming a reference point for new groups that want to develop (spatial) ideas for a certain issue subject of the participatory trajectory.
- The public status of the participatory process gave participants more trust in the fact that the process could contribute to a desired product: decision making or spatial results.
- When publicly documenting all public and discreet meetings, all actors have the opportunity to follow and enter the debate, which reduces problems related to some parties being absent in parts of the decision making process and to decisions on who can (not) be present.

This case study showed us that giving a participatory process a well-designed stage, helps to build trust among participants (citizens, policy makers, project developers, architects,...) and can be a catalyst for reflecting, acting and decision making by multiple participants. If the process gets this kind of attention, it can lead to better results. If it doesn't lead (immediately) to the desired result, than - at least - the process was worthwhile.

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