

Track 4: Participation and New Governance: Ethics, Responsibilities and Commitments

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Spatial capacity building as requirement for durable civic engagement

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Civic participation implies the active participation of citizens in policy making processes (Arnstein, 1969). This requires, on the one hand, that (local) authorities provide the appropriate (communication) instruments, (interaction) methods, and intermediaries (e.g. Slocum, 2003; Loyens & Van de Walle, 2006) and, on the other hand, that citizens possess the necessary capacities to engage with what is provided. In practice, the majority of civic participation initiatives pay attention to the first requirement, but hardly ever consider the second. One of the underlying argumentations of not explicitly considering capacity building, is that participation is a self-generating process: participating in civic actions makes one better at participating in civic actions (De Bie et al., 2010; Loeckx et al., 2009).

In this paper we argue that there also is a need for a more explicit form of addressing capacity building. We refer to this form as 'spatial capacity building' and define it as the process of improving the ability of people, organizations and institutions to (1) reflect collectively on the spatial transformation processes taking place in their environment and (2) act upon these processes, either individually or collectively. We claim that such a process could help to increase the chance that civic participation leads to durable civic engagement.

In this paper, we will frame spatial capacity building, discuss a number of on-going projects attempting to implement this process within the Flemish urban planning context, and propose a preliminary taxonomy of spatial capacity building approaches.

Keywords: Civic learning, collective reflection, lateral trust, spontaneous transformation processes

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Planner in the midst the governance networks and institutional framings

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The Finnish planning systems traditionally adheres to democratic welfare state ideals that emphasize transparency of administration, right of participation for all, as well as legal responsibility of planners to hear out the participants. New governance-based planning concepts – such as vision groups, informal master plans and city-region structural schemes – are increasingly utilized within public administration. The resulting practices transfer various tasks, ranging from agenda-setting to decision taking, outside the established forms of civic control. Power is afforded to actors and groups that are, within the context of these practices, not publicly accountable nor obligated to account for any other groups. On the other hand, also public planning practices include actors who control activities through their institutional positions and associated institutional framing.

Through two empirical cases, we look the actor roles and institutional framings that condition the actions of networks, partnerships and planning: the duties, responsibilities and entitlements of institutional and individual actors in both regulatory and informal spatial planning. While our first focus is on the role, power and influence of the planner in shaping the contents and practices of planning, we also ask who should have the responsibility for assuring that principles of good governance and democracy are followed. We shed light on the significance of planner's role in relation to the other actors' institutional framing powers. Results indicate that 'embedded' institutional framings may far outweigh the process-specific power relations, and that the planner may be controlled by these forces even in apparently simple and straightforward planning processes.

Keywords: institutional framing, governance networks, planner's role, participation, Finland

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