

The Importance of Recognition for Equal Representation in Participatory Processes: Lessons from Husby

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Introduction

In urban planning, ideas regarding the involvement of the public in planning processes have been present since the 1960s and 1970s, when popular, radical, democratic ideology emphasised public involvement.¹ In the discourse from that period, the word *participation* implied a process in which people could influence the decisions that affected them, or as Arnstein expressed it in 1969: '[Participation] is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future'.²

In the 1990s, an interest in participatory processes reappeared, while the issues of redistribution and power shifted to matters of recognition and identity construction, influenced by post-structuralism and third-wave feminism, with its focus on the politics of identity and diversity. Generally since then, the dominant planning discourse has undergone a major change towards more collaborative and communicative planning. There are many terms for this approach: communicative planning, collaborative planning, participatory planning, or planning through debate.³ These terms have been used in the literature of planning theory to describe and transform the concepts of Habermasian critical theory into the planning process.⁴ Furthermore, the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) to engage more people in collective processes was also seen as an opportunity to reform the system of representative democracy,

not only by enabling better services for citizens but also by introducing various ways of involving them in dialogue processes. Projects such as the Blacksburg Electronic Village in Virginia, USA, and the Digital City in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, explored the Internet as a means of developing a more deliberative democracy in local communities.⁵ Thus, public participation in urban planning can take on many different forms. Activities may range from clear-cut discussions about public art projects organised by various authorities with a formalised structure and a predefined agenda, to spontaneous revolts. Participatory forms may range from basic questionnaires to different kinds of more or less developed dialogues with stakeholders and citizens, such as public meetings, charettes or participatory design methods.

Needless to say, the participatory paradigm in urban planning has not been without its critics. In the 1960s, Arnstein was critical of many attempts to use participatory methods in planning, referring to them as 'manipulations' and 'therapy', and claiming that initiatives of this kind had nothing to do with sharing power but were instead used as a means to justify the plans. Furthermore, dialogue in urban planning is restricted in scope since the important decisions are mostly made elsewhere. Lack of transparency in participatory processes limits an understanding of the urban planning issues involved, and thus fails to meet modern society's need for effectiveness and social cohesion.⁶ Some commentators focus their critique on the deliberative 'ideal speech' condition

suggested by Habermas, which ignores hegemonic discourses and antagonistic interests, and does not position the public discourse in relation to the state and the economy.⁷ The lack of equal representation is common in extended, deliberative forms of democracy in which citizens participate more actively in planning and decision-making procedures, as these forms tend to give disproportionate power to people who have the means, time and opportunity to participate – a situation that undermines the widely held concept of representative democracy. In addition, citizens are too frequently conceived of as a homogenous group, so that differences both between and within various groups are seldom recognised.

Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards there has been a proliferation of various ICT tools for supporting democratic decision-making, and the field of e-participation has also struggled with similar problems of representation. The relationships among those who participate in Internet discussions are no more egalitarian than in other forums. Gender research into new media indicates that gender, race, and ethnicity as grounds for discrimination are just as prominent online as in other social contexts,⁸ and, once again, only certain groups participate in political activities via the Internet. The digital differentiation increases the gap between different social groups.⁹ In a comparison of research on the digital divide and research on community satisfaction, Dutta-Bergman demonstrated that the relationship between involvement in local political life and greater use of the Internet involves dividing people into many fragmented groups based on their identity and common interests rather than bringing together different groups and perspectives.¹⁰ At the same time, ICT and more globalised societies have changed the understanding of concepts such as 'common' and 'public'. The process of defining common problems and whom they involve remains unclear and controversial. Hence, both planning and decision-making processes often give rise to

conflict, are excessively time-consuming, and regularly end up in an impasse.

Given the many facets involved, the issue of representation in planning processes calls for a cross-disciplinary approach. We therefore established a joint research project involving the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, and the Department of Computer and Systems Sciences at Stockholm University. The research project team is exploring communicative structures on site, using various methods ranging from media analyses, interviews and participatory observations, to public seminars and more exploratory art projects in the public space. [fig. 1]

One area of research under focus is the lack of equal representation in participatory processes, which we consider by investigating and using the concept of *recognition* as a fundamental aspect of participatory urban planning. Below, we discuss one of our case studies and relate it to democratic theory and the critique of participatory practices in urban planning we presented above. The case is quite typical in the sphere of urban planning, but particularly interesting as it clearly demonstrates the impact of changing information structures on participatory processes. We conclude by arguing that the insights gained can help identify strategies for solving the problem of a lack of equal representation in the participatory process.

Urban planning in Husby

Car fires and riots have put Husby and other parts of suburban Stockholm on the global map. The events of May 2013, in which 76 cars and 21 schools and kindergartens were set on fire, and where youths threw stones at the police, is described in the media as symptomatic of a growing alienation in suburbs marked by immigration, social problems and unemployment. The media account



Fig. 1: Open Space by Anna Hasselberg (2012) is part of the art project in Husby. © Martin Hultén.

is dramatised and aestheticised, and presents a picture that is in sharp contrast to the normal, quiet, everyday life in Husby, a suburban idyll surrounded by extensive green areas. Husby was built in the 1970s as part of a ten-year national programme (1965-75) to combat inner city slums and simultaneously construct new, prefabricated, multi-storey housing in the suburbs. The construction of these suburbs was one of the core pillars of the Swedish welfare model. The inhabitants were offered clean and functional homes according to the ideals of the time. In 2012 there were about 12,000 people living in Husby, mostly in rented apartments, in an area built for a small-scale community. Husby is located along a subway line about 15 kilometres north of Stockholm's city centre. The area is home to many immigrants: 86.4% of Husby's population were born outside Sweden or had both parents born outside Sweden, compared with 33% in Stockholm as a whole.¹¹ The unemployment rate in the area is 8.8% (Stockholm, 3.3%), and the percentage of people in work is 55% (Stockholm, 77%). Voter turnout is similarly low: 55% (Stockholm, 81%).

Public opinion regards Husby as a problem area. Furthermore, the buildings have aged and there is a substantial need for renovation. In the light of these issues, there is a broad public consensus that Husby is in need of substantial redevelopment, including housing rehabilitation, social upgrading, and densification. Stockholm is also growing at a fast pace, and the municipality of Stockholm has developed strategic plans for new developments as well as for densification of existing suburbs to host this growth. Densification plans include Husby. A first planning proposal was presented in 2007, but has been frozen for the time being due to protests by local residents.

Both the redevelopment plans and the municipality's definition of the problems differ from the ideas and opinions held by Husby's residents. The plans coincide with cuts and changes in the delivery of

public services, and there are political controversies surrounding many of the initiatives included in the planned investments. The dilemma facing Husby is not only that the stakeholders cannot agree on how to solve the local problems but also that they cannot agree on defining them. This lack of a shared viewpoint makes it extremely challenging to find a solution that will satisfy the interests of the various stakeholders. As a consequence, the process of agenda setting is submerged in conflict. From a representative-democratic perspective, it is the region's long-term interests that should be the starting point for development strategies for Husby. 'Citizens' from this perspective are not only those directly affected – those living in Husby today – but also a wider group of stakeholders, given that Stockholm is an important economic node for the whole of Sweden.

From a deliberative-democratic perspective, all those who are affected by the decision should participate equally in the public discussion and, where there is a preparatory discussion, should ultimately reach a decision on rational grounds. From this perspective it is important to prepare and formulate the political issues by public debate with all the affected parties. In practice, the values at stake are too large to realistically reach a consensus decision. From the municipality's perspective, the growth of Husby is an objective, since the neighbourhood is strategically located between the city centre and the international airport, with a good communication network and recreational surroundings. From the perspective of Husby's actual residents, the municipal authorities' development plans imply that people who have lived in the area all their lives might be forced to move because they will be unable to afford the anticipated increased living costs.

According to the citizens of Husby, the mediated public sphere is dominated by a group of people who are not located in Husby and who acquire their information from police sources and press

releases. However, the dominant discourse in the public sphere maintains that Husby is an area suffering from high crime rates and social problems due to poor education, cultural differences and poor anchorage in civil society.

This negative image of Husby has created a local backlash. The inhabitants do not recognise the picture painted by the media and shared by public officials. In local public spheres, the discourses are different. Husby's residents feel comparatively safe and confident, and thrive in their community. They consider problems related to the recent influx of immigrants with low incomes and education levels to be small and mainly caused by cuts and deficits in services such as schooling, day care and welfare services.

Unlike the scenario related to problems in the 1960s, when a radical democratic ideology was central, the controversies are not just about the unequal distribution of resources among different stakeholders or the perception of planners as collaborating with powerful economic interests, but also about *recognition*: the residents feel that their perceptions of the situation do not coincide with how they are framed in the media or expressed by public opinion.

According to Husby's residents, planners should focus on social problems and not primarily on the physical environment. Various local organisations have therefore taken matters into their own hands and are working against the dominant discourse by creating their own. These interest groups have developed a strong common identity, where the self-defined values of 'Husby' are important common denominators.

The youth organisation Megafonen serves as one example of such interest groups. [fig. 2] Founded with the goal of creating an alternative view of Stockholm's northern suburbs, here,

young people in the community come together, positing their own conceptions of the neighbourhood. The founders were seeking a more nuanced picture of young people and Husby than the dominant Swedish media sphere allowed and wanted to launch a debate on their own terms through an online forum and organised discussion evenings.

Megafonen and its representatives have quickly gained attention in the dominant media, and the group is currently an informal representative for both the young people and their parents when an issue is to be debated; for example, when police shot a sixty-nine-year-old man in Husby, Megafonen organised demonstrations against police violence, and again, when the local meeting place, Husby Träff, was occupied as a protest against relocation plans.

Thanks to the use of social media such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, local people in Husby have established information channels which manage to influence the dominant discourse, and have developed relationships with other groups with similar interests.¹² The network Järva's Future has organised opposition to proposed gentrification plans. Politically independent and not a formal association, the network is organised by means of a mailing list comprising people from different parties and associations in the area.

But even within groups of people with a broad consensus, power structures that limit participation still exist. The association *Street Gårds*, which uses a Facebook group as a meeting place, was founded as a reaction to male dominance in contexts such as youth centres, and school classrooms and corridors.

In Husby's urban planning process, the municipal authorities actively tried to establish a dialogue with the residents to encourage them to accept the development plans. In the course of just a few days

spent collecting opinions and discussing plans with the citizens, the municipality were able to reach a much larger group than dialogue meetings in Sweden's urban planning process usually attract. Residents responded to questions concerning where they felt safe and where they felt insecure, and were asked to suggest proposals for improvements to the physical space. This result was achieved by using young people from Megafonen as ambassadors. Their local knowledge and multilingualism were exploited in order to reach groups of adults who otherwise would not have participated because of language problems or their unwillingness to expose their views. There was therefore a strong degree of recognition between those who organised the dialogue sessions and the participants. The issues were also important to the residents since their immediate environment was at stake. Consequently, both the level of participation and expectations were high. The youth organisations also had great expectations that their accrued time and the capital built on their reputation would make a difference.

However, the municipal authorities never saw the citizen dialogue as anything more than a way of obtaining information. They had no intention of involving the participants in the actual decision-making. For their part, the urban planners were focused on a restricted field that concerned roads and buildings and avoided issues that the citizens found more urgent, such as the provision of social services in the area. Accordingly, reactions were strong when the final proposal did not meet the local activists' expectations. The municipal authorities took more account of the Stockholm region as a whole. Therefore, although the participatory approach created considerable expectations for direct influence in the decision-making process, these were never realised. Instead, the documentation of the dialogues, including quotes from citizens and their images, were used to justify a new plan that was almost identical to the one that had initially

been criticised.

One of the major conflicts in Husby developed from a change in the structure of local communication. The neighbourhood was built to create many venues for social interaction. There is no main square but several small ones, as well as a library, community centre, medical centre, grocery stores, restaurants, small shops etc. Pedestrian walkways avoid road traffic and connect the various parts of Husby, which means that children can play in safety. When the area was built in the 1970s it was designed for community life. Each apartment block had a meeting room, and each district had a recreational centre. There were management staff who assumed an informal role as 'information channels' between residents and public agencies. One community centre built adjoining one of the squares had a restaurant, and a stage that could be used for debates and parties. Over time, public services in Husby deteriorated due to changes in the Swedish welfare system and dominant political ideologies. The neighbourhood managers disappeared, as did other service personnel. Recently, the privatisation and closure of public housing, together with plans to remove the pedestrian/traffic separation, have provoked substantial local protests and illegal squats.

In parallel with the decline in publicly supported common spaces, the common domains in semi-commercial spaces online are widening. An important source of information among Persian speakers in Husby and other parts of the world is *Radio Peyvan*, a community radio based in Husby. The role of the Iranian Culture Association, which operates the radio, is to strengthen a sense of self and thus promote integration and participation in Swedish society. One of the more popular programmes has explained the activities of parliament and the government. The use of Persian has made it easier for the elderly (whose knowledge of Swedish is limited) to follow and therefore to



Fig. 2: Bana Bisrat from Megafonen at demonstration against Swedish migration policy in Stockholm 2013.
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understand and participate in the community. *Radio Peyvan* also presents and discusses Swedish news. The radio channel works rather like a bulletin board, advertising events and hosting call-in programmes that discuss a range of urgent issues. The radio is also available on the Internet and, according to its producer Bahman Motaei, has about 8,000 online listeners, an estimated 90% of whom live in Iran. For Bahman, it is important that people who contact the channel are given space and can control the content. His aim is to act more as a moderator, listening and making sure that everyone has a chance to talk.

The Iraq Art Association is another active community in the area, and official Iraqi media comment on exhibitions at the art gallery. Although these organisations do not have much influence in the official Swedish cultural sphere, they are part of other global communities. This is an example of how globalisation has reshaped the foundations of the shared local sphere and how residents of Husby act in various public arenas not shared by the officials of the Stockholm municipality. Neither does the municipality see Husby's current residents as its main 'citizens'. Instead, the municipal authorities consider how they think Stockholm should evolve over time from a global perspective and, consequently, place importance on attracting financially strong partners to invest locally. 'Global' connections in this context are of a different kind from those represented by Husby's residents, many of whom have Swedish as their second or third language.

What is most interesting with regard to Husby is the gap in worldviews between the decision-makers from the city council and the residents. This can be explained by examining how Husby is presented in the dominant media. Ekberg shows how Swedish journalists are not only concentrated in the major cities, but also reside in a small number of neighbourhoods in the inner city.¹³

Our media study shows that Husby is often portrayed as a problem area in news articles.¹⁴ Half the articles and notices about Husby describe some kind of problem, and the majority of individuals selected as subjects or spokespersons in the articles – the ones who are portrayed or interviewed and whose opinions occupy a central role in the press – are middle-aged and have typical, ethnic, Swedish names. In general, they tend to be people with a position in society, usually working for a government or municipal authority, whereas the majority of 'objectified' individuals in the articles, those mentioned and discussed but not directly interviewed, are 'young people'. The positions presented in the articles are far from an equal or fair representation of the diversity found in Husby, or elsewhere for that matter. One can see the public sphere as a mirror in which some people can recognise themselves more than others. 'Young people' feature extensively in the reporting, but mainly as objects of concern. The people showing concern and doing the talking are middle-aged and are often representatives of public authorities: politicians, civil servants and police officers.

There is, however, one exception that counters this media approach: the local journal *Norra Sidan* has taken a more constructive attitude. It was founded as late as 2012 as a reaction to the discrediting style of journalism in other media. Its strategy is to conduct so-called citizen journalism by reaching out to residents and seeking to formulate problems and solutions together with its readers. Although the paper is only issued monthly, it has rapidly become an important local source of information.

In the newspaper *Norra Sidan* it is the local people who write, which makes it different, creating a different feeling. Crime is not the only thing that occurs in the area. The [other] media give a false image. The image has consequences. A while ago, the kids played with the image by making fun of it. They harassed those who came here they did not recognise, just to confirm

the prejudices. (Amir Marjai, aged 45).

For Rouzbeh Djalai, editor of *Norra Sidan*, the point of the local newspaper is not to change other people's image of a place – the most important thing is to change the self-image of the people themselves.

If the local newspaper constantly stresses that you live in a crappy area, then you have to, as a reaction, either move away or it's you who are the problem, and you make the problem your identity. (Rouzbeh Djalai, aged 47)

The uneven distribution of visibility for different groups in the media is not unique to reporting about Husby, but it clearly shows that the public sphere is a highly unequal place in terms of its representation and recognition of identity. Given that the media offers an important place for deliberative dialogue and democratic agenda setting, media discourses are fundamental to the way politicians and urban planners define and frame the problems that urban renewal is supposed to solve.

Participation, democracy and globalisation

As we discussed above, conflicts have arisen regarding the way in which Husby's problems are formulated and presented. The Municipality of Stockholm wants to develop and rebuild the area while the residents want better social services, and would prefer lower rents to renovations. An important part of defining the problem takes place in a public sphere that is dominated by restricted discourses.

The 1960s and 70s marked a period in which American urban planners were engaged in the civil rights movement and the struggles against the displacement of low-income communities. The rapid transformation of Western city centres provoked people to raise their voices and protest about insensitive rebuilding schemes and gentrification projects

determined by power elites who held no dialogue with residents in the local communities. A planning profession that only focused on the physical environment was questioned, and a view of the city as a total social, economic, and cultural system was emphasised. The critique was also strongly against an overly rational attitude towards urban renewal, which saw planners aligning themselves with powerful real-estate interests. At that time, new, more inclusive, planning paradigms appeared, such as transactive and advocacy planning. Advocacy planning, for instance, emphasises the conflicts and diversity of interests in the planning process, and maintains that the planner should not represent only one public interest, but acknowledge the presence of many and conflicting ones. One of its leading proponents, Paul Davidoff, has also criticised the fact that most so-called public participation programmes are reactions to government proposals rather than initiated by residents presenting their own proposals:

Intelligent choice about public policy would be aided if different political, social, and economic interests produced city plans. Plural plans rather than a single agency plan should be presented to the public. Politicizing the planning process requires that the planning function be located in either or both the executive and legislative branches and the scope of planning be broadened to include all areas of interest to the public.¹⁵

In this model, a radical democratic notion of public participation is a central tenet, and a multitude of public interests are assumed and respected. The formal planner is merely a facilitator who is supposed to stimulate primarily underrepresented groups to actively participate in the processes. The model also emphasises the political aspects of planning and the importance of recognising unequal economic conditions and power differences.

This model is interesting in relation to development plans for Husby. As with the urban planning Davidoff criticised in the 1960s, it is not primarily the

residents' interests that are being taken into account. The planners represent the one and only 'general best': there is no attempt to present multiple plans that include the standpoints of different groups of stakeholders. There is a clash of interests between the officials who want to change Husby and the residents of Husby who may have to relocate as a result of these changes. This conflict seems to be reinforced by the fact that the planning officials and politicians in charge, who do not live in the area, are also of a different class and ethnicity from the residents of Husby who are directly affected by the planning decisions. The gap between the conflicting interests and worldviews is simply too large. In addition, the agenda and discussion are governed by a hegemonic discourse in the public sphere, which reproduces discriminatory *structures*. *Ideally, we would like to see efficient means of enlightened reasoning taking place, much advocated by proponents of deliberative democracy. But as Mouffe, for one, has noted, this is only possible if no major conflicts exist between the different groups, which is not the case in Husby.*¹⁶

Consequently, the public sphere in which political issues are considered can be a profoundly undemocratic and unequal place, governed by ideologies very different from the ideal model of democracy in the deliberative participatory paradigm. Inequalities may also multiply when information and communication technology reinforce dominant norms about what questions are political, thus increasing the tension between different groups in society: those whose questions count as political and those whose issues are not even discussed. On the other hand, the increased use of social media, where the focus is on friends and family, has transformed what were once private social spaces into public spheres with a global reach. The development of public spheres on the internet can be regarded as an opportunity to create more alternative sources of information, and a way of breaking information monopolies. Fraser suggested the term *subaltern counter publics* for

these types of alternative public spheres, where contested identities, such as minority groups, can develop their own discourses without constant questioning from hegemonic worldviews.¹⁷

It should be noted, however, that minority groups also tend to be structured within certain parameters – age or gender for example – and are no more democratic than the dominant sphere: members of the same group may well have different, conflicting interests. In Husby, for example, *Street Gärås* was founded as a reaction against male dominance in local public spheres,¹⁸ and may serve to illustrate what John Dryzek calls a 'discursive democracy'. In this model, just as in a deliberative democracy, the agenda is defined by the dominant discourse; however, by creating places where alternative discourses can be developed, these can grow strong and influence the discourse of the dominant public sphere.¹⁹ In this context, the group's identity and interests may not necessarily be uniform. In contrast, a political practice that emphasises the antagonism between different groups underestimates the contradictions and unequal power relations within these groups. Identity-based groups held together by common norms and cultures can be composed of individuals with a variety of interests. In this respect, new media can enable individuals from different groups to gather more easily around specific interests (such as feminism), regardless of their identity-group affiliation (such as being young or from Somalia), which may loosen the links between interest and identity. Dryzek further argues that in order to reduce the significance of antagonism between different groups, we need public meeting rooms far from the hot political locations where decisions are made. Within these micro-public spheres more creative discussions can take place between people with similar interests, and thus enable the development of arguments and ideas strong enough to influence a larger public sphere.

To sum up: since the 1960s, participatory practices have become a norm in many areas, but the underlying ideology has changed towards a notion of democracy that focuses less on redistribution and more on recognition and representation. Furthermore, ICT is changing the concept of the common sphere; for instance, local issues (such as the action of Husby's young girls against male dominance) can easily become part of a global movement (the feminist movement, for example), while questions about who is affected by changes in a given situation become more difficult to answer as economies increasingly intertwine. Participation in urban planning therefore not only entails being part of the decision-making process, but also being part of the agenda-setting process, which evolves from discourses developed in the dominant public sphere: discourses that are also influenced by subaltern counter-publics formed from communities of interests. In Husby, the interest organisation Megafonen and the network Järva's Future are both examples of subaltern counter-publics that have managed to develop their own powerful discourses, which in turn have influenced general public opinion. Therefore the next question to ask is what motivates the individual to participate in a community of interest and to develop alternative public spheres?

The importance of recognition for participation

In the 1970s, Davidoff emphasised that redistribution was the ultimate goal for urban planners, and that equal representation in the planning process was the condition for this.²⁰ Representation is increasingly relevant today given that the perception of the nation state as the basis of institutionalised democracy is being questioned by the rise of global movements dealing with issues – from human rights to the environment – that involve globally scattered stakeholders. Participation is not just about taking part in decision-making processes, but also entails defining who is a legitimate, representative 'citizen' in these processes.

In addition to redistribution and representation, Fraser also adds *recognition* of one's identity as important for democratic justice.²¹ Particularly in a global perspective where the participant is not clearly defined, recognition of one's worldview and identity is important for developing the incentive to participate in the deliberative process. As one of our informants remarked in the interview: 'The satellite dishes are illustrative. Many people do not experience what is around them as real. What is here is not your truth, so you turn away, maybe to your home country, to get information from outside'. (Amir Marjai, aged 45)

Information technology facilitates parallel public spheres. If one's identity is not confirmed in one forum, involvement is reduced, but it might increase in other forums. If representation is considered from a perspective where the motivation for engaging in a community is not (only) based on national and geographic boundaries but also involves relationships between participants in dynamically-created global communities of interest, recognition both motivates and structures representation. According to urban network theory, participation in informal networks is organised along parameters such as class, gender or ethnicity, verifying the assumption that equals seek equals.²² People with similar interests or similar problems are attracted to each other as they acknowledge each other's perspectives, codes, and rituals. In this perspective, community is about *recognition* and shared cultural norms and values, developed through interaction between individuals over time.

Thus, recognition and closeness in time and space seem to be reasons for participating in a community. An individual's relationship with other people in terms of recognition is then determined by the amount of shared common ground, with parameters such as gender and class assuming importance, together with time and physical location. The significant contribution of information

technology in this context is to reduce the importance of time and physical location, making it easier to tie common bonds with peers at a distance. In practice, this means that the common domain shifts from one based on time and geographical proximity, to one where interests do not depend on time or physical location. For instance, instead of having a conversation with people in your physical vicinity whom you might not know very well, the mobile phone allows conversation with friends at a distance, with whom you may prefer to talk. To understand the individual's motivation for participating in the shaping of common, local spaces, it is important to understand how interests arising from shared geographical space intersect with other communities of interest. The individual here can be seen as more or less fragmented into various communities of interest that can be shared by people in the same geographical space, or in a completely different geographical areas. ICT can lead to fragmentation, but by facilitating involvement in local affairs, it can also be used to reconnect people who share the same physical location.

Iris Young refers to individuals who share common denominators as belonging to 'series' rather than 'groups' – a belonging that does not necessarily imply awareness.²³ This interpretation makes it possible to consider individuals as passive members of a variety of interest groups, even ones with conflicting interests. Figure 3 illustrates the difference between a series, a loosely tied interest group, and a community with shared cultural values:

- *Series*: A series of people, who are unaware of each other, share a common denominator. There are no channels of communication.

- *Interest Group*: A group of people who share a common interest and create a public sphere. The individual has a communication channel to the group, be it a shared space, a mailing list, or a similar forum that makes communication with the group possible.

- *Community*: A group of people who share interests, values, goals and practices, and where people often know each other. The culture is mediated in a public sphere.

This chart should be viewed as a scale where the individual may be simultaneously part of several different series, interest groups and communities.

Linking this perspective to Dryzek's concept of discursive democracy, communication tools such as shared meeting rooms, publications, or discussion groups online can develop greater antagonism between different interest groups by strengthening their separate culture and particularity. Yet the same tools can also reduce culture-based antagonism by making it easier for people to contact other groups with whom they share an interest, regardless of any culturally conditioned identity. The feminist movement is an example of this. People from different classes and cultures can form an interest group – on the issue of women's suffrage, for example – and thus change the rules that govern the scope for action of the whole series of women. Husby itself provides another example. The area has many organisations built on common values such as culture or religion. Although these organisations share premises, they otherwise have little in common. However, when the premises were threatened with closure, Järva's Future network was created as an interest group that drew its members from a variety of organisations. Their joint action resulted in a general improvement of the local community.

To conclude: the motivation to participate in the public sphere can be understood as a combination of shared interests and shared values; for example, recognition. The individual takes part in several, more or less coherent, communities of interest, all of which can be seen as bases for public spheres. A social space, such as a restaurant or discussion group online, does not automatically increase

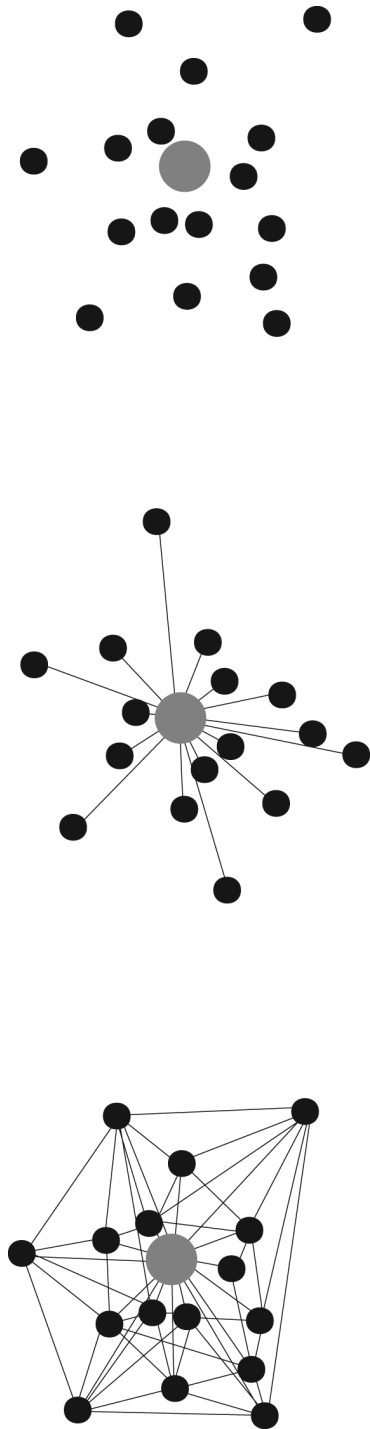


Fig. 3: Illustration of: A *series* of people with a common denominator; a loosely-knit *interest group*; a tightly-knit *community*. Black dots denote individuals; grey dots signify what they have in common; lines indicate that they know each other. The length of the lines has no significance. Illustration: Karin Hansson.

participation but it improves the conditions for participation. Globalisation causes a fragmentation of the local public sphere, but may also strengthen minority groups locally.

Concluding remarks: recognition and community

Today, participation is the norm in urban planning, but the underlying ideology has changed from a radically democratic ideology that emphasised the significance of unequal economic conditions and power differences, to a liberal ideology that emphasises access to information and the importance of participation for a more creative and efficient society. Differences in the ability to participate in planning processes are increased by a media landscape that is fragmented and ever more difficult to survey. This situation has also transferred interest from the economic inequalities between groups to the unequal influence certain groups have on the dominant discourse.

From this perspective, participation is as much about recognising one's personal identity, and how one's concept of reality is reflected in the media, as it is about the redistribution of the means to participate. Recognition is connected to representation. If the individual's self-image is not recognised in the public discourse, it is not represented in the decision-makers' image of the situation. The incentive to engage in the common also decreases if the individual is not acknowledged as a part of this community. Participation is about reciprocity: if the individual does not feel that the engagement is mutual, the incentive to participate is reduced. For most citizens, the personal benefit of becoming involved in planning activities is usually low and the cost of participation high.

In order to create greater engagement in local issues, a community seems to be required where the participants are seen and acknowledged in light of the diversity of the multiple communities they

belong to. Here, common spaces play an important role in helping transform common local interests into common identities. This includes such contexts as public squares, community centres, newspapers, TV channels, or websites that confirm individual self-images and encourage interaction and the collective development of knowledge.

Communities of this kind are not conflict-free. Participation is not a means of getting everyone to take part in a joint creative urban design process. Instead, broad public participation helps to promote more critical perspectives and as diverse a picture of the situation as possible.

For instance, Husby's residents were used as informants in the municipal authority's survey of the area, and their comments were submitted as part of the data that informed the municipal planners. The starting point was that Husby needed improvements. The solutions decided upon were aspects the city planners could control, such as buildings, roads, and repainting houses. The agenda had been decided in advance, and solutions to the problems were already defined. The authorities had already established the framework for discussion. Just as in the type of participatory art where the artist creates the framework and then invites participants to fill in the 'content', people are assumed to be bearers of 'data' that can be extracted, rather than acknowledged as critical discussion partners.

Figure 4 illustrates an individual's participation in diverse interest groups, to which he or she belongs to a greater or lesser extent. People who live in the same area tend to have more common interests than people who do not, but forums such as books, magazines, art, websites and social media loosen the link with geographical proximity. The individual may actually have more in common with people in other locations, and the incentive to engage in issues related to the common location decreases.

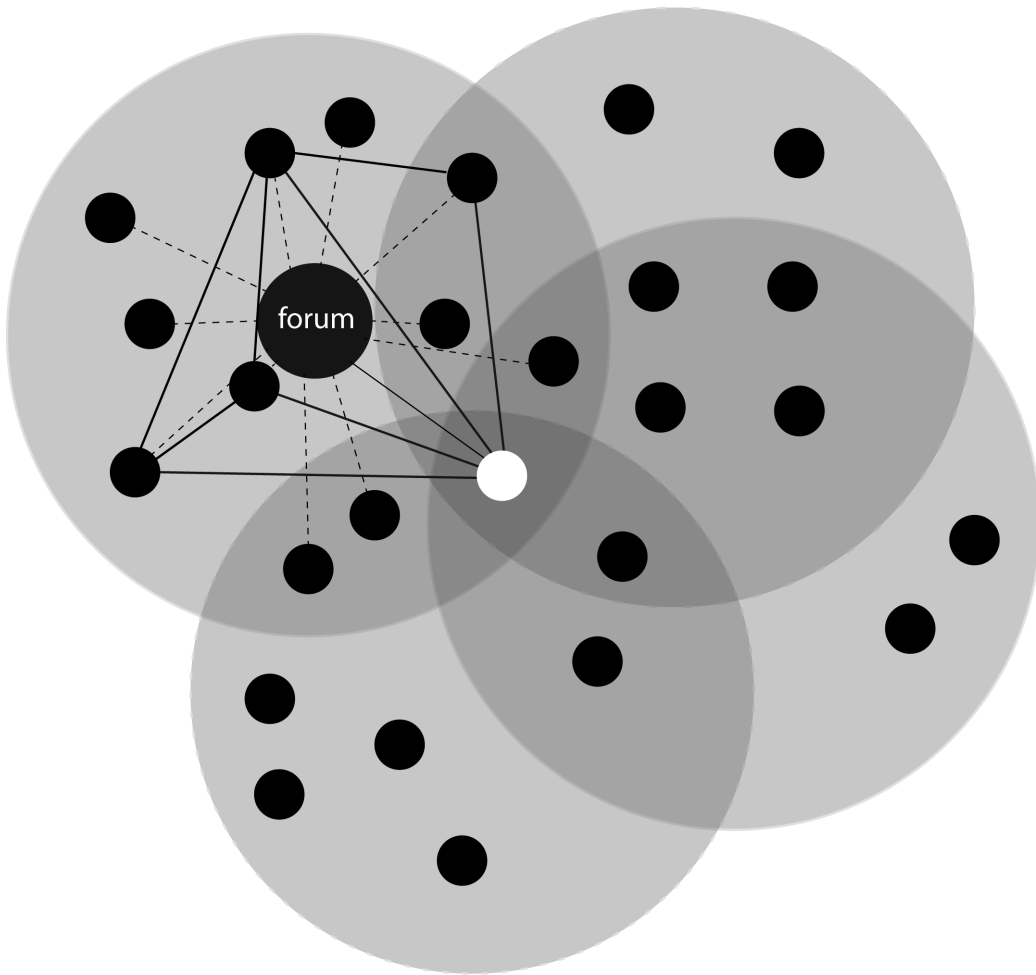


Fig. 4: Illustration of how the individual (represented by the white dot) is included in various interest groups (grey spheres), where such a group also provides a social network as several individuals (represented by black dots) in the interest group share and develop information together through a forum that can be a physical meeting place or ICT. A communication forum (big dot) provides potential contact (dotted lines) between members of the interest group and enables community in the group to develop (solid lines). Illustration: Karin Hansson.

But as Dryzek suggests, communication can also be actively used to strengthen the ties between those who share or are affected by the location: firstly, by bringing visibility to an issue, and secondly, by creating space for dialogue between those affected by the issue. In a discussion forum, the discussion starts when someone puts forward an issue and is interested in developing it with the help of the group. In order to get others interested in participating in the call, it is important to recognise and treat them as equals. In a long-term reciprocal interaction, fellowship and a common culture are developed that will further strengthen the relationship between interest and identity.

None of this is new, but Husby is an example of how globalisation and ICT have gained a significant role in shaping local issues, and thus contains important indicators with regard to reinforcing incentives to participate in urban planning.

To improve the equal representation of participants in urban planning processes requires the creation of a long-term engagement in local affairs rather than in single events. It involves creating spaces and forums for a variety of public spheres where different political agendas can be launched and given time to develop. Common domains such as public squares, libraries, schools, local papers, art galleries and online forums are important settings for communication. A participatory methodology for urban planning should thus be aimed at supporting and acknowledging a variety of communication flows in order to reduce the differences between those with more and those with less influence over the political agenda.

Notes

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