

Planning in no one's backyard: Municipal planners' discourses of participation in brownfield projects in Helsinki, Amsterdam and Copenhagen

Annaliina Niitamo
annaliina.niitamo@helsinki.fi
University of Helsinki
Faculty of Social Sciences
Media and Communication Research

Abstract

Citizen participation in urban planning has been contested in recent research for stemming from the need to ease conflicts instead of broadening local democracy. Definitions given to participation by planners have remained elusive and do not seem to result in agreed upon practical procedures in the framework of communicative urban planning. This article examines municipal urban planners' discourses of participation in urban brownfield projects in Helsinki, Amsterdam and Copenhagen through the lens of communicative planning theory (CPT). The contribution of this empirical research case is in its focus on public planners' views and affordances of participation. The article demonstrates how planners' work is largely influenced by exogenous political and economic factors and argues that publicly led citizen participation in large-scale brownfield projects is primarily motivated from a comprehensive-rational viewpoint as a way to inform citizens of the construction project and to maintain speedy development. Participatory work is restricted by a complex environment where CPT's ideals clash with fast paced building, global economy and institutional ambiguity.

Key words: communicative planning theory, participation, discourse, brownfield development

Introduction

The demand to expand citizen participation in urban planning has been discussed in the sphere of urban planning theory increasingly since the 1980s in communicative planning theory (Healey 1992; Forester 1989) but particularly since the early 2000s after citizen participation was embedded in the legal frameworks of several liberal and pluralist societies in Europe (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010; Sager 2009; Carpentier 2015). Citizen participation is a cornerstone of communicative planning theory, which demands a more thorough involvement process of the public than merely informing them (Sager 2009a). Citizen participation in urban planning has not reclaimed its grand hopes and has been criticized for not widely including citizens in discussions about urban planning at an early enough phase (Purcell 2009; Hajer & Zonneveld 2000; Mattila 2018) and emphasizing process over just outcomes (Mattila 2019; Fainstein 2005). The concept of participation is fluid in planning practices and also gains different connotations in varying fields of research and practice. The abstraction of the concept exposes it to various discursive struggles (Carpentier 2015) and understandings in municipal government (Isola et al. 2017).

This study focuses on citizen participation in three cities with strong social democratic traditions in urban policy, where the requirement for citizen participation is required by law but the interpretation of its implementation is to a large part up to the municipal urban planners and specialists in development projects (Anttiroiko et al. 2007). As urban planning claims to take on a more inclusive and dialogic task, there is a need for research that analyses the different understandings and implementations of citizen participation. By analysing participation discourses, I aim to identify difficulties and current issues municipal urban planners report facing in citizen participation, as they negotiate amid different stakeholders and political and economic interests of urban planning.

The research questions are:

1. How do municipal planners define citizen participation in the planning of urban brownfields?
2. What challenges and possibilities for participation do planners see in new neighbourhoods?

Studying discourses is important in understanding the wider contexts, tensions and hidden struggles of meaning in planning. Participation is not only a discursive struggle, but one practised in urban planning. It is important to study the commitment of municipal officials as it is their view of participation and routines established in their work that become the public policies they carry out (Lipsky 1980).

The redevelopment of urban brownfields offers an interesting context for studying participation. Urban brownfields are defined as land which has previously been used or developed and is not currently fully in use and not necessarily available for immediate use without intervention (Alker et al. 2000). There has been growing interest in urban brownfields by policymakers and investors in recent decades because developable land has become less available and more expensive as urban areas densify (Frantál et al. 2015). Capital cities in northern Europe aim to grow inwards, densifying existing residential areas and redeveloping underused spaces to sustainably constrain urban sprawl, to gain new tax revenue and attract new businesses and investments (Grimski & Ferber 2001; Bagaeen 2006; DeSousa 2006).

This study should not be read as an overview of participation in brownfields as citizens' views of participation are missing here. Different forms of informal and self-organized participation and activism most probably take place in the neighbourhoods constantly and may be left out of the scope of public participation.

The following section presents the case neighbourhoods, after which I discuss current debates of citizen participation in brownfields and the role of planners. The analysis section discusses three main discourses: *unchallenged professionalism*, *institutional ambiguity* and *constraining economic rationalism*, each containing practical notions planners make in their efforts towards citizen participation. The conclusion section discusses the value of a participation process over just outcomes.

Case neighbourhoods

The chosen urban brownfield-waterfronts belong to a new generation of mega-projects which are characterised by large-scale mixed land-use, a usual combination of public-private partnership and their aim for profitable land-use (Orueta & Fainstein 2008).

Jätkäsaari and *Kalasadama* are two of the biggest construction sites close to downtown Helsinki. *Jätkäsaari* will be home to 18,000 new residents by 2030 and is characterized by its currently active passenger harbour. Since the early 20th century it was a harbour for cargo ships and passengers. *Kalasadama* will accommodate 25,000 new residents by 2040. *Kalasadama* was an industrial area for raw material shipments since the end of the 19th century. Today it is known for its large new shopping centre *Redi* and high-rise buildings which were an unusual choice in Finland with traditionally careful attitudes towards high-rise living. Two neighbourhoods were chosen in Helsinki to gain a more profound temporal view as the phases of planning were different at the time of the interviews.

Zeeburgereiland is a triangular island and a part of the *IJburg* neighbourhood east of downtown Amsterdam. *Zeeburgereiland* will accommodate 25,000 new residents by 2040. Previously it was a military base and since the 1980s a sewage treatment complex. In the future, *Zeeburgereiland's*

area of Sluisbuurt will stand out from Amsterdam's traditional skyline, with high-rise buildings first marketed as the 'Vancouver aan het 'IJ'.

Nordhavn is located on a historical harbour which is extended by landfilling, north of Copenhagen city centre. It is one of the greatest areas of growth in Copenhagen and one of Europe's largest development projects with 40,000 future residents in the late 2050s. 'Sustainable neighbourhood of the future' was the main goal for planning Nordhavn as Copenhagen strives to become an 'eco-metropolis', executing a range of sustainability strategies, including plans to become the world's first 'carbon-neutral' capital by 2025 (Blok & Meilvang 2015).

Publicly led citizen participation

Communicative planning refers to a democratic attempt to enhance justice, environmental and social sustainability in dialogue and deliberation with a broad group of urban planning stakeholders, especially citizens (Healey 1992; Forester 1999). Communicative planning is a discursive practice which argues that one social group, such as municipal planning or private development, cannot legitimately force its preferred solutions to collective problems on other groups (Sager 2009a). The common claim is that participation of citizens is needed so that the planning of public services and urban space does not ignore needs at the local level (e.g. Horelli & Wallin 2013). Theorists (Carpentier 2015; Purcell 2009; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2002) warn about decontextualizing and fetishizing participation and its protective capacity of enhancing citizens' voices. A common critique is that citizen participation is left to an abstract theoretical level without grounding its contextual and situational meaning (Carpentier 2015; Isola et al. 2017; Anttiroiko et al. 2007). Participation and participatory can be 'plastic words', which can cover almost any kind of involvement (Pijnenburg 2004). In a thorough understanding of participation, it should be differentiated from *access* and *interaction*, where true participation must contain equalized power positions and particular decision-making processes (Carpentier 2015).

By participation I refer to a planner-led attempt to include citizens in discussion, knowledge sharing, co-planning and decision-making of the future neighbourhood. In the case cities of this study, the realisation of anything more than the law-required minimum of a hearing period to the plans is left to the discretion of the planner. *Discretion* refers to the public official's power of choice among possible courses of action and inaction when legal rules or policies have space for interpretation – a process named *street-level bureaucracy* (Lipsky 1980). The planner's space between policy and practice is why the commitment of the planner in participation is important to examine. Previous research (eg. Innes & Booher 2000; Sehested 2009) discusses competing models of planning practice where the planner's role grows from a mere technical bureaucrat who relies on a rational and scientific method to a more active facilitator or *mediator* (Forester 1989), pressing for substantive social goals and where citizen participation and dialogue is

valued. However, Lipsky (1980) contends that typically public officials cannot perform their job according to the highest ideals, because they often lack the time, information, or other resources necessary. For example communicative competence in creating dialogue is an aspect Danish planners reported themselves to lack (Sehested 2009).

Planners are often seen to balance between management oversight, pressure from the public, and by feelings of duty to the law or professional status (Proudfoot & McCann 2008) which restrict their autonomy in practice. Forester (1989, 20) argues that planners constantly use their power in shaping participation by selectively channeling information and attention depending not only on their employer but also their personal interests and values. These values can steer planning and are difficult to address as they are out of plain sight. An example from a redevelopment project in Gothenburg shows how a selective *hegemonic gaze* was present in planners' discourses in portraying a narrow and stigmatizing understanding of the developable area's past which impacted its future development (Holgerson 2014). However, Sehested's (2009) study of Danish planners suggests that planners actively advocating for social ends have become unpopular with politicians and have since had to adopt a more neutral and technical stance as "government defenders" (2009, 260). More empirical research is needed on the commitment of municipal urban planners as participatory practice seems to be situational and context-specific.

Citizen participation in brownfield development

Brownfield redevelopment is expensive and for one to be a financially successful endeavour, research has shown that government incentives, policy and political leadership as well as 'soft factors' like local stakeholder involvement and collaboration are key (Bagaen 2006; Franz et al. 2008; Dixon et al. 2011; Frantál et al. 2015; Solitare 2005). However, studies warn against urban redevelopment that ignores public participation of a wide base of people from different socio-economical backgrounds (Rast 2006; Wong & Owens-Viani 2000). Brownfield redevelopment can lead to unintended consequences such as gentrification, unwanted new land uses and lack of desirable opportunities, such as jobs or inviting public spaces for local residents if only middle class homebuyers are consulted in participation processes (Rast 2006).

Studies suggest that existing neighbourhood communities surrounding brownfields are far more likely to benefit from brownfields redevelopment if they are actively involved in all phases of the redevelopment process (Wong & Owens-Viani 2000). However, Orueta and Fainstein (2008) remark that brownfield projects are often marketed as promoting economic development from which all will benefit and it is difficult to mobilize opposition, or even public discussion, for alternative uses of the areas. Fainstein (2005) contends that due to the large scale of the projects, city-wide considerations must apply in searching for participants and not only interaction with potential residents.

A general assumption may be that brownfield redevelopment is an ideal venue for participatory planning due to the area's emptiness and supposed lack of histories of ownership and conflict,

but researchers have found that local brownfield programmes contain few or no guidelines for public participation and have left programme administrators to determine *how*, and *if*, to involve the public and *who* the public is (Spiess 2008, 35). Evidence from US cities shows that citizen participation done by the municipality in urban brownfield projects does not occur on a widespread basis and is weak in nature (Solitare 2005; Center for Public Environmental Oversight 2000).

Participation cultures in Helsinki, Amsterdam and Copenhagen

All three cities in this study belong to social-democratic welfare state models (Arts & Gelissen 2002) with strong municipal governments which own most of the land, have significant and institutionalized roles in urban planning and a vast number of professional urban planners as municipal employees (Hajer & Zonneveld 2000; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010). Citizen participation in urban planning is required by law and planning is steered by long-term planning documents that have an emphasis on enhancing citizen involvement (Amsterdam: Structuurvisie 2040, Koers 2025; Helsinki: Vision 2050; Copenhagen: Municipal Plan 2015). The cities face great yearly growth forecasts: Amsterdam grows by 11,000, Copenhagen by 9,000 and Helsinki by 8,000 new residents each year (United Nations 2018). By comparing meanings given to the vague concept of participation in similar types of projects, we can assess practical examples and policies as well as struggles of meaning and values in planning.

Denmark and the Netherlands have traditionally, yet arguably, been seen to implement bottom-up approaches of local citizen participation. This reputation can be anchored in social movements in the 1960s and urban policy programmes to combat area-based social problems since the 1990s (Andersen & Van Kempen 2003). After the financial crisis of 2008–2009, Amsterdam's governance was argued to be motivated by ideals of urban experimentalism and innovation which could more actively engage citizens and boost an entrepreneurial spirit (Savini 2017). However, planning theorists claim that Amsterdam and Copenhagen have recently faced a shift from welfare provision and enhancing democracy to strategic growth planning where a global growth regime mainly benefits multinational corporations (Andersen & Pløger 2007; Andersen & Van Kempen 2003; Gualini & Majoor 2007; Faludi 2005; Fainstein 2005; Roodbol-Mekkes et al. 2012) while privatizing and collectivizing risk of urban development to individuals and public budgets (Savini 2017). Where urban renewal was previously used to universalize housing access and enhance democratic engagement, urban renewal is now used for the *commodification* of housing, a process seen to favour well-off groups (Uitermark 2009; Fainstein 2010; Savini et al 2016).

In Finland, citizen participation in urban planning is a more recent phenomenon stemming from the new Land Use and Building Act of 2000 (MRL 1999/132, 63§). The culture of urban planning in Helsinki is said to be a mixture of traditional rationalist planning with some aspects of collaborative planning (Lapintie 2017; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010). An important value is

that local issues are dealt with by a broad set of public officials and elected governmental bodies who *represent* (instead of include) citizens as well as possible. Citizens do not ‘need to’ participate as the government and advocate groups make the decisions and professional civil servants carry out extensive welfare programmes. The general public has been typically excluded from discussion over urban development (Mattila 2018) and adversarial forms of participation are not wished by most Finnish cities, but instead representative interest-groups taking part in consensus-building (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010). This holistic approach of Nordic welfare societies and their all-encompassing role in society has been suggested to lead to the minimal participation of citizens (Anttiroiko et al. 2007). This ‘welfarism’ emphasizes the legal obligations of the municipality and the universalistic principles of providing services for all (Julkunen & Heikkilä 2007). Finnish legal culture gives a political mandate to urban planners’ jurisdiction based on institutional trust to defend ‘the public interest’ (Puustinen et al. 2017). However, a gradual change of municipal governance towards New Public Management, where government operations are restructured along market lines adhering to a logic of efficiency and short-term profit, is argued to have been taking place also in Finland since the 1990s (Puustinen et al. 2017). Mattila (2018) points out that neo-liberalisation does not represent a radical break with welfarist planning but continues many of the welfare-statist trajectories in a new form through aiding economic actors and allocating power to private sector actors, such as developers and construction companies, to design participatory processes, which as a result narrows down the municipality’s agenda setting in participation.

Data and Methods

A total of 19 semi-structured, in-depth expert interviews and two group interviews (altogether 23 informants) were conducted between 2014 and 2019 with key urban planners, project leaders, coordinators and interaction specialists in executive positions mainly from the municipal planning organizations. In order to get a supplementary view of municipal planning in Copenhagen and Amsterdam, I interviewed knowledgeable informants from outside the municipal planning department but still closely related to the cases. The interviews lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours and were taped, transcribed and analysed using discourse analysis. Here, discourse analysis refers to a close reading of accounts given by planners about citizen participation and further grouped these *ways of talking* into discourses. Stuart Hall (1997) defines discourses as ‘ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society’. I grouped recurring ways of referring to participation city by city from the 236 pages of transcribed interviews in an Excel spreadsheet. I then thematized them into the three most common discourses. Each discourse contains practical notions, challenges and opportunities of participatory work brought up by the informants. I interpret the discourses in relation to meanings of participation in the communicative planning theory (CPT) and previous empirical research on participation.

Discourses of participation

City officials' accounts of participation in brownfield projects can be divided into three main discourses: 1) unchallenged professionalism, 2) institutional ambiguity and 3) constraining economic rationalism. The discourses contain concrete examples (highlighted in italics) of challenges and possibilities as experienced by the planner.

Participation was often discussed in a matter-of-fact, de-politicised and even banal way in which it was seen as a neutral and self-evident aspect of a planner's work (similar to findings by Pijnenburg 2004). This can be called legitimative speech (Van Leeuwen 2008), which refers to a learnt way of discussing the topic of participation as expected from one's institutional position. However, the content of the term 'participation' remains vague. There is variance in the discourses of participation, where interaction specialists were advocates of deeper meanings of participation and project managers and coordinators generally defined participation from a more narrow and instrumental perspective or as providing information. In general, interaction specialists saw the main challenges of participation to be *within* the planning organization, whereas informants less tuned to deeper meanings of participation saw the problems to lie *outside* the planning organization, namely in the residents. When dissecting the concept further, there were a number of underlying notions and shared concerns.

Unchallenged professionalism

A prevailing professionalist discourse was the most common discourse in all three cities but most notably in Helsinki. It emphasizes the high technicality and complexity of urban planning, echoing comprehensive rationalism from functionalistic planning (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010). Examples of this discourse are found in the expressions of 1) expert knowledge, 2) participation as conflict management, 3) maintaining control of uncertain issues, 4) one-way informing, 5) lack of stakeholders, and 6) temporal disparity in participation. I argue that although traces of collaboration are occasionally present in this discourse, the term *participation* is misrepresentative as the action referred to in the interviews represents citizen *interaction* (Carpentier 2015) more fittingly.

Expert knowledge was valued over citizen knowledge and residents were normally positioned as objects of planning, not actively participating subjects. In previous research, planners are often seen to differentiate expert knowledge and non-expert knowledge; facts and opinions (Puustinen 2006: Staffans 2004), as seen here. Accounts range from scepticism towards participation altogether to more subtle professionalist accounts.

There is a common saying that people are the experts of the city, that they know best as they are the ones who live there. This is real nonsense. [...] I can say that after ten years of studying I started to understand the scales of how a city is formed. So, this is the work of an expert but people have to be listened to and they have to be collaborated with. –

Leading planner, Jätkäsaari

The need for interaction followed a *conflict-management logic* in all three cities but most strongly in Helsinki and Amsterdam. Citizen interaction was discussed through a *logic of necessity* that arose mainly when there were negative issues concerning the built area which were then ‘handled’ in a reactionary manner with the current residents of the area. In Amsterdam early interaction and ‘good relations’ with local actors were seen to make construction easier later on in the project.

There is a point that when there is some use of it [citizen participation], we can sort of use it like ‘it also came up in the resident evening that they want a park passage here’. Usually it’s like – we have thought of the palette ourselves and then we, kind of go behind this dabble of citizen interaction like ‘this is what came up [from the residents]’. But I think that is also nonsense. – Leading planner, Kalasatama

Knowledge located through citizen participation was at times cherry-picked (Krizek et al. 2009) to support the planning system’s predetermined goals and used as a tool to legitimate plans (as warned by Purcell 2009). It seems that participation, or rather interaction, has instrumental value in preventing conflicts that result in official complaints concerning the construction. Legally passed complaints are highly avoided as they slow down construction.

So, there are of course issues that are in preparation and in progress, so these we cannot take to open forums to be discussed. But when they have advanced to a certain level for them to be presented, that’s when. [--] This preparation period is very delicate, a delicate moment. – Former head coordinator, Jätkäsaari

Maintaining control of uncertain planning issues is present in informants’ accounts. Controlling the output of information (Forester 1989) is common and strategic decisions and directions are settled between groups of professionals. In the three cities, participatory actions were most commonly referred to as *one-way informing* of residents of the construction project’s inconveniences. This was seen to be the main responsibility of the municipality towards its residents. Information provision is defined by the planning law in the cities and thus forms the minimum basis for citizen participation. Organizing resident evenings is not defined by the law but was most commonly referred to as a participatory process, especially in Helsinki. However, the content was more informational than participatory or even interactive: a broad range of experts from various departments are invited to give presentations about their ongoing and upcoming phases and to answer residents’ questions in annual or biannual resident evenings. Ad hoc meetings with smaller, proactive interest groups were more frequent in Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

What you actually can say that they’re not doing is this kind of maybe co-creation idea where you have people engaged in the development process. It’s basically happening in a kind of closed circle among the architects, the municipal planners and obviously our

client [City and Port municipal development company]. And then at certain points when we have a kind of decision, then it's explained [to the people] ... – private architect, Nordhavn

The input of residents was seen as helpful in smaller concrete questions during the construction project, for example by informing the coordinating city officials about potholes in the ground or a dangerous pedestrian crossing. In Helsinki, broader issues such as aesthetics for buildings, apartment types, densities and layout of streets or where to plan and which type of leisure areas to build, were not seen as useful to discuss with residents early on and identifying the participants was seen as challenging. However, residents discussed these issues critically when the neighbourhood started to get its form.

Although practices for citizen interaction were more systematic in Amsterdam where the city officials verbalized citizen participation as a natural and uncontested, even a well-resourced part of the process, the nature of participation requires closer analysis. The planners would offer clearly defined local projects in which citizens were invited to participate. The objectives were often already shaped, for example to produce ideas for a park or to act as a citizen jury for the idea competition of uses for old silo buildings. This is described as *planner-centred staged participation* (Saad-Sulonen 2013).

The *lack of obvious stakeholders*, ‘no neighbours’, in urban brownfield development was generally seen as an obstacle in citizen participation. It seemed problematic to locate the time and place for citizen participation as an overall strategic plan for citizen interaction was lacking in all three cities. When the most defining decisions are made and there is still space for strategic discussion in the early planning phases, most informants state that participation is not fruitful due to the citizens’ alleged lack of interest towards a formerly unknown empty area. This reveals a *temporal disparity* in planning and participation: all of the big decisions are already made. However, one informant is very critical towards the planners’ given reason of ‘no residents, no need for participation’.

No, that is their excuse, that there is nobody there. But I, I think they are doing this because there are no citizens yet. So now they can have their own playground quickly. Yes, a planners and designers’ playground. [laughter] [...] If nobody is living there yet, everybody could live on the island in the future, so why not ask all the citizens [...] But then, for that you have to be brave. ... so they [urban planners] are very afraid of citizens and want to be in control. And of course this is part of the whole planning thinking: you want to be in control. – Former planning director, Zeeburgereiland

However, the entire international competition call for Nordhavn’s master plan was produced in collaboration with citizens before anything was drawn to gain vision for the area’s development. Citizens were invited to thematic workshops to generate ideas for the new area. These ideas were then further thematized and advanced with planners. The crystallized workshops ideas formed

the basis for the competition call for architectural offices for a competition entry for the neighbourhood master plan which must entail the citizens' ideas.

They are very concrete, very precise on what they want: panorama restaurants, houseboats, lagoons, floating markets. And I can say as the planning went on and the winning project and what's in the plan, nearly every one of these ideas are implemented in Nordhavn. – Municipal lawyer, Nordhavn

The municipality then picked two winning companies (not only one in order to ensure collaboration, flexibility and agility in future planning) to work together on the planning of Nordhavn. According to the informants this was a unique endeavour in Copenhagen requested by municipal politicians and done partly in order to avoid mistakes made in the heavily critiqued top-down planning of Ørestad characterized by low citizen involvement and lack of public life, resulting in rather low neighbourhood appeal (and financial problems for developers). The novelty of Nordhavn worked to its advantage in luring curious Copenhageners to see the previously closed-off area.

At one point we had to stop [inviting new citizens] because we couldn't have that many people in the room. So it wasn't hard [...] people didn't feel that we came and gave them something. We asked them to give us something. [...] They believed it was real involvement. [...] I found a lot of the normally uninterested Copenhageners – people who don't normally say anything or aren't a part of the public debate who were now interested in how this area could be a part of Copenhagen. – Municipal lawyer, Nordhavn

The initial views of citizens still affect the future development of Nordhavn, although since the active engagement of the beginning, the engagement of citizens has followed the 'normal' protocol of citizen interaction defined in the planning law, informal interactions and sporadic meetings when a topic of interest arises (see also Blok & Meilvang 2015). Planners in Nordhavn and Zeeburgereiland say that citizen interaction is relatively easy to organize as citizens organize themselves into associations and neighbourhood committees. Their *influence* on plans was admitted to being minimal. However, all informants said that after the first residents moved in, participation formed into planners defending the original planning goals as new residents were seen to have their subjective interests of their immediate surroundings at heart, or 'professional complainers' (highly-educated citizens with legal understanding) as verbalized. This discourse of complaining residents was present in Helsinki and Amsterdam also.

Institutional ambiguity

Through institutional discourse, informants constructed the environment in which they work in relation to participation. This was the second most common discourse and arose evenly from all three cities. Based on accounts of 1) the incomprehensibility of organizational structure, 2) lack of shared vision, 3) institutional conflict, and 4) practical organizational challenges it becomes

apparent that value-based discussion of participation and democracy are needed within the municipal organisation.

The informants recognized that the municipal organization and *decision-making is difficult to understand* for a citizen and sometimes even for the municipal officials themselves. These notions follow what Hillier (2003) calls institutional ambiguity. Institutional discourse ranges from critique towards the whole political system to practical and even interpersonal challenges in the organizational framework and culture. Starting from the broadest form of critique, one informant critiqued the entire welfare state model, in which true participation can never be done as the urban agenda is decided behind closed doors and merely imposed upon the municipalities, let alone its citizens.

And it really goes top-down and in the end they [the ministries] talk to the municipalities. But then the whole system – the whole programme for the next ten, twenty years – is already there. So it's very paternalistic, this country. It's still the welfare state, 'we know what is good for you. And we will take care of you. So, at every level, I will take care of you – don't bother ...' – Former planning director, Zeeburgereiland

In Amsterdam especially, a reported institutional challenge is the *lack of a shared vision* and concrete meanings given to participation. Participation is seen to be left to an undefined level and is not being implemented by different departments in their own contexts. In Helsinki, a subtle discourse of internal *institutional conflict* and cross-sectoral power struggle was stated between the planning department and construction project coordination of the municipality's central administration office.

It seems as though the city organization is very stiff. Conservative and formal. There is a lot to change there. Everything is done as before because that is safe. And then there is the fear of making mistakes. That's bad. You don't get any support from above [financing department], no directions and everything needs to be fed bottom-up. – Former head coordinator, Jätkäsaari

In Helsinki, the *institutional culture* concerning participation is reported to change slowly through good experiences of interacting with residents. The informants suggest that the allocation of funds to immaterial and social aspects of urban planning and building is challenging. This institutional change seems to need a driver, in which the interaction planner plays a crucial role. Many informants said that a stronger participation culture requires the commitment of the project managers and leaders. Data showed, however, that they are currently least tuned into augmenting participation from informing to asking and including citizens in earlier phases.

The most common type of institutional challenges are *practical organizational challenges* in the high divisions of responsibility, coordination of various actors involved in planning, complex

processes, legal frameworks and moral obligations of city officials. In Helsinki, there was an air of disinterest and fatigue towards new forms of collaboration with actors outside of the traditional scope of other municipal departments and developers. A practical critique of communicative planning is that it seems to fit poorly into the busy, poorly-resourced and often technical and operational planning realities of municipal urban planners (Mattila 2018), as seen here. Especially in Helsinki and Copenhagen, city officials saw a *lack of resources* as a challenge in enhancing participatory work. Planners may regard citizen participation as an additional and voluntary task aside from their core work (see also Högnabba 2014; Lapintie 2017; Puustinen 2006). In Copenhagen, the pressure to enhance citizen participation comes from municipal politicians in the city council as well as active citizens, but according to the planners, it is nevertheless not sufficiently resourced with allocated working hours, although they expressed a wish to interact more. Plans are expected to be completed faster and with higher quality than before. In Amsterdam, the nature of citizen interaction is seen as a neutral extension of their daily workload and resources concerning coordinating with residents were not seen as a problem.

Constraining economic rationalism

A discourse of economic rationalism and globalization makes evident the impact of the global world in local planning realities. Challenges for the planner's autonomy to realise participation are caused by 1) economic fluctuations, 2) need for speedy construction and 3) the high cost of developable brownfield land.

Urban scholars (e.g. Sassen 1994; Castells 1999; Taipale 2009) discuss how cities have since the 1980's become actors in the global market economy, often bypassing the nation-state. However, the nation-state and *globalisation* may overrun the desires of residents and local planning (Bengs 2005) in their competition for international businesses and skilled workforce. These pressures were most evident in discourses in Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

One of the main challenges is to find the right balance between this kind of market-driven, economic, pragmatic approach and then having as you say a soft vision for social sustainable, cultural aspects. The problem is that you can usually measure money but you cannot really measure – it's more difficult to measure – like social gains, cultural strengths or whatever. – Private architect, Nordhavn

The data suggests that *economic fluctuations* impact how planners see opportunities for participation. The global economic crisis of 2008–2009 and the following 'boom period' were a dominant topic in interviews with informants especially in Amsterdam and also in Copenhagen. All informants in Amsterdam stated that during the years of the crisis, there was time for participation because investments in building had stopped and new areas were not advanced. During this time, Amsterdam envisioned the future of the city together with its citizens in a participatory project called 'Amsterdam Free State', where thousands of citizens provided their views of the future of the city. Informants stated that planners believed that the state of the recession was going to impact building permanently, so numerous alternative plans were made in

collaboration with businesses and residents to make use of underused spaces in economic and ecological ways.

Speaker 1: I think the crisis period was very important because there –

Speaker 2: There was no rush. So we had time to discuss plans and because nothing was happening anyway [laughs] ... And there were no big developers with their plans already drawn out. So there was room for discussion. It's really there were no plans. So there was a lot of empty land on which you could think what do we want to have here?

– Planners, Zeeburgereiland

In 2013 the recession was over and investment flowed into Amsterdam again. Flows of investment, businesses and people (Castells 1989; Sassen 1994) migrating to Amsterdam stand out as the main influences on urban developments and new spatial configuration in Zeeburgereiland. Now informants dread the impact of Brexit as ‘thousands of high-income bankers’ and businesses are expected to move to Amsterdam as headquarters move to central Europe. According to an informant, citizens have protested the new influx of people from tourism and foreign business and claim that the city does not feel like home anymore. A great deal of this anxiety is embodied in the resistance to high-rise building in Sluisbuurt in Zeeburgereiland. Several informants stated that the traditional way of *speedy construction* has since become prominent again. A higher density was wanted in the inner city and according to the project manager it was easier to execute in Zeeburgereiland where “it is very easy to top on more and more and more than to redevelop an old neighborhood where people live and has to be demolished first.”

And now their [municipal real estate office] excuse for not starting a real participatory collaborative process is lack of time. We have to speed up! We have to build 50,000 dwellings in five years! Get out of the way! We have to build! It's like that. – Former planning director, Zeeburgereiland

The responsibility of the expert planner is seen to be to keep up a speedy construction project in all three cities. In Helsinki, it is seen to be in ‘everyone’s interest’ to produce new dwellings at a fast pace. Speedy building is justified by the common good, a concept argued to be often used to defend decisions of economic rationalism (Puustinen 2006), characterized by a minimum of predefined restrictions and guidelines and contains possibilities for striking deals at the local level. Building is seen as a *de-politicized issue*. Holgersson (2014, 214) made similar findings in Gothenburg, discussing how redevelopment is a part of a “post-political” rhetoric that makes urban transformation uncontroversial and utilizes language that stifles alternative uses for the area.

It's not like there is, there won't be any [citizen opinions] ... [laughs] It is in everyone's interest to advance with construction. So it [participation] is about fulfilling the requirements of the law. In reality in this situation with making this more agile, we would just go forward [with plans]. [...] Every change in the area is a change for the better so no

one minds if there are more buildings being built in the area. Everyone knows it and it's a good thing when it is finished. – Head planner, Kalasatama

It seems that proactive participation is seen as a risk unless the participation in question is a separate localized project, such as co-planning a temporary playground in Kalasatama or a park in Zeeburgereiland. The *high cost of developable brownfield land* and costly infrastructure results in expected high financial returns and demands that the land is sold to developers at a high price.

And the island, it looks beautiful but it's a horrible place to build on. It's an artificial island and it's polluted, the land. [...] And in that sense they have to do it right and very well but that makes it all very expensive. And if it's going to be very expensive you take no risks. So why participation, it's risky! Yeah, all those expectations, all those risks. No. So, better, be in control. – Former planning deputy director, Zeeburgereiland

Although Nordhavn can perhaps be seen as more exemplary in its early participatory process, the level of government subsidized housing is the smallest. In Nordhavn, economic pressure is visible in the discussed uncertainty of reaching the municipally *suggested* (but not law enforced) amount of 25% social housing. Critics of the actualization of social housing in Nordhavn contend that the municipality itself would be the only developer able to create a social mix and opportunities for middle and low income households as it is too expensive to realise social housing in new attractive neighborhoods with high land prices (Tsenkova & Vestergaard 2011). Currently the area is developed by development company City and Port (By og Havn), jointly owned by the City of Copenhagen (95%) and the Danish state (5%). It is mandated to generate economic value through land sales, which is then reinvested in local infrastructure, namely the construction of a new metro line.

We have this kind of market-driven economy that creates difficulties in having these projects. [...] So this is maybe the most difficult place in the whole city to have housing for people with a low income. It's difficult. – Private architect, Nordhavn

Ranci (2017) argues how global urban competitiveness has incrementally overridden goals of social cohesion in European cities, especially in cities where intensified economic development has taken place. In Ranci's study Copenhagen represents this process. He indicates how there is a widening gap between the professional urban elite and the middle class as well as disadvantaged groups whose access to housing in desired urban areas is becoming unattainable (see also Tsenkova & Vestergaard 2011).

In Zeeburgereiland's sub-district of Sportheldenbuurt the amount of social housing is presumed to be 30% and in Sluisbuurt 40%. Figures for the whole area are not available, but new housing in Amsterdam adheres to the so-called 40-40-20 distribution (40% social housing, 40% mid-price rent-controlled and 20% market-priced) (figures from email exchange with key informant).

Although participatory speech was most elusive in Helsinki, the level of government subsidized housing was the highest. In Jätkäsaari it is 59% (subsidized rental 30% and subsidized owner-occupied 29%) and in Kalasatama 49% (24% and 25%, respectively) (figures from email exchange with administraty).

The economic-rational discourse supports discussions about large-scale urban development projects of recent decades portraying a structural change from redistributive, social policies towards more market-oriented approaches aimed at economic development and inter-urban competition in European cities (Gualini & Majoor 2007; Puustinen et al. 2017). Although the urban policies of Nordic welfare societies aim at balancing economic targets with social development objectives, such as providing government subsidized housing and enhancing citizen participation, the hegemony of a neoliberal context in urban policies may override these social goals if they are not upheld by law and political will (Ranci 2017; Gualini & Majoor 2007; Fainstein 2010).

Concluding discussion

This article has attempted to answer the question of how municipal planners make sense of citizen participation in urban brownfields. Citizen participation in brownfield development presents as a fluid concept that escapes rigid definitions. It is a part of “politics of definition” (Fierlbeck 1998, 177) as it gains varying meanings according to the informant’s position and viewpoint. Challenges for citizen participation in brownfield development arise from various exogenous factors but also planners’ professionalist attitudes prevail. Planners negotiate between often contradictory expectations from the planning department, politicians, citizens and other stakeholders. It appears that enhancing citizen participation is subsidiary to other, more fast-pressing goals. The main tension is that there is a need for new (affordable) apartments for quickly growing urban populations, which according to planners require speedy construction. This threatens thorough public discussion of the area’s future and leaves no space for deliberation of alternatives. Findings here support the notion that brownfield development is often depoliticised and verbalised as necessary urban transformation that benefits everyone as long as plans are not opposed and slowed down (Lehrer & Laidley 2008; Orueta & Fainstein 2008; Holgersson 2014; Swyngedouw et al 2002).

It seems that participation is not enough in attaining a socially just city. Although planners verbalised an interest to enhance interaction more in Amsterdam and Copenhagen than in Helsinki, they did not see that citizens have (or necessarily should have) a chance to *impact* planning more. Housing policy emerged as a topic defining social justice in the future areas. As Nordhavn showed more signs of procedural equality through early-phase citizen participation defining the architectural call, housing policies in Helsinki appeared to aim at evening material inequalities the most. These findings contribute in analysing CPT and its claimed lack of connecting fair planning processes and outcomes (Mattila 2019; Purcell 2009; Fainstein 2005). Because comparing housing policies between countries is complicated, further research is needed

to analyse what subsidized housing in each case means and how housing reflects social justice in the future neighbourhoods. What justifies the high speed of building, if this urgency subjugates citizen participation? As seen, citizen participation exposes and connects to values in planning. Instead of questioning the role of municipal planners as instigators of participation, I encourage practitioners to deepen value-based discussion on their responsibility as democratic actors. A lacking discourse was that of participation as a democratic end, a *citizen right*, in itself.

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