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Rising to the Challenge: Public Participation in Sustainable Urban Development

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INTRODUCTION

Public participation in the governance of urban sustainability can appear as something of a paradox: it is held up as “good practice” in planning and policymaking, and yet it often proves elusive and easily gets lost in technocratic processes. Where it is embraced and put in action, its function is often vague; it can be beset by problems of design and implementation; and it can produce outcomes that bear little relevance to actual decision processes. There is, then, often a discrepancy between the ideal of “deep” participation and the reality of “thin” participation: the former centred upon empowering and giving “voice” to the community, the latter based on cursory opportunity for debate and engagement.

That public participation, nevertheless, remains a central theme for urban sustainability is for the following three interrelated reasons: first, however hard it may be to realise it in practice, participation is widely held as a normative ideal of good governance — even democracy — worth striving for. Second, it has gained added significance within the context of contemporary governance, which is characterised by a relative shift from traditional forms of government to new modes of planning and decision-making centred upon the cooperation and networking among diverse public and private actors. Third, it is seen as particularly relevant for achieving *social* sustainability, by emphasising the social dimensions of urban sustainability and involving those affected in the process. Public participation, then, has the potential to inform and improve urban sustainability practice both procedurally and substantively, contributing to the co-production of place-specific knowledge and reflexive discourse in a pluralistic, open and transparent way.

Against this background, the aim of this article is to discuss recent concepts and practices of public participation in relation to urban sustainability. The article summarises key debates and developments over the last half a century, followed by an elaboration of core aspects of

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public participation in the governance of the sustainable city. The conceptual perspectives are complemented by short case studies, drawing on practical examples of public engagement. The article concludes with a discussion of “good practice” lessons.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Interest in the community, and community engagement, has not just been a recent theme in urban sustainability. The garden city, Ebenezer Howard’s innovative concept (first published in 1898) which fundamentally influenced modern urban planning, placed the community at the centre of the debate about what the city in the industrial age ought to look like.² It proposed to redress the detrimental impacts of unfettered industrial and economic development on an increasingly urbanised population, by designing urban centres in a radically new way including: the separation of residential areas from industrial districts; walkable access to community amenities; the use of green space both within and surrounding the city; and the interlinking of urban centres with municipal railways. A further, significant characteristic of the garden city concept is community-based governance in the form of, for example, cooperative land ownership and self-governing community organisations. In other words, the active engagement of the community, and planning centred upon public interests were at the very heart of the original vision for urban sustainability.

While the garden city concept profoundly shaped thinking and policy in the first half of the 20th century, the increasing professionalisation of urban planning meant that the focus on community engagement gave way to a more technocratic approach, which placed planning experts at the centre of decision-making. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that urban planning was challenged, once again, by calls to open up to community involvement and to address more centrally social concerns, such as the impoverishment of city centres and the disenfranchisement of minority groups. This coincided with the growing environmental awareness at the time, and reflected wider social and cultural trends centred upon calls for the “democratisation” of expertise and greater public participation in policy- and decision-making.

The “ladder of citizen participation” by Sheryl Arnstein³ turned out to be one of a number of key contributions to the growing discourse on community and public participation in urban planning, as well as in other fields of public policy (environment, health, technology, etc.). Apart from providing advocacy for greater public engagement, Arnstein’s influential paper drew attention to the complexity of what constitutes public participation and related pitfalls. In particular, it appraised various types of engagement, from basic information provision (at the bottom of the participatory ladder) to citizen control (at the top), and the importance of properly differentiating between various forms of participation.

² Kargon, R and AP Molella, *Invented Edens: Techno-Cities of the 20th Century*, Boston, MA, MIT Press, 2008; and Wheeler, SM and T Beatley, *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader (2nd ed)*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009.

³ Arnstein, SR, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2004, pp. 216-224.

Notable practical examples of community involvement and citizen participation in urban planning growing out of the 1970s and 1980s include the so-called “planning cell” (*Planungszelle*) originally developed in Germany as a method of involving citizens in urban planning processes.⁴ A highly structured, participatory process, the planning cell produces citizens’ assessment reports (*Bürgergutachten*) which are fed into the formal planning and policymaking process. A similar method, developed in parallel in the United States, is the “citizens’ jury”, at the centre of which is a group of a dozen or so randomly chosen citizens brought together to deliberate and reach a joint decision on a policy issue.⁵ “Participatory budgeting” is another method applied to urban policy processes.⁶ Pioneered by the city of Porto Alegre (Brazil) in the late 1980s, it has since gained prominence elsewhere in Latin America — where over one thousand participatory budgeting processes have taken place to date — and in Europe, where over one hundred cities have used the process. Other structured methods of public participation developed in the policy field of technology assessment (TA) and applied to urban sustainability issues (e.g., urban ecology, and urban transport) include the “consensus conference”, “scenario workshop” and “future workshop”.⁷

International governmental acknowledgement of the need for public participation in local urban decision-making came with Agenda 21, the sustainability action plan resulting from the landmark Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.⁸ Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 calls upon cities and other local authorities to “enter into a dialogue with citizens, local organizations and private enterprises” to develop mutual understanding and strategies for sustainability. While not legally binding, Local Agenda 21 was soon widely adopted by local governments, as part of community engagement and public participation, which have become mainstream in policymaking. Building on Agenda 21, the Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability signed in the city of Aalborg in 1994 (also known as the Aalborg Charter) declared that “we [cities] shall ensure that all citizens and interested groups have access to information and are able to participate in local decision-making processes”.⁹

⁴ Citizen Participation in Science and Technology (CIPAST), “Planning Cell”, at <<http://www.cipast.org/cipast.php?section=1018>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

⁵ Jefferson Center, “Citizens’ Juries”, at <<http://www.jefferson-center.org/what-we-do/citizen-juries/>> (accessed 31 July 2013); and Citizen Participation in Science and Technology (CIPAST), “Citizens’ Jury”, at <<http://www.cipast.org/cipast.php?section=1016>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

⁶ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*, London/Sterling, VA, Earthscan, 2009; Roseland, M, *Toward Sustainable Communities: Solutions for Citizens and their Governments (4th ed)*, Gabriola Island, New Society Publishers, 2012, p. 265.

⁷ Joss, S and J Durant, *Public Participation in Science: The Role of Consensus Conferences in Europe*, London: Science Museum, 1995; and Joss, S and S Bellucci (eds.), *Participatory Technology Assessment: European Perspectives*, London, University of Westminster, 2002.

⁸ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), at <<http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=52&ArticleID=76&l=en>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

⁹ European Sustainable Cities Platform, *Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability* (Aalborg Charter), 1994; and *The Aalborg Commitments*, 2011 at <<http://www.sustainablecities.eu/>> (accessed June 2013).

To date, over 2,700 cities and towns have signed the Charter, making it Europe's largest network of sustainable urban development initiatives. The Aalborg Commitments, agreed by the signatories on the occasion of the Charter's 10th anniversary, include a pledge to "energize decision-making" by "build[ing] participation and sustainable development capacity in the local community and municipal administration" and "invit[ing] all sectors of local society to participate effectively in decision-making".¹⁰

That there is by now broad policy support for the principle of public participation in urban sustainability management does not, however, necessarily translate into widespread practice; and while the last half of the twentieth century had seen a growing number of experiments and initiatives, there remains an evident need for conceptual and methodological innovation to establish what public participation means, how it is achieved, and what benefits are derived from it.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Example 1 – Barcelona’s sustainable action plan (Spain)

Arising from the United Nations’ Local Agenda 21 initiative, Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, in the late 1990s embarked on a wide-ranging participatory process aimed at developing a sustainable action plan for the city. A special feature of Barcelona Agenda 21 is its explicit emphasis on the social dimensions of sustainability and on citizen participation: as part of the process of drawing up its sustainable action plan, the city authorities involved over 100 representatives of various civil society organisations (environmental and social interest groups), businesses, policymakers and academia. The participants were brought together in the Municipal Council on the Environment and Sustainability, which was given overall responsibility for defining the contents of the sustainability action plan and engaging citizens in the process. Over a four-year period (1998-2002), numerous workshops and discussion meetings were held across city districts, involving diverse community and citizens’ groups. Some of the workshops focused on discussing district-specific issues, while others considered cross-cutting themes for the city as a whole. Citizens were also invited to post proposals online. Together, the deliberations resulting from these various participatory forums informed the contents of the action plan — *The People’s Commitment towards Sustainability* — which was subsequently debated and approved by the Municipal Council on the Environment and Sustainability in 2002. Over 600 municipal organisations have since voluntarily signed the 10-year action plan, thus committing themselves to help implement the objectives contained in the plan.

The significance of this participatory process lies in the combination of: (1) engaging a broad spectrum of civil society actors in the Municipal Council, which was given responsibility for facilitating and validating the process of drawing up the sustainability action plan; (2) mobilising citizens through multiple strands of deliberation (workshops, discussion meetings, online forums, etc.) at both district level and citywide; (3) encouraging the implementation of the published plan through voluntary action by municipal and civil society organisations; and (4) lending the process overall support and legitimacy through the political process. A further characteristic is that participation was not treated as a one-off intervention, but as part of a medium- and long-term strategic planning process.

References: Municipal Council on the Environment and Sustainability;^a and Barcelona Environmental Report.^b

^a Ajuntament de Barcelona, *The People’s Commitment towards Sustainability, Agenda 21 BCN*, Municipal Council on the Environment and Sustainability, at <<http://www.bcn.cat/agenda21/compromis/compromisangles.doc>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

^b Ajuntament de Barcelona, Barcelona, *A City Committed to the Environment, Barcelona Environmental Report 2009*, URL: at <<http://www.bcn.cat/agenda21>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Considering the role of public participation, three interrelated questions arise: who are the “public”; what is the purpose of participation; and what are its specific functions? (This and the following sections draw on Grote and Gbikpi;¹¹ Irwin;¹² Jamieson and Wynne;¹³ Joss and Bellucci;¹⁴ Joss;¹⁵ Parkinson;¹⁶ and Renn,¹⁷ among others). These questions need to be answered not in the abstract, but in relation to the substantive issues to be addressed through participation — namely, how to define, design and implement urban sustainable development. It is one thing to establish broad consensus on the merits of urban sustainability — to render towns and cities more liveable for residents, to improve their resource efficiency and to lessen their negative environmental impacts — it is quite another to find agreement on specifics and settle on priorities within the context of complex information and competing, and often conflicting, interests. It is not just that urban sustainable development has to address concurrently and seek to reconcile, environmental, economic and social dimensions, but it has to do so in relation to complex, place-specific settings. Furthermore, for urban sustainability to gain traction, it essentially relies on political and social resonance: it requires appropriate policy steering and coordination, and depends on public engagement.

Participation, then, forms part of the governing process for urban sustainability through which normative aims can be considered and prioritised, expert knowledge can be complemented with place-specific local and “lay” knowledge, and strategies and plans can be designed, implemented and monitored. All of this relates to substantive issues: what the rationale for urban sustainability is understood to be; what issues are involved; and how these are addressed in practice. Participation, however, also relates to people — that is, it emphasises social, political and cultural engagement with urban sustainability, and how such engagement can strengthen the public accountability of planning, policy- and decision-making processes, contribute to public discourse, and enable people to play their part in urban sustainable development. Participation — as well as other “new mode” governance processes — therefore typically serves both substantive and procedural purposes: namely, to inform and improve

¹¹ Grote, JR and B Gbikpi, *Participatory Governance: Political and Societal Implications*, Opladen: Leske & Buderich, 2002.

¹² Irwin, A, *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise and Sustainable Development*, London/New York, Routledge, 1995.

¹³ Jamieson, A and B Wynne, “Sustainable Development and the Problem of Participation”, *Technology Meets the Public*, Pesto Papers 2, 1998, Aalborg, University of Aalborg Press, pp. 7-17.

¹⁴ Joss and Belucci, op. cit.

¹⁵ Joss, S, “Making Technology Accountable: Citizens’ Conferences in the Era of Public Accountability”, *Diacritica*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2009, pp. 298-316; and Joss, S, “Accountable Governance, Accountable Sustainability? A Case Study of Accountability in the Governance for Sustainability”, *Environmental Policy and Governance*, vol. 20, 2010, pp. 408-421.

¹⁶ Parkinson, J, *Deliberating in the Real World: Problems of Legitimacy in Deliberative Democracy*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.

¹⁷ Renn, O, *Risk Governance: Coping with Uncertainty in a Complex World*, London, Earthscan, 2008.

the contents and outputs of policy- and decision-making and public debate, while at the same time striving to support and enhance cooperation, engagement and equity among interested parties.

From this governance perspective, it is useful to discern three distinct functions of participation relating to design, policy, and public discourse processes. Participation relating to design and policy processes typically entails structured techniques integrated in formal procedures, whereas participation relating to public discourse tends to be more informal and open-ended. In practice, these functions may partially overlap. Nevertheless, in distinguishing between these core functions, key conceptual and methodological differences can be highlighted including: what the underlying rationale is for opting for a participatory process; what are the core questions and/or issues to be addressed; how participants are defined — as members of the general public, representatives of local communities, interest groups and stakeholders, etc. — and how the outputs of the participatory process are used and how they inform decision-making. In turn, these considerations inform the way in which participatory procedures should be designed and implemented.

COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

The first participatory function relates to urban sustainability design and planning processes. Here, the impetus for participation usually comes from professionals — designers, architects, planners — wishing to engage with stakeholders, such as residents, neighbourhood associations, business organisations and social interest groups. Participation has two main functions — namely, to harness the visions, knowledge and preferences of the communities that are affected by the planned urban sustainability initiative; and to gain acceptance for the planned intervention. Rather than relying solely on expert knowledge, the participatory process is designed to enable the consideration of issues relevant to the community and specific to the particular place where an initiative is planned. Furthermore, such public engagement gives an opportunity to break down barriers between planning professionals and community groups and individuals, and may thus prevent public opposition to a planned scheme. The emphasis, then, is on the co-production of knowledge and awareness about urban sustainability shared across professional and community groups.

There are several tried-and-tested collaborative planning methods. These methods have in common the use of structured techniques that involve relatively small numbers of participants (from a few dozens to in the low hundreds) engaged in short, facilitated sessions held over a day or two or as a series of events over a few weeks or months. For example, the “charrette” method brings together community stakeholders with the aim of producing urban sustainability visions and designs, and discussing implementation strategies.¹⁸ While the

¹⁸ Lennertz, B and A Lutzenhiser, *The Charrette Handbook: The Essential Guide to Accelerated Collaborative Community Planning*, Chicago, APA Planners Press, 2006; and World Bank, *Eco2 Cities: Ecological Cities as Economic Cities*, Washington DC, The World Bank, 2010, pp. 111-122.

“charrette” is typically led by professional designers, all participants are considered “designers” based on their respective community expertise.

Collaborative planning should arguably be understood as going beyond short-term, structured design processes, to be a more far-reaching interactive, social planning process occurring within and across institutional environments.¹⁹ This points to the gap that can arise between collaborative design exercises and wider interactive planning processes, especially where the former fails to capture and adequately represent the complexity and dynamics of the latter due to inadequate methodological design or organisational biases.

PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

The second function of public engagement is in relation to policy- and decision-making. Here, participation supports policy consultation and contributes to the public accountability of decision processes. Policy consultation entails the provision of information about, and the invitation for public comment on, the substance of a proposed urban sustainability policy as well as the procedures used to implement the policy proposal. It can occur at various stages of the policy process: early on, when public input is sought on the development of new policy — for example, when a city authority embarks on the process of drawing up a new sustainability plan and wishes to involve the community in identifying priorities — or at later stages, when draft policy statements are released for public comment and scrutiny, or when the finalised policy is published and the community is invited to get involved in its implementation. The potential benefits of participatory decision-making are of both substantive and procedural nature: substantively, public engagement can help improve the contents of a proposed policy by providing feedback on which aspects of the policy are considered feasible and desirable, and which aspects are deemed problematic or unacceptable. Procedurally, public engagement can enhance the transparency and accountability of the decision-making process. Information is made public, and policy- and decision-makers are prompted to be more openly accountable concerning how they formulate policies and reach decisions.

Over the years, decision-makers in various institutional settings have used a variety of public engagement mechanisms designed to support policy consultation and decision processes. These range from informal deliberative procedures, such as “consensus conferences”, “town hall meetings” and “citizens’ juries”, to formal, statutory methods in connection with public consultation and planning processes. The strength of informal, deliberative procedures stems from their ability to reveal in-depth information about public perceptions of the issue at stake and to encourage open, critical debate. Their weakness lies in the limited resonance — as they typically involve only a small number of participants — and in their non-binding nature within the decision process. On their part, formal participatory procedures derive their strength from their binding character: as part of the statutory process, they provide formal opportunities for public comment which decision-makers must consider when reaching

¹⁹ Healey, P, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*, London, Macmillan, 1997; and Healey, P, “Collaborative Planning in Perspective”, *Planning Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 101-123.

decisions and for which they can be held accountable. Their weakness, however, lies in the often short periods of consultation available and the limited range of questions and issues open for public comment.

The stated primary purpose of collaborative design and participatory decision procedures is to open up planning and policymaking to public input and thereby to complement and enhance decision-making processes substantively (by making contents and outputs more comprehensive and robust) and procedurally (by rendering processes more inclusive and transparent). Hence, their purpose is primarily to increase opportunities for the public to have direct input into planning and policy- and decision-making. Arguably just as important, however, is the potential for institutional learning on the part of decision-makers. Such institutional “reflexiveness” increases the capacity of decision organisations for developing more in-depth understanding of, and handling capacity for, urban sustainability. This is particularly relevant, given the multiple complexities and uncertainties (technical, social, and political) involved in shaping and implementing sustainable urban development strategies and policies. Participatory processes, and similar forms of “new mode” governance, then, offer opportunities for decision organisations to develop more nuanced and sophisticated knowledge of planning and policy issues, based on the input of diverse lay and expert knowledge and the context-specific feedback of various stakeholders and members of the community.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The third function relates to public discourse. The purpose of participation is to stimulate, inform and support public debate about urban sustainability. From this perspective, urban sustainability is not just seen as the preserve of technical experts — designers, planners, engineers, policymakers, etc. — to be addressed through intra-institutional decision processes, but as much a matter of public interest and concern. As such, urban sustainability is essentially public in nature, since it involves and affects fundamental issues concerning the direction of public policy, the design of the public realm, and the management of public resources, goods and services. Furthermore, as sustainable urban development and management are heavily dependent on the engagement and behaviour of communities, carrying public support is seen as crucial to bringing about more sustainable urban futures. Therefore, encouraging and enhancing public discourse is arguably a key function of participatory processes. Such participation can be broader and more open-ended than procedures designed to support specific projects or formal decision processes. It may be broader in the way in which a participatory process addresses issues more fundamentally and comprehensively, unrestricted by the constraints of a particular site or initiative; and it may be a more open-ended process that allows for public engagement by multiple communities, at various sites and using diverse media, over an extended period of time.

The format of participation in this context, then, is typically less constrained by formal procedures and time limits than that of structured methods used in collaborative design and policy consulting. Here, participation may be a series of public debates, broadcasts, exhibitions, cultural events and campaigns designed to encourage the public to get involved in

learning about, debating and putting into action sustainable urban development. Rather than formal decision-making bodies, organisers tend to be from the educational and arts and culture sector, such as science museums and science centres, festivals organisers and media organisations. Needless to say, the broader, more open-ended nature of these participatory activities does not mean that these activities are less resource-intensive or complex to organise: they require just as many — if different — methodological skills and experience, as well as organisational capacity, as the more formal participatory procedures.

Example 2 – Tajimi Eco-City (Japan)

In 2003, Tajimi, a medium-sized city (with over 100,000 residents) in central Japan, came in top in the country's *Eco-City* competition for the first time. Its submission scored particularly highly in terms of the openness — centred upon regular public hearings — with which the city has developed and implemented its urban master plan as well as carried out environmental impact assessments for various municipal projects. These hearings have brought together policy specialists from various domains (planning, finance, engineering, etc.) to promote integrated policymaking and planning with focus on urban sustainability. In addition, the system of public hearings incorporates citizens' workshops. For example, residents in one district, which suffered from deteriorating river and wetland habitats due to rapid urbanisation, were enlisted to get involved in monitoring environmental quality and restoring waterways. Another example of citizen engagement in the planning process and project design relates to the construction of a new school complex. Both residents and pupils were involved in considering and choosing various sustainability features (among other design criteria), such as rooftop gardens, solar panels and water recycling.

While Tajimi has gained a national reputation for its innovative work on policy hearings and citizen participation, more generally across Japan, citizen participation and public discourse are recognised as key ingredients for effective urban sustainability management. "Citizen empowerment and partnerships" is one of the selection criteria for the national eco-city competition, which has been running since 2001. Kawasaki — the first city to be recognised in 1997 under the government's national *Eco-Town* initiative — supports the engagement of citizens' groups in urban sustainability activities; the city of Mitaka put in place a citizens' council to advise on the development of its master plan; and the city of Yamato enacted a law promoting citizen engagement in support of public community.

The integration of participatory procedures into the planning and policymaking process, coupled with municipal support for independent citizen initiatives, appears to have created an enabling environment in which social sustainability — both as process and content — can flourish. This builds on the legacy of environmental discourses in Japan dating back to the 1960s, when citizen movements formed around environmental issues and contributed to a growing culture of environmental citizenship. As such, this points to the importance of long-term strategies to support a culture of public engagement that can deliver substantive input into urban sustainability management.

References: JFS Newsletters.^c

^c Japan for Sustainability (JFS), "The 3rd 'Top Eco-City' Contest Held in Japan by the National Eco-City Contest Network", Japan for Sustainability Newsletter, no. 24, 2004, at <<http://www.japanfs.org/en/mailmagazine/newsletter/pages/027784.html>> (accessed 31 July 2013); and JFS "Japan's 'Top Eco-City' Contest Providing a Path to a Sustainable Communities", Japan for Sustainability Newsletter, no. 63, 2007, at <<http://www.japanfs.org/en/mailmagazine/newsletter/pages/027839.html>> (accessed 31 July 2013).

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN CHALLENGES

The design and implementation of a participatory arrangement have to be considered closely in terms of the intended function, particularly concerning the relationship of the arrangement to wider planning, policy or public discourse processes and their respective organisational settings. Inevitably, therefore, the question about appropriate methods and procedures is one that cannot be answered properly without paying close attention to the context. Nevertheless, the experience of participatory experiments and initiatives accumulated over decades in various organisational and cultural settings point to several common challenges that, in turn, can inform practice learning. These challenges are summarised here in three categories relating to: the internal working of participatory procedures; the integration of these procedures into planning and policy; and their wider sociopolitical resonance.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Structured participatory processes face two major challenges: first, they are typically time-constrained, with the opportunity for participants to deliberate often limited to but a few days over a relatively short period of time; and second, while participants (citizens, community groups, stakeholders, etc.) are at the centre of deliberation, they themselves have little influence over the design and conduct of the participatory process. This, therefore, creates potential power asymmetries and the risk of skewed processes — that is, the process designed to be participatory may in effect undermine that very goal both by restricting the participants' means for directing their own engagement in the process and by limiting the extent of deliberation. In turn, this can unduly influence the contents of deliberation and the related outputs produced. Consequently, methodological design should address these challenges, which is critical for the quality and credibility of participatory procedures. The following specific methodological issues have been identified as particularly important by specialists in public engagement procedures:

- *The selection of participants.* The types of participants should be clearly specified: stakeholders (interest groups, community organisations, etc.); individuals directly affected by the issue (e.g., residents); and members of the general public. Randomised selection is the preferred method if the aim is to recruit a panel of citizens; panels should be broadly representative in terms of socio-demographic criteria (gender, age, education/occupation, etc.).
- *The use of expertise.* A broad range of expert views should be made available as input into the deliberative process; the list of experts made available to participants should be validated by an independent advisory group to avoid the risk of bias; participants should have a choice about which experts/expertise to consult.
- *The choice of issue.* The issue needs to be publicly relevant by being a current topic of policymaking or public debate; a balance is needed between framing the issue sufficiently broadly to allow participants to direct the discussion, and achieving enough focus to produce outputs able to inform planning, policymaking and public debate.

- *The nature of deliberation.* There needs to be clarity about the rationale underlying the deliberative process — that is, whether the goal is to seek consensus (common interest) among participants, to facilitate negotiation (trade-off of interests), or to inquire into power relations (exercise of power/authority).
- *The process of facilitation.* The role of facilitators should be to enable participants — individually and collectively — to exercise their role without, however, being unduly steered into the process of deliberation. The facilitator primarily acts as the champion of the participants, rather than as representative of the organisers.
- *The form of output.* Where a participatory procedure informs planning or policymaking, a clear set of findings and recommendations needs to be produced and validated by the participants.
- *The agreement of “ground rules”.* From the outset, transparent rules ought to be established to ensure procedural fairness; ideally, these should be jointly agreed by the organisers and participants.

The development and implementation of various deliberative and participatory methods over the last couple of decades or so has produced a wealth of information and guidance on these and other methodological criteria. This has resulted in a certain degree of quality assurance and the emergence of technical design standards in relation to, for example, participant selection procedures, the role of facilitators and procedural fairness rules. Where a participatory procedure is to be introduced in a new policy or organisational context, it may be advantageous to deploy such existing “tried-and-tested” methods, as this will help secure the legitimacy of the process and build organisational capacity.

POLICY INTEGRATION

Another challenge facing formal participatory procedures concerns their link to, and integration into, policymaking and planning. If a procedure is too remote either thematically (because the topic considered has little relevance) or instrumentally (because there is no connection with corresponding decision-making processes), then this reduces the likelihood of the procedure having any significant impact on policy and planning. In turn, this devalues the procedure and undermines the participatory efforts. Hence, it is imperative for the organisers of a participatory procedure to be specific about what link — if any — the procedure has to policymaking and planning; and organisers should be accountable to participants for the way in which the outputs of deliberation will be used. The question of integration is necessarily one which is context-specific — that is, it has to be clarified in relation to individual policy and planning processes.

The *problematique* of integration has two interrelated dimensions: one concerns the appropriate distance of a participatory procedure to formal decision-making processes; the other concerns the appropriate point along the formal decision-making trajectory at which the participatory procedure should intervene. Proximity to formal planning and decision-making processes increases the potential for the outputs of a participatory procedure to inform, and

be able to influence, the deliberations surrounding the formal planning and decision-making processes. At the same time, too close a relationship could undermine the value and integrity of a participatory procedure in case it becomes emasculated by the formal decision-making process. Realistically, however, in most cases the challenge for organisers of participatory procedures consists of the opposite — namely, trying to bring these within the sphere of formal planning and decision-making.

The question then arises at which point this should be done most appropriately: if a participatory procedure takes place too early in the policy and planning cycle, there may be little resonance with wider discourse and outputs risk going unnoticed; if it is too late — when positions have already been taken and options narrowed — then the participatory procedure's capacity for providing design inputs and informing policy debate may be limited. The point of intervention, therefore, needs to be considered carefully; and in doing so, one needs to bear in mind what the scope of deliberation and who the intended audience are meant to be. “Upstream” intervention, early on in the planning and policy process, may be appropriate if the goal is to stimulate a broad discussion of an issue and to scope various possible development options. For example, a participatory procedure on sustainable urban transport could at this early point consider a range of possible socio-technical systems and policy options — for example, from a focus on regional transit planning to a focus on improvements to neighbourhood transport system — and evaluate various scenarios in terms of economic feasibility, social relevance and policy implications. The target audience at this point would likely be diverse, including researchers, policy analysts, various interest groups as well as decision-makers. Intervention further “downstream” — when the policy options are narrowed down through the political decision-making process and when planning has reached advanced stages — may be suitable if the objective is to contribute a specific assessment or consultation input into the policy and planning process. Here, the participatory procedure may focus on gauging whether a proposed policy — say, the introduction of a congestion charge to reduce private car use in the city centre — is socially acceptable and establishing how best to achieve implementation of the policy.

The issue of integration is made further complex by the modes of governance involved in the management of urban sustainability: policy- and decision-making typically transcends any one single institution, policy area and jurisdictional domain; instead, it often involves diverse actors engaged in elaborate networking arrangements, such as public-private partnerships. In the governance literature, participatory procedures are seen as a way of rendering such governance arrangements more transparent, accountable and inclusive, by opening them up to public scrutiny and giving greater “voice” to stakeholders, interest groups and citizens. However, it cannot be taken for granted that the use of a participatory procedure *per se* improves the processes and contents of deliberation; this depends on how well the procedure relates to, and is integrated into, the governance process. Applied to the management of urban sustainability, special consideration is required concerning large sustainable infrastructure and planning projects. These tend to be technically highly complex and involve particularly elaborate — and often seemingly impenetrable — governance structures and processes. This makes the integration of participatory procedures especially challenging.

PUBLIC RESONANCE

The design of structured participatory procedures as input into governance processes throws up a further challenge: how, at the same time, to make them relevant to wider public discourse. This is not just a question about how best to amplify and communicate the discourses generated within the participatory procedures so that these may inform wider public debate. (The answer to this lies at least partly in how to achieve media resonance.) It is also a question about how resonant these discourses are of political processes in the wider public sphere. The challenge here consists in the potential artificiality of the participatory procedures and the discourses they produce. Most formal participatory procedures are constituted and designed in ways which are arguably remote from the political deliberations and social discourse that occur in the wider public sphere. As purposeful, highly structured interventions in governance processes, they typically seek to render deliberation “rational” and “robust” — based on optimal information and knowledge input and controlled, facilitated deliberation techniques — and emphasise consensus as the goal and output of deliberation. The effect is that the essence and dynamics of “real” political discourse and action — entailing negotiation, bargaining, consultation, lobbying and public contestation — may be left outside participatory procedures.

Consequently, it is important to recognise that structured participatory procedures may be fundamentally different from deliberation and participation within the wider public sphere. Such procedures may produce useful insights into public perceptions and comparative information about various policy options for, say, future sustainable transport based on a consensus-based deliberation process; but it may not adequately capture the contestation of political interests and the dynamics of public discourse surrounding ongoing conflicts over major transport infrastructure projects and planning processes. This is not problematic, as long as this difference is recognised. It would be problematic, however, if the assumption is made that the deliberation generated within structured participatory procedures necessarily mirrors wider sociopolitical discourse. It would be further problematic if these structured procedures were assumed to be able to substitute for wider public discourse.

Example 3 — St. Davids Eco-City (UK)

St. Davids, the United Kingdom's smallest city, has gained a reputation for its urban sustainability practices and policies. Following a sharp economic decline in the late 1980s/early 1990s, the port city began to shift its focus to innovation in environmental sustainability and eco-tourism. This work was led by a voluntary group of civil society actors, including at its centre, the Eco-City group. The latter is made up of representatives of local business groups, the city and county councils, the National Park, as well as individual residents. The group holds monthly meetings and communicates its activities through a social media site. In 2004, the group secured a funding of more than GBP100,000 from the National Lottery based on its proposal to transform St. Davids into a carbon-neutral city. The programme of work has to date focused on the solar heating and photovoltaic installations, water conservation measures as well as recycling initiatives. More recently, a biodiesel pump was installed (using locally sourced biodiesel) and a car-sharing scheme was introduced. The Eco-City group, supported by a part-time manager, runs an education and tourism programme, attracting an average of half a million visitors annually. Revenues from this are reinvested in new sustainability technology innovation, including the recent testing of a tidal turbine which, if successful, could provide 100% renewable electricity for the city. The first "St. Davids Eco City Week" of events, talks and workshops was held in February 2010.

As a community initiative, St. Davids Eco-City is driven by collaborative planning and participatory action open to all residents and civil society groups. While political representatives are involved in the Eco-City group, the initiative appears to have no direct anchoring in the political process. Consequently, external funding by the National Lottery was critical in getting the initiative off the ground; and the realisation of the various projects has since relied on the support by volunteers.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of contemporary urban sustainable development initiatives can sometimes appear to be almost exclusively on technological issues — renewable energy systems, recycling processes, public transit innovation, etc. — and related technocratic management led by professional experts and planners. Arguably just as important, however, are the issue of social sustainability, and the agency of citizens, community groups and civil society organisations. From a substantive perspective — defining and prioritising urban sustainability — as well as from a procedural perspective — realising community engagement — the social dimension of sustainability is critical to the potential effectiveness of sustainable city initiatives. And yet, this dimension often remains elusive due to the predominant technocratic approach to urban sustainability governance.

One of the challenges of opening up urban sustainable development to public participation is to define and present urban sustainability in a socially relevant and accessible way. For example, the issues of sustainable food, urban green spaces and affordable public transport are likely to engage the public directly *and* can be shown to have significant environmental benefits. More technical and far-ranging issues — such as how to invest in infrastructure improvements and tackle global climate change — have a better chance of engaging the public if they can be shown to be relevant to particular communities and locations. Such an approach then also provides an opportunity to situate place-specific concerns within a wider “bioregional” context, to highlight the interdependence of urban sustainability with regional and even global developments.

Another challenge is to overcome an overly monolithic view of “the public” and “the community”. Rather, it is more productive to consider various “publics” and “communities” as containing a plurality of interests and comprising a range of stakeholder groups. This in turn calls for tailor-made engagement processes to take into account the types of participants to be involved. This may not in itself resolve the difficulty of public participation in planning, but it at least suggests more differentiated and responsive engagement modes.

When public participation is used as part of the process of governing for urban sustainable development, its function has to be made explicit which, in turn, has ramifications for the methodological design of participatory procedures. There is a place for structured collaborative planning and formal consultative processes, as there is a place for open public discourse; but these different functions should not be conflated. The former can be useful in structured processes for uncovering public issues and insights of which designers, planners and developers might otherwise be unaware. The latter are important to ensure that decision-makers are held to account and that urban sustainability is subject to informed and robust public debate.

As such, public participation in urban sustainable development might be productively conceived of as being generated across multiple deliberative arenas: some more formal, others more informal; some more place-specific, others more large-scale; some thematically more focused, and others more exploratory and future-oriented. The different methodological and practical requirements for each of these arenas need careful consideration. Finally, particular attention should be paid to how synergy can be created between these various participatory arenas, so as to strengthen public engagement in the governance of urban sustainability.

