The Mechanics of Playful Participatory Processes

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With the increasing interest of local governments in civic participation, it becomes important to address inherent asymmetries in existing public participation processes, such as inclusion, time availability and long-term commitment, and knowledge and power differentials. Game-based participation has the potential to enhance public participation processes and lead to civic learning. At the same time, games tend to reproduce and even reinforce existing assumptions about stakeholder roles, procedures and political agency and social dynamics. We argue that urban planners will be able to improve the coherence and overall experience of participatory processes by thinking in terms of separate game mechanics, which when used in balance, create a successful player/participant experience. In doing so, some of the asymmetries observed in the existing participatory framework can be addressed. The potentials and challenges of game elements' applications are discussed in the framework of three case studies in the Netherlands, Austria and Belgium.

1. Introduction

The transition from 'government' to 'governance' has led to the multiplication and diversification of public and private organisations that participate in decision-making, and the fragmentation of governmental bodies, which distributes responsibility across a wide range of institutional actors. With traditional government and citizens being just two of the actors involved in this new institutional landscape, there is an increasing interest in defining the processes through which these actors can negotiate and reach decisions. Particularly, in the field of urban planning, the multiplication of stakeholders has led to spatial configurations in the production of urban space, characterized by large privately owned urban developments, which feed inter-city competition (Brenner, 2004; Grahan & Marvin, 2001). The large complexity of urban projects and the need to include multiple stakeholders has renewed the interest in civic participation, with participatory processes being embedded in several national legislations across the EU. At the same time, we witness a change in societal dynamics and urban civic practises where citizens form local initiatives and engage in so-called civic city making, on the fringe of institutional participatory processes. Civic groups become active in a broad range of activities such as urban gardening, mobility or energy initiatives, demonstrating alternative forms of participation to the formalised top-down processes.

Serious games have been applied in planning since the 1960's (Abt, 1969; Duke, 1975) as a way to overcome several challenges associated with the intricacies of planning, both on the level of understanding and modelling urban dynamics and by providing participatory and collaborative environments. There are undoubtedly several advantages of engaging citizens in planning processes

with the use of games, such as civic learning, reflection and development of lateral trust (Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi, 2014). Games also provide a framework for collective goal setting, where the data produced by this collective environment can be understood as a public record of the participation process on which the planning body is expected to react but also as a resource that can become actionable by other groups. Digital games in particular offer rich options of modelling reality and possibilities for dynamic manipulation of the game environment (Poplin, 2014). As such, games provide a structure of rules and mechanics, and a means of communication that provides an environment where the content can emerge – contrary to more traditional approaches where the steering goes strongly over the content. Within a game, content emerges out of the combination of various game mechanics, '*the various actions, behaviours, and control mechanisms afforded to the player'* (Hunicke et al, 2004). However, the application of games in participatory planning processes is not in itself unproblematic, as games tend to reproduce and even reinforce existing assumptions about stakeholder roles, procedures, political agency and social dynamics (Lobo, 2004; Fernholz, sd). While maintaining a modest outlook on the possibilities of either participatory processes or games to affect systemic change, this paper builds on a line of arguments that focuses on optimising interactions within specific tools' applications during participatory processes (Poplin, 2014; Innes & Booher, 2010).

1.1 Living Labs, Methods and Data

The three cases are: the new Reitdiep area in Groningen, the Netherlands, where a community of inhabitants is pushing for an energy transition agenda; the 3rd district (Landstrasse) and 20th district (Brigittenau), in Vienna, Austria, where community building projects focus on increasing resources sharing; and finally, Winterslag in Genk, Belgium with a focus on work spaces. The exploratory period investigated participatory projects and approaches in the three living labs to develop a structured typeset and evaluation of participatory processes and related challenges and difficulties that serve as the basis for the following game design and prototyping. The three cities cover a large spectrum of spatial and social settings and offer the possibility to study applications of participatory processes within contrasting environments; a mid-size, fringe city within a larger rural area (Groningen), a growing European capital (Vienna) and a former industrial city forming part of a larger conurbation (Genk). We present an overview of participatory tools commonly used in existing processes and discuss their applications within the larger context of each project. Additionally, analogies between participatory tools and game mechanics are drawn in order to propose a restructuring of participatory processes following a game design model, in which particular mechanics are carefully selected and implemented in specific components of the game to contribute to the total player experience.

2. Results and Discussion of the exploratory case studies

Civic engagement and citizen participation are broadly defined as the sum of political and social practices, through which individuals influence and attend to public affairs, beyond their direct private environment. (Gordon, et al., 2013; Parés & March, 2013). These practices are informed by the communication technologies of each time and are formatted (Muller, 2009) by the spaces within which they take place. For Arnstein, citizen participation can only exist when those excluded from the political and economic processes are being deliberately included, through the redistribution of power. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) In planning, the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups has been the task of communicative planning, an approach calling for the positioning of the planner in a mediating position, trying to balance conflicting interests and bridge power differentials. Both systemic limitations of participatory processes as well as several organisational and implementation complications previously identified are met throughout the three case studies. Fainstein (2000) summarises the practical inefficiencies of communicative planning, despite its theoretical allure. In its foundations, it ignores the endemic, underlying social conflicts and the domination of powerful interest groups and thus does not address persistent systemic problems. In terms of its organisation, it tends to privilege the role of the planner over the context or the outcome; it remains awkward towards unjust outcomes and it can be solipsistic in that it places the emphasis on personal stories and beliefs and remains very much group specific, while it rejects the idea that bureaucratic decisions can lead to

desirable results. Even on the level of implementation, the already powerful continue to dominate, there are lengthy processes that lead to high drop-out rates, participants are unable to properly frame their own desires and very often the phenomenon of NIMBYism appears. (Fainstein, 2000) Due to the set-up of the research project and the different conditions of the cities, the three living labs represent a broad variety of approaches, content and topics. However, similarities can be observed in the three living labs (table 1).

Table 1: Comparative overview of the participation processes in the three living labs

		Vienna/Austria	**Genk/Belgium**	**Groningen/Netherlands**
	City	Capital City	Metropolitan Region	Mid-sized town in declining region
	Case Study Area	Brigittenau, 20th district Landstrasse, 3rd district	Winterslag/Vennestraat	Reitdiep - New Residential Neighbourhood
Content of the Process				
	Content Focus General	**Urban Planning**, *Community Development*, Local Economy Energy, Carbon Footprint		
	Content Focus at project level	*Community Development*	*Emerging Communities, Emerging Economy*	*Green Energy, Sustainable Neighbourhood Area based energy solutions, reduction of carbon footprint*
	Relevance for Citizens/Participants	high Community Building Processes that are directly linked to the (spatial) quality of the neighbourhood and quality of life	high due to widespread public & personal concern	medium Citizen Initiative to turn towards energy neutral neighbourhood
	How is public administration represented in the process?	Municipal Level is involved and well represented or overrepresented in the process Regional Scale is represented to overrepresented, supra-regional level is underrepresented to missing		
	How is public administration involved in particular?	Indirect via the District Service and LAG	G360: Public Servants as facilitators (experienced in facilitating methods and brainstorming techniques)	Urban GRO Lab (Living Lab) in an intermediary position, supports with organisation
	Does administration fund/sponsor the process?	District Service and LAG publicly funded (city/municipality), participatory processes are funded (personnel district service, facilitation etc.)	Public funding for neighbourhood management and process	No structural funding yet, municipality provides organisational support
	Who is launching the content/subjects? of different processes	**Municipality, Consortium of organisational/institutional partners, activist groups/initiatives** *Individual Actors, Local Associations* / Private Market Parties		
Participatory Methods				
Methods	**Which methods are applied and facilitated**	Large Variety: Focus on traditional methods - like focus groups, workshops and brainstorming techniques, extended by Social Media Platforms		
		Workshops, Brainstorm Techniques, Focus Groups, Public Interventions	Brainstorm Techniques, meetings/ discussion rounds	Meetings, Discussion rounds, Information
Level of participation	**Level of participation in general and in particular project**	Focal Points: **Information - Consultation - Placation** - *Partnership*		
		Information, Consultation, Placation	Information/Consultation/Placation	Self-Governance

Capacity	**Are the participants able to express their interests?**	yes		
	Does the process include making proposals?	yes		
Process design	**Who decides on the usage of methods/tools?**	District Service & LAG (leadership)	Wijk Management (leadership)	Volunteering managing heads of the initiative (volunteer leadership)

Coordination				
Agreement	**How far is the processes politically accepted?**	limited (legal restrictions, influence by informal political agenda - all projects have to be negotiated and agreed on in conjunction with district politicians)	high Urban Scale G360: political commitment	Not entirely clear yet; in general the municipality supports initiatives, especially in energy because it fits the municipal energy policy and political agenda
	How intensively is the political domain involved in the process	indirectly involved (and in control)	Intensively: a process that grew in the past 20 years due to the recognition from the political domain of its importance	Not intensively yet, since it's in the initial phase: the UrbanGroLab is involved - in an intermediary position
	Are the involved/responsible political actors committed to the results?	limited (only if negotiated, agreed and if it fits to district policy and hidden political agenda)	Urban Scale G360: yes	Not clear yet (initial phase)
Leadership & Integration	**Who is leading the process?**	District Service / Area Renewal Office	G360: City administration Neighbourhood scale	Initiative - by volunteers from the neighbourhood
	Is the process linked to other initiatives?	Yes very well connected to other initiatives and groups, committee 'regional forum' that links initiatives, police, street & community workers	yes Wijk Management is linked to other neighbourhoods and different departments, Wijk Management (as intermediary position between municipality - neigbourhood - police)	No the initiative is in a very early stage but plans to seek knowledge exchange in the near future.
Resources	**Has the process necessary resources (money, room, etc.)**	Yes, well funded (Personnel, Knowledge, Room & Infrastructure, implementation of projects is funded/paid by other departments)	no	no
	Are there resource restrictions on participant level?	Time, Knowledge, Language barrier, educationally deprived strata & low income groups, cultural restrictions (hard-to-reach groups)	Time, Knowledge, Language Barriers, Cultural Restrictions	Knowledge & Know How (processes, institutional capacity), Organisational
Design	**Are the processes designed?** **Was there a deliberate design process?**	yes straight forward process design, not much room to maneuver and experiment (very rigid planning)	Partly	No Process Design yet

Participants

	How are the participants chosen? (democratically)	Activation (information events), actively invited by district service	Open for everybody to join: Invitation Letter to all inhabitants Social Media, newspapers, direct approach/invitation by Wijk Managers	Reitdiep: Initiative, inhabitants can join the initiative, there are no selection criteria
Extent	**Is there stability of the number of participants over time?**	Constant core group - fluctuations around that core group (size of core group and fluctuation is depending on project and length)	Enthusiasm in the beginning - fluctuating throughout the process, people dropping out	Core group (with clear agenda) & surrounding (fluctuating) group Initial Period: enthusiasm
Diversity	**Are different social groups reflected in general?**	to different extents Underrepresentation of non-european social groups (Fig. X)		
	Are different social groups reflected in particular?	yes - partly (asymmetries)	yes	no area is very class and race specific
	Age Groups	Adults & working population age group: well represented 25-64 years **Representation of young adults in a transition zone** **Teens and children: underrepresented** Elderly people (65+): tendency for overrepresentation		
	Is there gender equality in the process	Male: well represented - overrepresented Female: represented - underrepresented		
Communication	**How is communication organised? (within the process)**	Personal contacts, mailing lists (website social media)	Initiative: social media, professional networking, personal meetings Leadership: meetings	Initiative: Website social media, meetings, personal contacts, dedicated web platform Leadership: meetings

Implementation/Impact				
Influence	**Are there plans/designs/ actions produced?**	yes	yes	yes
	Were the results implemented in policy, action, program so far?	Conditionally, if they fit into the district policy and match the political agenda (official and hidden)	Urban Scale: yes, used as policy guideline	no
	To whom are they addressed?	Towards District / City	G360: Alderman and Public Administration	Individual inhabitants
	Are there documents with the results of the process? Could the participants influence those documents?	Reports, no influence of the participants, compiled by District Service	Urban Scale (G360): Participants ideas were incorporated in the 'Genk in Sight: Future Scenarios of Genkenaars on their City' report. Will take initiatives to stimulate and integrate the ideas in the policy and bring them to live	no
Learning	**Are there training sessions foreseen?**	no	not yet	not yet
Implementation	**Have the results been implemented?**	yes, but limited (only projects that are already agreed upon make it to the implementation level)	partly (smaller actions) - the main part is in the initial phase	partly (smaller actions on neighbourhood scale, resource extensive) - the main part is in the initial phase

2.1 Content, Context and Coordination.

A participatory planning approach or participatory elements are mainly facilitated in projects that are linked to urban planning, community development and local economy while the particular projects

that the Play!UC project is linked to are focusing on community development (Vienna), emerging economies (Genk) and energy neutral neighbourhoods (Groningen). Municipalities, groups of organisations and activist groups/initiatives play an important role in launching topics, raising awareness and initializing participatory projects. The municipalities in particular use public funding to support the intermediary organisations (personnel, infrastructure), which act as proxy for the municipal administration and the political level and are an entry point to the formal and informal institutional domain. The direct involvement of political representatives varies to a greater extent as does the political acceptance and agreement of the process outcomes: while in Belgium the outcomes are accepted by the political domain and implemented as policy guideline, the political agreement for single projects has to be negotiated with the political domain for each project separately. In addition to legal restrictions, the political agenda plays an important role for the political agreement and therefore for the continuation and implementation of the participatory project: while delegating idea generation and participation to the neighbourhood level, the political domain stays in control in the final decision making. Therefore, the intermediary organisations (LAG, neighbourhood management) figure not only as the facilitators of the processes but also assuage neighbourhood initiatives and groups if their projects and particular interests do not find political agreement and therefore are not implemented. In a nutshell: the Austrian and Dutch living labs illustrate that proximity to the political agenda and official policy is impacting either the project directly or indirectly inhibits the process by letting the message be delivered via the intermediary offices. Genk illustrates the opposite case: the results from the participatory process were implemented in policy guidelines and the political domain tries to stimulate initiatives to integrate the ideas into their projects. The process design is focussing on the progress of the project itself, is strongly content-oriented and is steering the content itself; less attention is paid to the design of the governance and project process itself. In Austria and Belgium, the neighbourhood management and district service are run by employed professionals (architects, community workers, etc.) that are supporting the participatory process with professional support, facilitation and knowledge (institutional capacity, etc.) and are very well connected to other processes, initiatives and organisations such as the regional forum (Vienna), in which different initiatives, police, street workers and public administration are represented. In the Dutch living lab, the neighbourhood initiative is currently managed by two volunteers who are accomplishing the task in their free time.

2.2 Participation at Work: Methods and Participants.

The set-up and the design of the participatory processes depict a broad variety in the three living labs. In Groningen, the process design is fairly spontaneous and organic. On the other hand, in Vienna, participatory processes and projects are rather straight forward and very well planned by the district service or the LAG, which provides an efficient project management but only little room for experimentation. The levels of participation are stretching from the level of *information* to *placation* with some same special cases of *partnerships* that show characteristics of *self-governance*. The methodological setting and the applied methods are chosen by the intermediary organisations or the volunteering leadership, who are also facilitating the single participatory sessions. In all participatory processes, the participants are working on concrete and tangible proposals for design solutions, actions or policy recommendations.

Leadership is necessary in setting up a collaborative process, engage other parties, manage resources and also encourage other leaders to emerge and take initiative that will advance the process. (Innes & Booher, 2010) All three living labs illustrate that a core group that is the main carrier and driver of the process, surrounded of a group of followers. While the core group is rather stable throughout the process, the composition of the follower group is fluctuating. The perception of the intermediary offices is that the groups represent different social groups and the diversity of the spatial reference scale. However, scrutinising the situation, more in-depth participation asymmetries are detected: while the age groups ranging from 25-64 years are well represented, teenagers and children are underrepresented or even non-existent, and elderly people (65 and older) are over-represented. Social groups and nationalities are also represented differently: while natives are well represented, social groups with immigrant backgrounds (other EU or outside EU) are underrepresented and missing. The high number of answers in the field “I don’t know” let us assume a lack of knowledge about the representation of different social groups regarding their cultural and immigrant background, which

also indicates little awareness towards the active integration of those groups in the participatory processes. Resource restrictions on participant levels mainly entail time restrictions, knowledge and language barriers, organisational knowledge and know-how and cultural barriers. The cultural barriers can be divided into direct cultural barriers, eg. that females are restricted in participating in public life and public debate and indirect cultural barriers: eg. low income groups and educationally deprived strata that do not consider participation in these kinds of settings because they do not experience the settings as their place of involvement and action.

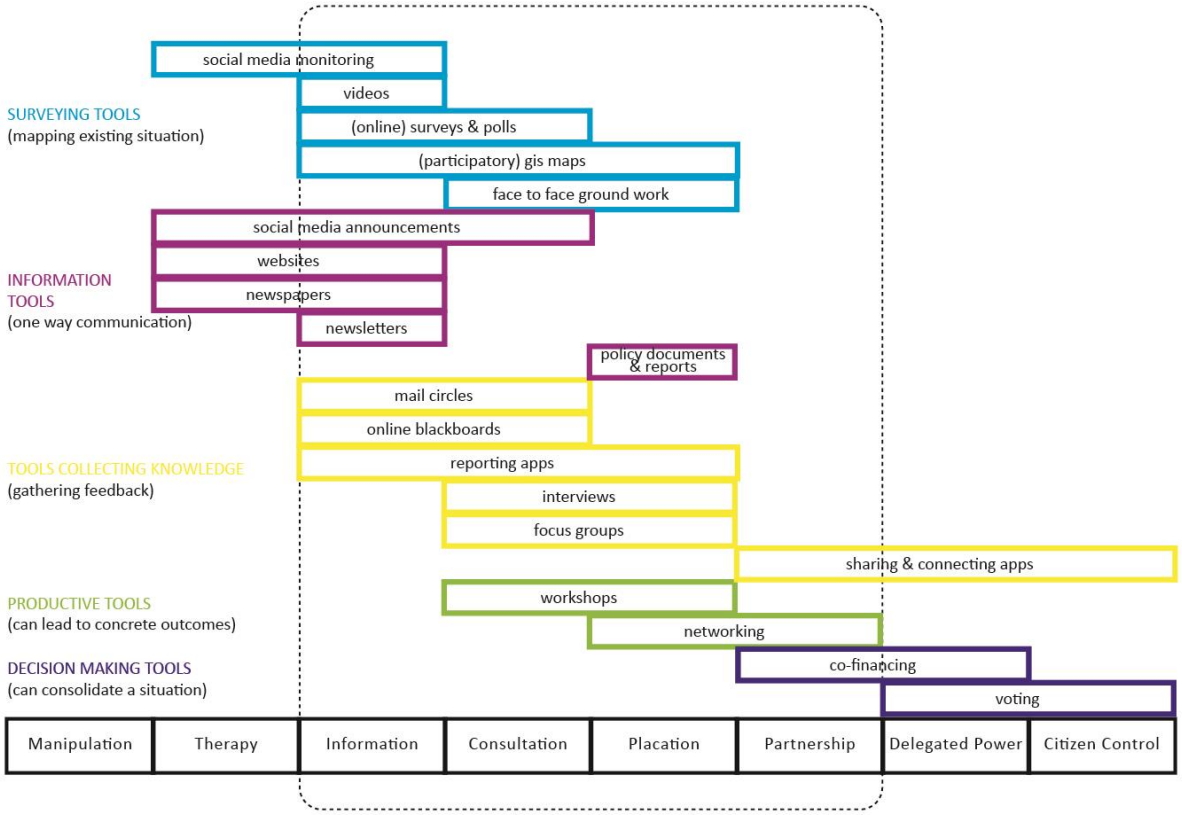
2.3 Tools and Process Design.

Innes and Booher (2010) argue that those engaged in communicative planning should focus on the improvement of the participatory process itself and embrace the inherent and thus unresolvable systemic contradictions within and around collaborative practices. This can practically be done by renegotiating the existing incentive structures, acknowledging the importance of leader and sponsors in getting the processes started and their abilities to engage others. Very practical things such as meetings summaries, invited experts, proper information and dedicated staff that takes care of these necessities is also mentioned as a significant success factor. The practical tools applied in the studied processes are focussing on traditional and established methods that the facilitators are comfortable with, mainly different brainstorm techniques, focus groups and workshops, expanded by information meetings. The tools are aligned with the duration of the process that range from several single meetings to processes that are taking several months (and sometimes years). These methods and tools can be organised in four broad categories. (table 2):

- Tools for surveying and mapping the existing situation, such as social media monitoring, face-to-face ground work and surveys, online surveys and polls, GIS maps etc.
- Tools for providing information about the progress of the project, but only allow for one way communication, such as announcements in social media, the local press, websites and newsletters, audio-visual material, and policy documents and reports.
- Tools for collecting knowledge and gathering feedback through discussion about existing plans, such as mail circles, online blackboards, reporting apps, focus groups or interviews.
- Productive tools, i.e. tools that allow for the articulation of alternative proposals and that can lead to tangible input for the project, through co-design workshops, for example.
- Decision making tools that help consolidate situations, such as by allowing people to vote on project proposals with binding consequences, or agreements on co-financing initiatives.

These tools form the building blocks of the participatory process; they are effectively the mechanics of the participatory process. Whereas Arnstein's participation rungs trace the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product (p. 217), we consider each step the goal of the participatory planning process, within which many different tools can be used. This creates an overlap between tools and rungs. Additionally, each rung can describe specific goals within a total planning process, instead of the process as a whole. That means that there can be tools used to provide information or request consultation within the same project. Indeed, in most cases tools are used to provide information, to consult inhabitants in order to better understand the local conditions and gain access to unsubstituted local knowledge (Van Herzele, 2004; Brabham, 2009; Coburn, 2003), such as insights about the environment, change of perspective and creative solutions tuned to the specific locality in question.

Table 2. Participatory tools commonly used in the three living labs:



Gordon et al (2013) define two broad categories of tools used in community engagement processes: those that are specifically designed for a particular process, such as custom made games and dedicated online platforms, and generic tools, such as social media, that can be employed within a participatory process. Despite their diversity, in all three cases, the majority of tools used fall in the second category. Moreover the process design does not seem to follow a coherent logic. There is not a well-argued selection on which tools are used and the tools themselves are poorly designed with little customisation to address specific needs of the participatory process. The sequence of applications also seems random and based on the intuitive judgement of the planner in charge.

2.4 Implementation and Impact.

Despite the practical difficulties to address issues relating to the context in which the process takes place, the process itself, the instruments used and the impact of the process can be evaluated and improved. As participation plays the double role of achieving better plans and providing contact between citizens and local administration, evaluation should cover both the relation between objectives and results and the evaluation of the process itself. (Parés & March, 2013) In all three living labs, the groups are developing design or action proposals that are directly put into action as long as it stays in direct sphere of activity. If they reach beyond that direct sphere, the proposals are addressed towards the responsible level, such as the district or city council or public administration organisations like planning departments. However, it seems that such documents are created by the management teams of the intermediary organisations and that the participants have only minor or no influence on those documents.

3. Game-based participation:

The rise of smart city technologies and the following debate seem to have provided a significant boost to gamification and other applications of social and digital media for commercial, entertainment and educational purposes. Gamification of society (Kapp, 2012) is the tendency to apply gaming principles in every aspect of our lives, with games motivating us to run, to organise our housework, map

defibrillators in public spaces and self-diagnose sicknesses. However, this proliferation of game-like applications has actually blurred the understanding of what constitutes a game, with many applications marketed as games being interactive simulations or gamified activities. (Devisch, et al., 2015)

Although the medium of games is extensive and hard to precisely delineate, most definitions describe games as sets of rules that impose limitations to player's pursuits of set goals. Other common characteristics include the voluntary participation and some kind of 'magic circle', a special setting or condition that sets the game outside of reality. (See (Huizinga, 1955; Caillois, 1962; Parlett, 1999; Abt, 1969; Juul, 2011)) In their formal analytical model for games, Hunicke et al (2004) introduce the Mechanics-Dynamics-Aesthetics triptych to describe the game experience both from the side of the designer (M>D> A) as well as from the side of the player (A> D>M). Mechanics are the various actions, interactions, roles, relationships and control mechanisms that are afforded to the players of a game. They are the building blocks out of which a game is built. They trigger the dynamic system behaviour which then translates to a particular aesthetic experience for the player. (Hunicke, et al., 2004) Game mechanics can be very simple, such as points, countdowns and game levels or more complex such as *Behavioral Momentum* (the tendency of players to keep doing what they have been doing) and *Blissful Productivity* (the idea that working hard playing a game makes you happy) (Bagdeville, sd). But it is indeed the entanglement of different mechanics within even the simplest games that facilitate the game experience.

The 'radical pragmatism' (Hoch, 1984) in optimizing the implementation and impact of participatory processes advocated by Innes and Booher can be operationalized within the context of games, where interactions are rule based and goals are predefined, and where the emerging content depends on the actual use of these pre-structured communication spaces. Instead of trying to address participatory processes as a unified whole, understanding participatory tools as separate game mechanics, can contribute to better structured participatory processes with carefully designed tools, selected to optimize the desired output at each phase of the process. While it would be naïve to assume that game-based participation can address systemic social conflicts and the unavoidable domination of powerful interest groups, it can be used to improve citizen's knowledge about the institutions involved in planning and their ability to articulate their proposals. There is no conclusive taxonomy of game mechanics (Schell, 2008), as there is none for participatory tools, but we can learn from the game design process in order to optimize a process for participation. It is evident that in the thee cases, participation tools are employed rather randomly, and in a non-coherent way. This comes in sharp contrast to the selection of particular game mechanics, which is done very carefully. Choosing and balancing mechanics is an iterative process at the core of the game design practice. The game designer adds, tweaks and removes different mechanics in order to achieve the desired dynamics that will lead to the desired aesthetics.

4. Conclusions: Mechanics for Playful Participation.

To summarize, in order for civic participation to be effective in practice, citizens need to be familiar with the institutions that are responsible for each process; they need to possess skills of expressing themselves and articulating their interests and concerns and they need to have the personal drive to participate (Raphael, et al., 2010). Most of the participation asymmetries identified in the three case studies (high drop-out rates, asymmetrical representation of age, gender and ethnic groups, cultural divides etc.) fall under one of these categories. The lack of systematic choice and combination of participatory methods and tools further amplifies these issues.

Game-based participation has the potential to enhance public participation processes because games provide an environment in which players can safely experiment with behaviours and scenarios that might be impossible in real life, in addition to a context for collective goal setting, in which players are motivated to continue participating because of perceiving themselves as part of a public (Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi, 2014) However, games are not widely implemented in civic participation, mainly because of the lack of knowledge of the initiating organisations (often the local governments), the lack of evidence as to their actual benefits and substantiated potential that the knowledge generated in the

game can be transferred to the real world, their inefficient nature and conflicting political views on what civic engagement should be. (Raphael, et al., 2010) Expectations for the use of gaming are also fairly low, as most interview respondents consider games to be useful for raising awareness about urban issues and education, but they do not see the potential for more productive uses.

In all three case studies, we observed that the tools used throughout the existing communicative planning processes are employed in a rather fragmented and incoherent way. By establishing a connection between game mechanics and participation tools, we expect to be able to understand the design of a participatory process as a game design process, where different mechanics are used consciously at all levels and where multiple mechanics are combined to address each spatial context. Since there is no such thing as a one-solution-fits-all in participatory planning, the adaptivity provided by implementing specific mechanics according to the changing needs, partial agreements and emerging tasks can provide for the necessary adjustment to the local conditions. Having to think as game designers, the parties orchestrating the participatory process must identify clear goals for the process in advance and select the tools that will most suitably address them. Furthermore, for processes lasting over extended periods of time, it can create diversity during the process and thus contribute to addressing asymmetries that relate to time restrictions and drop-out rates due to boredom.

However, in drawing an analogy between game mechanics and participatory methods, we must also acknowledge the limitations of games, particularly when used in the highly charged political context of planning. Game mechanics are tools of indirect control not only over the player's actions, but mostly over their experience. (Schell, 2008) Games are 'formatted spaces of participation' (Muller, 2009) in that they are technologically, socially and economically pre-structured interfaces through which citizens can perform certain actions. That means that while the experience of participatory processes can become more accessible for the hard-to-reach groups and can help participants articulate their visions and desires, it will always be in the format dictated by the game itself. The tension between the given structure of the participatory process and its constant redefinition by the practice of participation will remain. Moreover, as the political level reaches to stay in control of the planning process, and game development is a lengthy and costly process, the motivation of the commissioning stakeholder should be constantly scrutinized. The role of intermediary organisations, such as the District Service and LAG in Vienna or the Wijkmanagement teams in Belgium, is instrumental in this, as they need to play a facilitating role for the citizens but they are also in constant exchange with the government. In order to maintain their own legitimacy, they have to accept the existing power dynamics between government, interest groups and citizens.

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