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# Introduction: The Participatory Turn in Urbanism

Maroš Krivý and Tahl Kaminer, editors

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In the last decade, a 'participatory culture' has evolved and expanded dramatically, advocating participation as a radical form of direct democracy and demanding its implementation outside the traditional territory of institutional politics. Fuelled by innovations in the field of information technology, such as Web 2.0 or social networks, within the fine arts this emergent movement has brought about a 'participatory turn'. The new aesthetics related to this turn have been enthusiastically theorised and endorsed as 'relational' (Nicholas Bourriaud), 'dialogical' (Grant Kester), 'collaborative' (Maria Lind), or simply 'social' (Lars Bang Larsen).<sup>1</sup> This participatory turn has also been subjected to a critical examination. Claire Bishop, in particular, showed that the promise of equality between the artist and the audience is problematised by the outsourcing of authenticity from the author to the audience, and by the excessive deployment of ethical, non-aesthetic categories such as 'demonstrable impact' as a means of critical evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

The participatory turn can also be identified in urban planning, urban design and architecture. In these fields, as in others, the 'turn' is necessarily also a 'return' of sorts to the ideas and ideologies of the 1960s, an era in which participatory demands were backed by influential and radical political movements. The origins of participatory planning can be thus traced back to concepts of advocacy (Paul Davidoff), equity (Norman Krumholz), and transactive (John Friedmann) planning.<sup>3</sup> In various ways, the notion of public participation was central

to ideas as diverse as the 'Non-Plan' of Reyner Banham et al, Giancarlo di Carlo's 'Urbino', or Jane Jacobs's 'diverse city'.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas participatory planning remained important in much of Latin America, in Western Europe it has been integrated into planning policies in diluted forms such as 'public consultation'. In the United States, many of the Community Design Centres established in the late 1960s and early 70s ended up by the late 1980s as low-profile and limited-impact neighbourhood organisations. The realisation of the Non-Plan in the development of free enterprise zones, such as the London Docklands, has been acknowledged by Paul Barker, one of the authors of the original proposal;<sup>5</sup> the lessons learnt at Urbino have been mostly forgotten, overwhelmed by individualist-consumerist forms of participation, such as the 'shopping list' consultation process of the WIMBY project in Hoogvliet, whereas the 'diverse city' has fostered gentrification and mutated into the 'creative city'.

The explicit demands for inclusive, legitimate forms of sovereignty and for the decentralisation of power, which are at the core of the political demands for participation, infer an ideal of freedom – from the state, from top-down power structures and from institutions. The recent Occupy and Tea Party movements, for example, manifest two forms of systematic dissatisfaction with the state and with representative democracy that have emerged in the wake of the recent financial crisis. In spite of

their contrasting political orientation, the critique of state politics and emphasis on citizens' direct power lie at the core of both movements. Yet, as this radical freedom posits autonomous subjects as its end, the idea of collectivity is weakened, relegated to the state of a contingent, fleeting, social grouping, valued primarily as a counter-force to that of government.

Also bypassed is one of the original arguments for participation: giving voice to the subaltern and expanding political equality by expanding social and economic equality. As Boris Buden recently argued, a concern for 'community' and 'culture' has replaced 'society' as the horizon of contemporary politics.<sup>6</sup> This is evident in urban practices. Related to the 1990s concern with programme, the dominant model for activism and experimental (albeit increasingly mainstream) practice has become the participatory platform, focused on community consolidation and on facilitating cultural expression and identity formation. Yet such platforms tend to have a fleeting existence, and consequently also a limited impact. Where, when, by whom, for whom, for what (and whether) they are implemented is rather arbitrary; often, the creation of participatory platforms reproduces the inequalities against which they were tailored. The vulnerability of communities, the themes of grant programmes, architects' idiosyncratic interests or the presence of 'enlightened' clients is decisive for shaping the structure of participatory practices in today's cities.

Many of the urbanists and architects currently involved in participatory practices, such as Atelier d'architecture autogérée, Stalker, or raumlabor, react to contingent conditions and tailor their projects and methodologies to the situations they encounter, yet the specific practices deployed have significant ramifications, which are rarely considered beyond their immediate impact. Diverse forms of participation, different types of representative or participatory institutions, disparate protocols for

deliberation, will-formation and decision-making, necessarily correspond to diverse democratic political theories. Among these are associative democracy (Paul Hirst, Joshua Cohen), communitarianism or 'neo-corporatism', republicanism (Hardt and Negri), direct democracy, deliberative democracy (Habermas, Dryzek, Benhabib), and agonistic pluralism (Mouffe, Barber),<sup>7</sup> to name but a few. Each of these theories tends to privilege different social configurations and different processes of democratisation, and therefore participatory practices require more than a reaction to visible, existing conditions in situ. Theories mediating between political theory and urban practices are few, and often limited in their scope and rigour. By strengthening such theories, by articulating a socio-historical perspective which contextualises the specific tactics of participatory practices, the latter's efficacy and larger societal role can be properly and fully assessed.

To place 'the participatory turn' in a socio-historical context illuminates its underlying logic. While the 1960s call for participation certainly embodied a commitment to equality, to empowering the subaltern, it already clearly expressed an anti-statist position, with the centralised and powerful welfare state as the major adversary. Empowered by state retrenchment, in the ensuing decades, many of the original 1960s critical advocacy groups were, in fact, invited to participate and take responsibility. Planning bureaucracies, as mentioned above, responded to the discontent by incorporating participatory processes into their protocols.

Forty years later, national and local governments have retreated from many of the territories they had previously occupied, including managing urban development and constructing social housing. In this process, the empowerment of the 1960s advocacy groups has also allowed their co-optation: they are required to compete for funding and, in effect, function as private-market entities.<sup>8</sup> A broadening of freedom may be discernible in all this, yet the

weakening of the state has strengthened citizens *qua* entrepreneurs (of themselves) rather than strengthening them *qua* political actors. The state, the sole power capable of keeping market power at bay, thus appears to be a bogus enemy of many contemporary participatory movements. At the end of the day, anti-statism can instead be held suspect of primarily aiding the expansion of the market in the name of empowering 'the people'.

The co-opting of participatory processes by planning departments, the systematic disregard of inequalities, and the empowering of the market resulting from 'anti-statism' call for a rigorous evaluation of the participatory turn. Does it necessarily leave inequalities intact? Is it a means of achieving 'quietism' by placating the lower middle classes? The objective of this issue of *Footprint* is to critically examine the recent participatory turn in urban planning and urban design. While the 'right to the city' has an important strategic value in fighting social and urban exclusion, it is less capable of responding to contradictions resulting from urban policies of inclusion. What does the advocacy of popular participation by planning authorities, urban policy strategists and international urban consultants mean? Why is participation encouraged, and who is giving the encouragement? What do different social actors understand by participation? Can the notion be opened up by asking: participation by whom, where, and to do what? And how should we respond to a frustrating awareness that the promises of equality implicit in every participatory act are recurrently compromised by inequality between those who stage the participatory process and those who are invited to participate?

This issue of *Footprint* opens with Ryan Love's critique of the institutionalisation of participation, a synoptic overview that addresses issues ranging from culture to power. Though quality (of life) is now decidedly among the key objectives considered by planners, it is also something to be assessed and

evaluated by disinterested experts and professional consultants. Top-down, state-led bureaucracy has been replaced by market-driven bureaucracy and horizontally dispersed management models, in which citizens, private corporations and public bodies are considered as mere 'stakeholders' of the same order.

Brooke Wortham-Galvin broadens the territory and discusses the unfolding of participation, including the related questions of freedom, autonomy and self-organisation, through a number of projects and initiatives from the past and present. The particular focus of her paper is on the Occupy movement and on homesteading practices in their historical and contemporary variations. When she asks 'For whom is the extra café seating in Portland?', she queries everyday urbanism and its assumptions.

Camillo Boano and Emily Kelling study the *Baan Mankong*, an ambitious housing project in Thailand. They deploy Jacques Rancière's work as an explanatory theoretical framework, albeit inferring, though refraining from explicitly arguing, its reversibility: namely, that Rancière's theories can also become the point of departure for concrete projects. Focusing on the phenomenon of community architecture, the authors see its political role at two levels: firstly, the residents' involvement in the actual design challenges the standardised bleakness of 'housing for the poor', and secondly, repositions them as active partners in design expertise.

Julia Udall and Anna Holder raise important questions regarding the real-estate market, power, and participatory initiatives, by reviewing a project in which they took part. The authors draw on J.K. Gibson-Graham's concept of 'diverse economies' to analyse how participatory practices tend to be evaluated in terms of their market-related economic value and, consequently, how practices that cannot be evaluated in these terms are made 'invisible'.

Karin Hansson, Love Ekenberg, Göran Cars, and Mats Danielson provide an overview of participation that interweaves questions of deliberative democracy with cultural and artistic production. They outline fieldwork carried out in Husby, a suburb of Stockholm, in which questions of community-building, local pride and image overlap issues such as employment, housing quality and availability, and education. The authors identify 'recognition' as one of the key prerequisites for successful participation and analyse how it is shaped by media representation.

Eli Hatleskog presents four housing development projects in Norway and analyses participatory urban design and policies as a means of revealing the transforming characteristics and logic of participation. Hatleskog traces how early egalitarian impulses were exhausted in the stigmatisation of housing cooperatives during 1980s-90s and in the associated emergence of private home ownership as a new promise of individual liberty. Questioning the association of participation with the practice of collecting individual 'wish lists', as manifested in the most recent case study, Hatleskog asks how participation can become relevant today.

The review article section begins with a paper by Eva Maria Hierzer and Philipp Markus Schörkhuber, which uses Foucault's argument to discuss participation. Taking the Berlin IBA 84/87 project as its focus point, the paper studies municipal strategy towards squatting and urban regeneration. During the 1980s, uncooperative squatters, labelled as 'bad', were separated from 'good' squatters, who were included in the planning process and were later instrumental in the IBA's subtle approach to urban renewal. The case study exemplifies the authors' assertion that critique is the very infrastructure through which spaces and populations are governed.

Monika Grubbauer studies BMW Guggenheim Lab's Berlin 'residency', unfolding the debate and controversy surrounding the project, and using it as a means of identifying the co-optation and institutionalisation of participatory and interventionist projects. Grubbauer analyses how the project promoted DIY practices and staged the city as an experimental laboratory, yet the implemented forms of participation failed to challenge the social divide in any significant way.

Jenny Stenberg's discussion of two projects in Hammarkullen in Gothenburg focuses on the intertwining of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches in the planning of this disadvantaged neighbourhood. The planning profession is conceived in the tradition of advocacy and action planners, and the active role of citizens' participation in progressive institutional change is identified. Stenberg frames participative planning as complementary to representative democracy and as a potentially successful channel for voicing dissatisfactions in districts with low electoral turnouts.

Socrates Stratis outlines a project in Nicosia that underlines the importance of context: the manner in which operations and practices that might seem benign in one condition are actually conflictual and provocative in another. Although the project in question failed to realise its desired objectives, Stratis asks whether this 'failure' has nevertheless produced merits and values in the course of its unfolding.

Henriette Bier and Yeekee Ku introduce digital urbanism and its participatory promise via a critical review of a number of recent projects in the field. Fully versed in debates on parametric and generative design processes, Bier and Ku nonetheless raise the question of the contrasting technocratic and democratic tendencies of these methods.

Maroš Krivý closes this issue with a review of the 2013 Tallinn Architecture Biennale, highlighting the debates and discussions surrounding the question of architecture as politics, which suggest that the 'aesthetic' understanding of 'good' architecture as autonomous of external constraints still has a hold on some scholars and architects. Here, Tallin's specific condition as a 'Westernised', historic post-socialist city served to bring to the fore contradictory notions of 'participation'.

This issue of *Footprint* thus seeks to expand the discussion of the 'participatory turn' and strengthen its auto-critical and reflective dimension. Considering the dissipation of the earlier participatory movement, whether as a result of co-optation, failure, or loss of interest, and noting the significance and urgency of the questions that the ideal of participation posits to urban designers and planners, this issue and its articles are an attempt to steer this loose movement in a direction that would benefit cities, their residents and society at large.

## Notes

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2. *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel, 2006); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).
3. Paul Davidoff, 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31, 4 (November 1965), pp. 331-38; Norman Krumholz, 'A Retrospective View of Equity Planning. Cleveland 1969-1979', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 48, 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 163-74; John Friedman, *Retracking America: A Theory of Transactive Planning* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973).
4. Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, Cedric Price, 'Non-plan: An Experiment in Freedom', *New Society*, 13, 338 (20 March 1969), pp. 435-43; Giancarlo De Carlo, 'Architecture's Public', in *Architecture and Participation*, ed. by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till (London: Spon Press, 2005 [1969]), pp. 3-22; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1993 [1961]).
5. Paul Barker, 'Non-Plan Revisited: or the Real Way Cities Grow. The Tenth Reyner Banham Memorial Lecture', *Journal of Design History*, 12, 2 (1999), pp. 95-110.
6. Boris Buden, *Konec postkomunismu: Od společnosti bez naděje k naději bez společnosti* (Praha: Rybka, 2013) [orig. Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009)].
7. April Carter, 'Associative Democracy', in *Democratic Theory Today: Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. by April Carter and Geoffrey Stokes (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp.228-48; Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, 'Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance', *Politics & Society*, 20, 4 (December 1992); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. by Sayla Benhabib (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993); Chantal Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Model of Democracy' [2000], in *Hegemony, Radical Democracy and the Political*, ed. by James Martin

(Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 191-206 ; Chantal Mouffe, 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*, ed. by David Trend (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 19-26.

8. Margit Mayer, 'Neoliberal Urbanization and the Politics of Contestation', in *Urban Asymmetries: Studies and Projects on Neoliberal Urbanization*, ed. by T. Kaminer, H. Sohn & M. R. Duran (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011), pp. 46-61.

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