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## **Scripting deliberative policy-making: Dramaturgic policy analysis and engagement know-how**

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### **Abstract**

Public engagers are officials tasked with facilitating collaborative performances in the theatres of deliberation that increasingly populate local governance. In Scotland, they work to involve citizens, communities and organisations in deliberative policy-making. Drawing on 2 years of ethnographic fieldwork, this paper shows how these policy workers deploy their own field of specialist knowledge during the scripting of participatory processes. The analysis eschews conventional notions of 'scripted participation' as tokenistic or manipulative, thus seeking a more sophisticated understanding of the know-how that animates engagement practice. The findings reveal the micro-politics of official participation processes through the 'behind-the-scenes' work of engagement practitioners.

**Key words:** participation practitioners, deliberative policy-making, engagement know-how, policy ethnography, policy work

### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>: Policy as practice, participation as policy**

Two contrasting themes have gained prominence in the discourse about the policy process. One concerns the professionalization of policy work, leading to the development of policy analysis (e.g. Colebatch, 2006a; Fischer, 2009). The other emphasises public participation, stakeholder engagement and deliberative policy-making (e.g. Fischer, 2000; Fung and Wright, 2003). This paper explores how these

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the four anonymous JCPA reviewers who helped to improve the article, as well as Hal Colebatch for very useful editorial advice. I am particularly indebted to Richard Freeman and Andy Thompson for their mentorship during my doctoral research and beyond.

two strands come together; that is, how participation becomes a professional concern, and what it is that professionals do to perform participation.

The approach taken here draws on a tradition of policy studies that analyses policy as practice by focussing on the policy process rather than policy contents. For instance, Lipsky's (1980) work on "street-level-bureaucracy" demonstrated how policy is not only implemented, but also made through the everyday practices of front-line policy workers. Schon and Rein (Schon, 1983; Rein, 1983; Schon and Rein, 1994) not only advanced our understanding of policy practice, but also provided conceptual approaches to inform it. In particular, Schon's notions of 'knowledge in action' and 'reflective practice' have become influential prisms.

These landmark studies provided fertile soil for the growing field of Interpretive Policy Analysis (e.g. Yanow, 1996, 1999; Wagenaar, 2011). Two strands within this field are relevant here. The first has updated Lipsky's work on street-level-bureaucracy by emphasising the increasingly entrepreneurial qualities of front-line workers in contemporary governance (Durose, 2007, 2011; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). The second has argued for a focus on practices as the basic unit of analysis in policy studies (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003; Freeman *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, building on classic and recent work, this paper offers a form of policy analysis sensitised to the role of practitioners and the practices that constitute policy work.

The broader context for the policy work investigated here pertains to the 'participatory' and 'deliberative' turns in policy making and analysis (Fischer and Forester, 1993; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012). Arrangements for citizen and stakeholder participation (e.g. partnerships, community engagement processes) have become a staple in various policy arenas (Sullivan and Lowndes, 2004; Barnes *et al.*, 2007; Osborne, 2010). An industry of participation is emerging, as public, private, and third sector organisations tool-up to perform deliberative engagement (Hendriks and Carson, 2008; Cooper and Smith, 2012; Pieczka and Escobar, 2013). In Scotland, there are hundreds of Council officers whose job is to involve people in policy processes. A distinctive feature of this policy work is that it cuts across traditional silos, as practitioners operate simultaneously in different policy arenas: their expertise is on the engagement process *per se*.

Nonetheless, influential think-tank publications (e.g. Involve, 2005; Lowndes *et al.*, 2006), research by governmental agencies (e.g. Mahendran and Cook, 2007), and popular academic studies (e.g. Fung and Wright, 2003; Barnes *et al.*, 2007; Smith,

2009) often overlook the work of engagement practitioners –henceforth ‘engagers’– tasked with turning participatory ideals into everyday practices. In mainstream narratives, participatory processes are created or enabled, stakeholders summoned, encounters facilitated, results taken forward (or not) and so on. But most accounts ignore *who* creates, enables, summons, facilitates and takes those processes forward (for exceptions see Forester, 1999, 2009; Moore, 2012; Cooper and Smith, 2012; Pieczka and Escobar, 2013). Such narratives present ‘engagement’ as a somewhat disembodied practice, and ignore that it requires work, and therefore, workers. Consequently, we lack accounts of the *backstage* policy work carried out by the engagers to set up the *frontstages*<sup>2</sup> of participatory governance. I therefore follow Geertz’s (1973: 5) advice: to understand engagement practice you “should look in the first instance not at its theories or... what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do”.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the research that underpins the paper. Then, sections 3-4 conceptualise engagement practice, micro-politics and dramaturgic policy analysis, and introduce the core practice explored in this paper, namely, ‘scripting’. Section 5 presents an exemplar that illustrates how official engagers script participatory forums. Section 6 further examines scripting work, particularly its connection to storytelling in policy-making, and the subversion of scripts by forum participants. Finally, the conclusions emphasise the value of understanding the political work that fuels engagement practice. The aims of the paper are to conceptualise scripting, to show how policy workers perform this practice, and to contribute to a research agenda that foregrounds practices.

## **2. The research: Ethnographic grounded theory**

My core method was participant observation during 131 days over 2 years of fieldwork (2010-2012), including 117 meetings, following groups and processes, and shadowing 4 engagers during 15 alternating weeks of work placements. This generated fieldnotes (969 transcribed pages), complemented by 44 interviews (917 transcribed pages) with engagers, officials, councillors, citizens and activists. Drawing on interpretive political ethnography (Schatz, 2009), this doctoral research sought depth rather than breadth. The overall aim was to offer a practice-based account of the “policy world” (Shore *et al.*, 2011) of this group of engagers. This research does not seek to produce generalisations, but to work on “exemplars” that

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<sup>2</sup> Terms borrowed from Goffman (1971).

illustrate dynamics of situated practice in order to deepen understanding and open new lines of argumentation and inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

My modality of participant observation was “shadowing”, suitable for studying actors working across various settings (Czarniawska, 2008). Following agents can generate rich data from “multiple observational areas within their geographic, organizational, or political settings” (Yanow, 2009: 294). Accordingly, I followed an “abductive” logic of inquiry (Blaikie, 2009: 89-92). Abduction is a “circle-spiral pattern” of sense-making that begins with “a puzzle, a surprise, or a tension, and then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make it less perplexing” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2012: Loc 792). This iterative process “involves the researcher in alternating periods of immersion in the relevant social world, and periods of withdrawal for reflection and analysis” (Blaikie, 2009: 156). In abductive strategies, theory and research are intimately intertwined, coevolving in dialogic fashion. This is central to my analytical approach, namely, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz and Bryant, 2007) as formulated by Charmaz (2006) and Wagenaar (2011) from a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology.

The research sites were across Wyndland, a Scottish Local Authority Area (LAA). Having traded anonymity for access, all names of locations, groups and individuals are changed. Wyndland is a medium sized LAA with a population between 80,000-150,000, spread across rural and urban areas<sup>3</sup>. Wyndland Council employs a small team of engagers whose official title is Community Planning Officers. Community Planning was the label chosen to designate collaborative governance in the *Local Government in Scotland Act 2003*. Community Planning Partnerships are networked structures created in each Scottish Local Authority Area to enact the collaboration mandated by this policy<sup>4</sup>. Wyndland Council has the statutory duty to facilitate this process by engaging diverse Partners in deliberative policy-making. Some engagers operated at strategic level, where the Partnership Board and Theme Groups (see Figure 1) bring together representatives from Council, National Health Service, third sector, community groups, police, emergency services, educational institutions, and so on. The others were community-oriented, focussed on local civic forums, although all of them often worked together across strategic and grassroots levels.

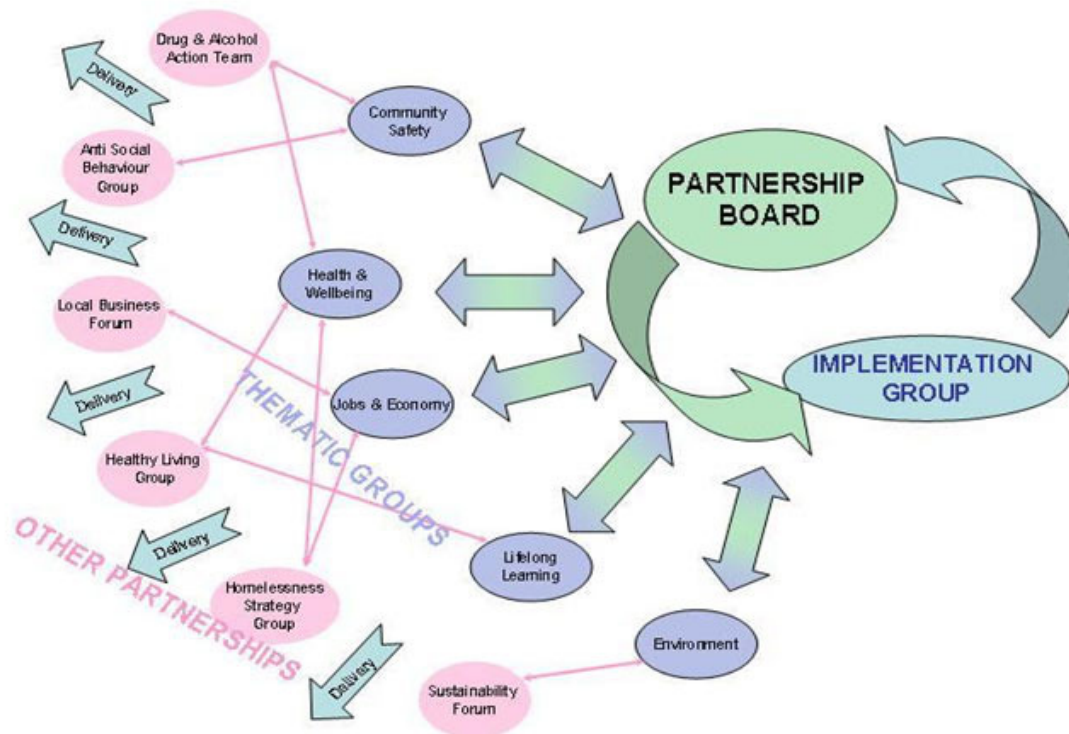
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<sup>3</sup> This bracket represents 20 out of 32 Scottish local authorities.

<sup>4</sup> The 2003 Act has been developed through various frameworks <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/community-planning> [Accessed on 23/12/10].

**Figure 1- Community Planning Partnership Model**

The diagram shows the type of structure adopted by many CPPs:



Source: Scottish Government

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/community-planning](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/community-planning)

[Accessed 15/02/13]

### 3. Analysing engagement practice as policy work

I draw on Colebatch's notion of *policy* and *policy work* as organising constructs (Colebatch, 2006a: 3-4) that help to analyse governing and to "understand through what sort of work it is produced" (Colebatch, 2006a: xiii). Following Wagenaar, the concept of *work* used here refers to "the hundreds of practical judgments, the everyday, taken-for-granted routines and practices" (2004: 643-644). In this paper, officially invited participation is understood as policy: the policy of making policy through participation. For as Colebatch argues, when stakeholders participate they "are not implementing an already-formed policy: it is their cooperation that is the policy" (Colebatch, 2005: 22). This recasts policy as a domain of action and interaction, contributing to emerging policy ethnography that explores agency at the centre of the policy process (Shore *et al.*, 2011). Instead of asking 'does participation work?' the question here is 'how does it work and what work does it take?' The focus is thus on practice as

an important and distinct dimension of politics, with its own logic (pragmatic, purposeful), its own standards of knowing (interpretative, holistic, more know-how than know-that), its own orientation towards the world (interactive, moral, emotional), and its own image of society. (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003: 141)

The study of practice has developed steadily in social and policy sciences (e.g. Rein, 1983; Schatzki, 2002; Freeman et al., 2011), capturing the imagination of interpretive analysts who focus on how “meaning emerges from our interactions with others and the world” (Wagenaar, 2011: 57). Accordingly, practice turns our attention to “shared agency” emerging from mutual frameworks of interpretation and action (p. 57). The engagers I shadowed share understandings of their policy world that stem from acting upon it: “as soon as we act upon the world it will resist, talk back, defy our expectations” (p. 60). That interpretive process reveals the constraints and affordances that shape the engagers work and know-how.

Freeman and Sturdy (2014) distinguish three types of knowledge: embodied, inscribed and enacted. Embodied knowledge includes the tacit knowledge that underpins much practice –it’s the knowing that moves with the knower. Inscribed knowledge refers to knowledge pressed upon some material –i.e. a document, an artefact. Both embodied and inscribed knowledge only fulfil their potentialities when they are enacted. Enacted knowledge therefore takes place when embodied and/or inscribed knowledge are mobilised. Formal policy analysis typically focuses on inscribed knowledge (cf. Weimer, 2012). In contrast, the focus here is on the engagers’ enactment of embodied knowledge as a form of *in vivo* policy analysis. I follow Colebatch’s (2005) invitation to understand as policy work whatever policy practitioners actually do –rather than what textbooks say that they do. Like its formal counterpart, *in vivo* policy analysis focuses on elucidating adequate courses of action, albeit not by analysing policy alternatives but by analysing policy worlds and practices as they unfold. In other words, the work of the engagers entails policy analysis at the level of “practical judgement” –or “metis” (Scott, 1998: Chapter 9)– and this informs the knowledge work that they carry out to understand, intervene and cope in their contexts.

#### **4. Micro-politics and dramaturgic policy analysis**

Central to the policy work of the engagers is the skilful ‘scripting’ of participation processes. As later shown, scripting entails creating spaces and processes where engagers can foster certain dynamics by orchestrating people, language and artefacts within purposeful assemblages. Thinking about participation as a frontstage

phenomenon –a scripted intervention that is publicly performed– invites questions about its backstage. Accordingly, this paper explores the micro-politics of engagement through backstage scripting work. Micro-politics comprises “the ways in which power is relayed in everyday practices” and reveals “the subterranean conflicts, competitions and minutiae of social relations”, thus illuminating “how power is relayed through seemingly trivial incidents and transactions” (Morley, 2006: 543).

The engagers share Edelman’s (1985, 1988) understanding of governance as political drama, and scripting is their contribution to this art. Indeed, the dramaturgic analogy was recurrent during the research. I took the first cues from Alison, an experienced engager who explained: *‘I’ve been doing it for a long long time, in different ways... I grew up devising theatre ... and directing stuff’*. Practice theorists have demonstrated how human interaction is inescapably ordered, and that ordering arrangements constitute the site of the social (Schatzki, 2002: 25; Law, 1994). When the engagers work on scripting they are simultaneously building on, and seeking to alter, what Goffman (1983) calls the “interaction order” –“a sui generis realm of human meaning and action, which possesses its own processes and constraints” (Schatzki, 2002: 4). Scripting seeks to create specific interaction orders through “prefiguration”, that is, working to channel and prefigure forthcoming activity “by qualifying the possible paths it can take” (Schatzki, 2002: 44). The concept of prefiguration rests on a Foucauldian understanding of the exercise of power as “a way of acting upon an acting subject”, and thus “to govern... is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1982: 219-221).

Although dramaturgic policy analysis has been used to explore participatory stages, it typically studies engagement scripts through their frontstage performance and overlook the backstage work of scripting (e.g. Hajer, 2005; Freeman and Peck, 2007; Felt and Fochler, 2010). The conceptual work by Hajer (2005: 631) is nonetheless useful:

First, scripting refers to those efforts to create a setting by determining the characters in the play and to provide cues for appropriate behavior. Second, staging refers to the deliberate organization of an interaction ... Third, setting is the physical situation in which the interaction takes place and can include the artifacts... Forth, performance is the way in which the contextualized interaction itself produces social realities like understanding of the problem at hand, knowledge, and new power relationships.



Hajer derives his framework from analysing frontstage performances and overlooks the work of scripting. Accordingly, my notion of scripting is broader to also encompass the work that underpins staging, setting and performing. From this perspective, the engagers script not only characters, but also the staging of interaction, the setting of layouts and artefacts, and the narratives that emerge from performances. This conceptual adaptation allows dramaturgic analysis that reflects the backstage nature of most scripting work.

Scripting, as any form of ordering, “is the hanging together of things, the establishment of nexuses” (Schatzki, 2002: 18). Assembling an interaction order seems one of the engager’s most powerful interventions in a policy process. Once participants are gathered, engagers can try to entangle them by managing arrangements and the quality of exposure to people and ideas.

## **5. Exemplar: Scripting a Partnership forum**

Analysing the work of scripting presents a dilemma regarding data presentation. I could present analysis cutting across all observed instances of scripting practice and induce categories. Or, I could remain close to the ‘in-the-moment’ nature of scripting by offering an exemplar. I have opted for the latter to ease readability and flesh out the micro-political know-how that nurtures engagement practice. Accordingly, I will ‘zoom-in’ (Nicolini, 2009) on a single meeting exemplar, which features elements recurrent in scripting exercises. Participatory scripts can be inferred from observations –i.e. reading the script through its performance (e.g. Hajer, 2005). In this exemplar, however, the conversation between the engagers renders the actual scripting process observable. The vignette takes the reader through the chronology of a scripting session, thus presenting ethnographic data interweaved with grounded theorising.

### **The exemplar**

A group of officials, engagers and activists believe that Wyndland’s Partnership organisations are not fulfilling their agreed goal of working together on sustainability issues. They see this as stemming from broader resistance to collaborative governance. Therefore, the engagers are meeting with key allies to script an encounter that seeks to generate buy-in across the Partnership, especially on the public authorities’ side. Although the engagers lead, these allies advise during the scripting process. Present at the meeting are:

- Lisa and Lorna (Council engagers); and me, shadowing;
- Sean (Council senior official, Environment);
- and Ana (participation practitioner, environmental group)

2pm– Environment Department meeting room. We are scripting a forum that summons councillors, officials and various Partnership representatives (e.g. National Health Service, third sector) to deliberate on environmental policy implementation. Engagement work is often about marrying people and issues –getting people to own issues, getting issues to shape people’s work. For Lisa, the event seeks to generate a *‘shared understanding’* of what local sustainability means for the different Partners. As Ana puts it, the event is about establishing *‘how are we gonna face these common challenges’*, *‘strategy alignment, that’s what we are doing here’*.

Lorna suggests pacing objectives through subsequent events. First *‘raise awareness’*, and then *‘let people chew on it’* before gathering them back to deliberate about actions. The option is discarded, unrealistic. There is only one shot at bringing these decision-makers together. Lisa reminds us of ongoing resistances: *‘we try to get them thinking as a Partnership, but most of the time they wear their organisational hat and think from that perspective’*. The Partnership Board has already signed off an ambitious environmental agenda, but the engagers believe there has been limited policy development across, and between, organisations and communities. Lisa insists on preventing participants from using this encounter to *‘question’* that policy agenda: *‘we just present it, it’s there, it’s written, and it’s being signed off by the top people’*. She summarises the goal: *‘we are trying to win hearts and minds in order to find ways of shifting power to elicit buy-in’*.

2.25pm– We move on. Lisa proposes featuring a speaker from another Local Authority Area where grassroots environmental initiatives work in sync with the Partnership. They want the speaker to stress the progress made by working collaboratively. Lisa: *‘We are trailblazers here, we will say: we can show you how it’s done elsewhere’*. This part of the script allows the engagers to speak at the event without saying a word. They speak through others, so that their *‘impartiality’* as process custodians remains unquestioned at the frontstage. Accordingly, scripting includes the considered casting of character profiles: someone to frame things in certain ways, someone to enact disensus, and so on. Casting may also involve places (towns, neighbourhoods) or projects (interventions, case studies) that are made to speak at the frontstage to inform deliberation.

They agree on that speaker, although they fear she might frame the ensuing discussions too narrowly because her expertise is on food policy. Lorna solves the problem proposing a deliberative format that will force participants to consider various issues. Framing and re-framing (Schon and Rein, 1994) is hereby scripted through people and formats, as well as –more conventionally– words. Lisa: *'livelihoods, we should use that language, for too long we have only spoken about money, jobs... I like the word livelihoods because it refers to a different understanding. We should ... share this sort of language on the table'*. The themes are agreed: food, energy, transport, education, health. They are tailored to force Partnership members to think through them as crosscutting categories to be *'own'* by all. The engagers, and their allies, seek to move participants beyond their *'narrow patch'* thinking.

2.40pm– Scripting doesn't parallel the event timeline. As with most practices, linear depiction would be a misrepresentation (Schon, 1983). While scripting, the engagers jump back and forth between timelines, artefacts, spaces, frames, formats, people and dynamics –interlocked like a Rubik game. For example, now we're talking about the event finale. Lisa: *'instead of a plenary we should have them writing down things. I would like them to take away the question of how they are going to apply these ideas to their organisations and departments'*. Here is the engager using *'writing'* as a disciplinary tool to force participants to plan policy actions and leave a trail that invites subsequent accountability.

This disciplinary impetus can often provoke reactions. For instance, the allocation of roles implicit in how the engagers script participatory processes is unwelcomed by some officials who see them as encroaching on their expertise. This seems typical in transitions from technocratic to collaborative ways of working (Innes and Booher, 2010). Officials are being asked to relinquish some of the power afforded by their status and expertise, and develop new kinds of contact with citizens and organisational representatives. In this way, engagement work pushes new forms of evidence and knowledge (local, experiential) into policy-making processes. The engagers believe that, as long as the officials are around the table, they can expose them to various others (ideas, people) and hopefully entangle them into collaboration. In the process, previously unquestioned technocratic expertise is exposed to new deliberative scrutiny. Indeed, renegotiating the existing hierarchies of knowledge and expertise constitutes a key dimension in engagement practice (Fischer, 2000).

Much of the engagers' work for Wyndland's Partnership is about taking policy issues that used to belong to an organisation, or group of experts, and bringing them into a more public space. A case in point is that of Wyndland's Council departments, which tend to conduct their business backstage. Partnership work blurs policy boundaries, forcing upon participants a new threshold of publicness that involves various others – what Goodin (2008: Chapter 8) calls “network accountability”. Suddenly, your policies become everybody's business.

3pm– Scripting work illustrates practitioners' tacit knowledge in action. We are now covering layout, format and dynamics. Lisa expects 40 participants: *'we want at least 6 tables, and a table at the front'*. The engagers' unstated ratio for deliberative quality is between 6-8 participants per table. Each table is engineered to mix characters and perspectives. The engagers seek to expose each participant to a meaningful range of others who may get them *'thinking differently'*, thus enhancing deliberative quality. Accordingly, each table responds to a self-contained logic with its own political microcosm. The *'table at the front'* constitutes the watchtower from which the engager orchestrates, and the stage from which speakers project framing narratives. The layout combines a plenary logic featuring shared stimuli (i.e. presentations), with table discussions featuring purposeful combinations of participants. Moving from the whole to the parts, and vice versa, the engagers think of layouts as malleable conduits with idiosyncratic dynamics.

This micro-politics of spatial dynamics forms the basis for the script's material choreography. The engagers will populate the room with artefacts that seek to compel participants to act and speak within certain parameters. These include tablecloths, post-it notes, flipcharts, markers, presentations, handouts, and voting pads. Each of them serves a specific purpose within the script. For instance, the tablecloth is made of paper and will be written on. At its centre there will be the question: *'How can we ensure that sustainability policy is embedded in our partnership work?'* Participants will be asked to deliberate in light of the presentations and within pre-established categories. The tablecloth will structure the session, helping the facilitator to keep participants focussed on their in-between space. The playfulness of writing on tablecloth will also bring an element of symbolic transgression to the interaction (i.e. challenging custom, innovating). The small post-it notes will force participants to synthesise, articulating concise formulations to be placed on the tablecloth. They are moveable, and participants will be invited to establish connections. This choreography of materials seeks to generate a set of

collaborative dynamics that may ease participants into publicly performing their Partnership roles. It models acceptable interaction and funnels argumentative mess into concise points framed by pre-established categories. In this way, the script generates workable records.

The post-forum report will, therefore, include an action plan co-produced by Partnership members. The engagers hope that by taking participants through this deliberative process, and making them perform a frontstage collaborative ethos, the Partners may seek changes within their organisations. To be sure, they don't think that a single event can make such a difference. However, scripted events are often part of ongoing processes. Engagement practice can thus be seen as constituted by nested scripts that seek to reinforce certain dynamics over time.

3.20pm– We move on to facilitation strategy. Deliberations will be partially self-facilitated –the engagers want the groups to *'take ownership'* of the process. Ana insists that this will need policing: *'we will have to look over our shoulders to make sure they're not just chatting'*, *'if we see they are not recording, then we intervene'*. Next, food and beverages: they must be *'locally sourced'* to be coherent with the environmental themes of the encounter –this enacts a politics of example. The engagers seek a coherent performance: every object in the room communicates. The event must read well whatever the angle. Not every symbolic detail talks to everyone, but each speaks to someone –at least in the political mind of the engager (cf. Edelman, 1985).

Interestingly, we haven't yet considered who will open the encounter. Scripting sometimes begins with the end of a performance, and unfolds intricately towards the beginning. Ana proposes: *'if we could get the Council Leader to open that would give it credibility one would hope'*. Lisa reacts negatively: that would make the event *'Council heavy'*, and *'we want to get away from the Council being equated with the Partnership, so we need to be careful. We want these managers to get back to their departments and organisations and think about how to meet these challenges working in partnership'*. Ever since Community Planning was introduced in Scotland, Councils have been the main players in the 32 Partnerships and this is considered problematic (Sinclair, 2008; Audit-Scotland, 2013). The Council-centric nature of the Partnership is often alleged to explain the lack of buy-in from other partners. Accordingly, in the engagers' eyes, letting the Council Leader open the event sends the wrong message. Ana proposes someone from a partner University. Lisa rejects it because they do *'very formal stuff'*, *'not good for what we are trying to do'*. Note the

intertwinement of local knowledge, analytical work, political know-how and scripting dynamics. Scripting reveals a particular understanding of a policy world, and a sense of what actions should follow from it.

The final plenary will focus on *'positive actions'* so that, says Ana, *'the day finishes with this very promising way forward'*. Thinking about the end, Lisa returns to the beginning: *'we could have Tom Sanders talking about Preventative Intervention, a new way of working collaboratively... similar to what we are talking about here'*, *'he is inspirational'*. Everyone agrees. This would strengthen the script. The Preventative Intervention project (Council and National Health Service) also focuses on *'building resilience'*, says Lisa, *'so we can show that some departments are taking these issues on board, and that they are included in key initiatives'*. Here is the engager orchestrating the performance of policy meaning through a narrative about cutting-edge policy and practice. She seeks to generate a story that participants –especially senior officials- can take away; a viral policy story that may, in turn, shape policy practice.

3.50pm– Lisa takes us back to the end: *'representatives from the Partnership Board could give personal reactions and reflections. That would seal the commitment to take things forward'*. Here is the engager weaving yet another thread, trying to get the Partners to entangle themselves in the Partnership web. Engagers lack authority to compel others into collaborative policy-making, and hence must get creative. In this case, they cast decision-makers to publicly display Partnership commitment, hoping that frontstage performances may trap them into changing backstage dynamics. Working the frontstage can thus be a means for tentatively scripting others' backstages. Engagers are often skilled at transitioning between both, while others may not so carefully navigate those transitions –and may for instance commit at the Partnership frontstage to more than they had planned in organisational backstages.

4.05pm– The meeting ends, another is scheduled.

## **6. Scripting, storytelling and the breach of scripts**

This exemplar illustrated scripting work by observing the engagers thinking together. I have noted the intertwining of agency and materiality within the carefully scripted arrangement of the performance from the start to the grand finale. This was the scripting of a forum at strategic level: an engager-led intervention into the

troublesome world of Wyndland's Partnership. However, similar backstage work takes place when scripting grassroots community engagement. Insofar "policy emerges from the activity of organizing a complex world" (Colebatch, 2009: 139), official engagement practice is purposeful intervention and thus necessarily scripted.

Scripting, therefore, assembles time (e.g. pacing, opportunity), space and dynamics (e.g. layouts, formats), characters (e.g. individuals, groups, places), strategies and tactics (e.g. exposing participants to diverse others), materials and artefacts (e.g. tablecloth, facilitation tools), narratives and frames (e.g. collaborative governance as avant-garde policy) and enactments (e.g. facilitating, orchestrating). Elements within these intertwined categories are infused –by their place and agency within the assemblage- with political qualities: constraints and enablements (Schatzki, 2002: 44-46). Insofar power is the capacity "to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1982: 221), scripting is political work. Edelman (1985, 1988) argued that once we analyse politics through dramaturgy we can no longer overlook stage-setting. The setting is political because it is scripted to encompass a series of "material arrangements that have hierarchical and distributional effects" which "perform themselves through agents, through interactions between agents, and through devices, texts and architectures" (Law, 1994: 25).

Scripts are made of choices based on practical judgement. Scripting requires local and political knowledge and a command of participation technologies. Of course, not everything materialises during performance. Nevertheless, scripting work remains a structuring force intended to foster certain forum dynamics and an overall narrative for participants to take away. Accordingly, the script's function is not only ordering: scripting also renders processes narrative. In the exemplar above, the intended story was about co-producing a plan to implement sustainability policy, and thus join the '*cutting-edge*' of green participatory governance in Scotland. Scripting sought to plant storifying seeds. To some extent, that's what engagement work is about: creating meetings that narrate themselves beyond the meeting (see Freeman, 2008), thus generating policy stories that emerge from practice and seek to maintain or dislocate practices.

Insofar they are storyfiable, scripts keep working beyond the staging phase. For instance, I have seen such stories used by participants (officials, representatives, citizens) to vindicate or dismiss the need for further participation processes, to argue for changes in strategies, or to hold others accountable. Storyfied scripts thus become rhetorical resources in the "argumentative" milieu of policy-making (see

Fischer and Forester, 1993; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012). Through the script, engagers try to shape the story that can be told about a participatory process, which is critical for subsequent policy-making and public legitimacy. Once the script is staged, the story is thrown into relief. Stories are not only, however, translations of performed interaction orders. They often underpin subsequent scripting: “a story creates a field for possible actions”, therefore “building and founding meaningful contexts that shape what people might do” (Sandercock and Attili, 2012: Location 3683).

Despite emphasising the power of scripting, I want to avoid deterministic connotations. In Nietzschean and Foucauldian vein, anything human is malleable and although “something constrains if it excludes courses of action”, that doesn’t make it “immune to change from the actors whose activity it supposedly constrains” (Schatzki, 2002: 214). Scripting participation is the engagers’ intervention, while staging it is everybody’s performance. As Newman and Clarke (2009: 61) point out, “people inhabit these sites in ways that are often very different from the imaginings of their designers”. Engagement scripts can be understood as “political machineries” that “frame or pre-scribe particular kinds of roles and identities for the participating publics”, and often participants “might struggle with, attempt to shift, or to even reject the script” (Felt and Fochler, 2010: 220).

Consequently, the engager scripts expecting reality to talk back. Managing performances is thus not only about reducing the distance between scripting and staging, but also about impromptu scripting during staging and performance. For instance, the engagers convened a process where citizens designed a community centre for their town. At the first forum, 70 residents opposed to being broken into groups for a deliberative format using various artefacts. They preferred to remain as a block facing –and outnumbering– officials and councillors. During an interview, an engager recalled the incident:

*...they were like that: ‘we’ve heard it all before... we want straight questions and straight answers’, and ... I said to [a community activist]: you have said that you don’t think it will work breaking up into groups, but I want to ask... and she said: ‘aye, but I know what the answer is gonnae be’... and not one single hand went up... I was panicking... because I thought it was going to descend into a bunfight... because there were a lot of people very angry still about being let down in the past...*

This public disputed and reframed the premise for the meeting. It was scripted as an interaction order where citizens would deliberate about new services and facilities,



thus taking the promise of a community centre as a given. However, this public was mindful of a history of disappointments, and questioned that assumption by rejecting the script. Instead, in block, they imposed the dynamics of a traditional adversarial public meeting, where councillors were forced to make commitments onstage. Accordingly, this public managed to entangle participatory and representative politics by pressing local councillors, from government and opposition, facing imminent elections. Participants contested the script and re-scripted the process. Once all councillors gave budgetary reassurances, the engagers regained scripting scope and were able to assemble more deliberative encounters. During such breaches of the script, the engagers must *'play by ear'*, as they put it, and develop onstage scripting so that the encounter can still be storyfied as participatory for the argumentative phase –when a process is turned into an argument that seeks to influence courses of action.

Scripting participatory forums entails anticipation and improvisation in equal measure, and the former informs the latter during performances. Anticipatory work was observable when the engagers liaised amongst themselves and with other officials. They typically briefed on the organisation of the encounter, the venue blueprint, the facilitation format and style, who may attend, the different agendas at play, who may say what and how to react. Scripting is thus underpinned by intensive knowledge work and political know-how, developed over time. Like sponges, engagers absorbed contextual cues from conversations, reports, newspapers, community networks... They learned to script from experience, by acting upon an interaction order, and listening to the world talk back. Co-organising a hundred encounters per year generates a shared pool of experiential narratives that becomes an invaluable repertoire for scripting –particularly for tactical anticipation.

I have called it 'script' because it is created to be enacted, and it evolves when performed. The script is thus a heuristic to analyse the political assemblage that joins backstage and frontstage in participatory processes. Commonly, when people say that participation is scripted they mean to criticise tokenism and manipulation. In contrast, I have presented the script as a micro-political device. Scripting is indeed purposeful political work, but it can be put to various uses. That is why I chose the exemplar above, where the engagers work at Partnership level, seeking to elicit policy development between and within organisations –including the Council who employs them. The question 'who is manipulating whom?' is thus rendered simplistic.

During fieldwork, I soon realised that engagement practice is a contested domain of action, and Manichean analyses add little to what we know.

Some may regard the engagers' strategies, tactics and moves as Machiavellian. In my view, contextualising their political work requires appreciating the challenge of what they seek to accomplish –namely, carving up in-between spaces (between officials, representatives and citizens) that defy established boundaries and ways of working. The engagers do what they do to service a politics of process shaped by the ecology where their work unfolds. As any practitioner, they are guided by practical intelligibility (Schatzki, 2002: 74), practical judgement (Forester, 1993) and practical knowledge (Scott, 1998: Chapter 9) –that is, what it makes sense to do, in the flow of action, given a particular context and goal.

A more nuanced analysis of scripting thus foregrounds the “context-dependent nature of rationality”, as argued by “practical thinkers of power” like Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 2-3). This view presents a “less idealistic, more grounded” grasp of local democracy and the strategies at play in shaping it (ibid.). Furthermore, the exemplar above, where powerful players were subject to scripting work, demonstrate the polyvalence of the shaping of interaction orders that some may see as manipulation. Scripting is thus not necessarily something that the ‘powerful’ impose on the ‘powerless’, but a transformative practice at play in diverse participatory contexts –e.g. assembly-based movements such as Los Indignados or Occupy (e.g. Castells, 2012: 128-133, 177-188).

Furthermore, it is worth noting the pitfalls of script-less engagement. Participatory processes can be criticised for lacking clear plans or being inconsequential –having *‘no teeth’*, as Wyndland activists often put it. Unscripted, without backstage work, participatory frontstages may not read as performance spaces, but as theatrical farces. Purposeful scripting can prevent or counter these critiques. Successful scripting doesn't hinge on generating a predetermined result, but a predetermined process (e.g. deliberative). In the exemplar, the engagers didn't seek to predetermine actions for the Partnership. Their focus was getting the Partners to work collaboratively on deciding those actions. Of course, the overall frame was to develop –rather than question– environmental policy agreed in previous performances. The scripting of forums is thus often embedded in ongoing chains of scripts.

## **7. Conclusions: Scripting as political work**

Accounts of deliberative policy-making often narrate participation as a frontstage phenomenon. This paper focussed on the backstage scripting work that animates official participatory processes. The engagers are meticulous about scripting because it is their opportunity to arrange interaction orders and render them consequential. This account echoes Law's (1994: 166): "it takes a lot of effort –over weeks and months– to create a single important strategic performance". Interestingly, despite the work it takes, scripting rarely leaves traces besides partial inscriptions: agendas, lists of materials, emails, facilitators' briefs, etc. The micro-political force of the script remains in the shared understanding –and embodied know-how– of the engagers.

Important studies have mapped out micro-political grammars of governmental practice. However, unlike the textually-mediated practices analysed by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2006), Foucault's "apparatus" (1980), or Scott's "hidden transcripts" (1990), engagement scripts are not necessarily embodied in materials and practices at systemic level, but developed by practitioners through micro-political work. The emphasis here is on agency and the assembling of interaction orders: "the hard work required to draw heterogeneous elements together, forge connections between them and sustain these connections in the face of tension" (Li, 2007: 264). Studying this work is critical to understand the micro-politics of deliberative engagement, for as Hajer (2005: 642) demonstrates, "even with the same cast policy deliberation can change face through experiments with new settings and stagings".

Analysing scripting illuminates the backstage political work that sustains the springing "theatres of collaboration" of contemporary governance (Williams, 2012: 1). It also sheds light on the often-mystified know-how that characterises "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998). As a heuristic, attention to scripting work reveals the micro-politics of participation, and how engagers interpret and act upon their policy worlds. After observing them scripting myriad meetings and processes, the beginnings became familiar: undefined participants, crosscutting –often-conflicting– agendas, uncooperative players, partisan struggles, and so on. Time and again, the engagers sought to perform the disciplinary alchemy of engagement: aligning agendas, ordering mess, rendering it governable. Studying participation as a frontstage phenomenon, it is easy to overlook that engagement is sustained by backstage scripting, and the political work of deploying "soft power" (Newman, 2012:

Location 2313) through the orchestration of people, language and artefacts within purposeful assemblages.

This work entails *in vivo* policy analysis –action-oriented practical judgement about an unfolding policy world– put to the service of policy dramaturgy. This recasts policy analysis as anything but technocratic (Fischer, 2003). The engagers studied here understood their job as political –never mind that some managers presented their remit as technical: ‘*gathering views*’, organising ‘*logistics*’. As most policy workers, engagers face the demand “to turn the political into the technical, to represent the mess of practice in ordered expert ... categories” (Mosse, 2011: 57). They partially address this in the frontstage, presenting themselves as impartial mediators between authorities and stakeholders, communities and citizens. Their expertise is on process: they know how to work the corridors of policy, construct publics, develop scripts, facilitate deliberation, and translate messy practice into actionable records. These activities are far from merely technical and require skilful political work.

Colebatch (2006b) investigated everyday policy work by asking “what work makes policy?” I am asking: what policy work makes deliberative policy-making? This practice-based research agenda seeks to better understand participatory processes as new sites and forms of the political. Scripting is one of four core practices in the engager’s world –alongside public-making, facilitating and inscribing (Escobar, 2014). The question is: what do official engagers do when they perform engagement? A tentative answer: they assemble interaction orders, working on the purposeful (re)organisation of a policy world. This does not downplay the role of agency in participation, but directs attention to the agency of those who work to shape participants’ agency by assembling purposeful interaction orders.

All in all, the paper illustrates the potential of analysing participatory forums by interrogating their constitutive practices: How are interaction orders assembled, performed, facilitated and storyfied? Who is scripted in and out? What kind of participants are participants invited to be? How do interaction dynamics evolve and with what consequences? How are scripts subverted? Such questions exemplify how dramaturgic policy analysis may help to understand the micro-politics of process that shapes power dynamics in forums where new forms of deliberative policy-making are negotiated.

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