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Paper

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The role of public participation and spatial planning in regional growth management

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the praxis of strategic spatial policy making and planning to promote regional growth. Regional growth policies are, at least to some extent, supposed to be an integrated part of spatial planning and, thus, supposed to be provided under the influence of public participation - not only in Europe but in most 'modern' countries. In other words, public participation and spatial planning are in many countries considered to be very important tools in regional growth management. But how do spatial policy and planning response to economic goals? And at the same time, how can spatial planners and policy makers secure legitimacy? Specifically, this paper will try to explore the role of public participation as a tool to secure legitimacy as well as response to economic goals.

The definition on 'public participation' as well as the ways to practice public participation can vary a lot from country to country, depending on the political culture in each country. Denmark and Japan are two countries with very different political cultures. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that both spatial planning and public participation play a very different role in the two countries. As far as we know, Denmark and Japan can be considered as counter-examples.

In both Japan and Denmark trade policy aims to increase and strengthen the general conditions for commercial enterprises as a basis for increased growth and employment.

However, in Denmark (as in many European countries) there is a strong tradition for public participation, and legitimacy in strategic spatial policy making is 'a big issue'. But it is often believed that the public participation curb economic growth. Therefore, the role of spatial planning can be considered as 'land book-keeping' rather than planning to promote development.

Opposite, in Japan, although various public participation methods are now tried in spatial planning issues, advisory boards ('shingi-kai' and/or 'iin-kai') still play a key role in spatial policy making. The members of a Japanese shingi-kai and/or iin-kai at regional (prefecture) and municipal level are nominated by the mayor. Each of the members (from chamber of commerce, agriculture associations, residents' associations, officials from upper-level government related to spatial planning, etc.) are considered to understand important local institutional interests. The numbers of shingi-kais that also have academic members are not large. The advisory boards sometimes strongly tend to contribute to promote economic development through advising. And to some extent they legitimize spatial planning and development proposals, too. But in a strict sense there is a lack of legitimacy in Japanese spatial planning and regional growth management.

Defining public participation as an independent corrective to the formal decision making major findings in surveys in both countries show that in Japan public participation works quite well at regional (prefecture) level and in major cities (municipalities), but not so good at municipal level. In Denmark the survey shows almost the opposite result.

Why? Can Denmark and the rest of Europe learn from the Japanese experiences, and vice versa? Is it possible to transfer the Japanese advisory boards directly into e.g. the Danish

planning system at regional level? And is it possible to transfer the Danish public participation experiences directly into the Japanese planning system at local level?

These and other questions are what our paper will try to answer, hopefully to improve the quality and independency of public participation, and in a wider sense to improve the spatial planning as a useful integrated tool in regional growth management.

1. Introduction

Various ‘structural conditions’ must be fulfilled in a society to make economic growth possible [The World Bank 2005]. But also the physical environment at regional and local level needs to fulfil the requirements of the enterprises that create economic growth, see Figure 1.

Very important	Good infrastructure (roads, train service, etc.)
	Access to qualified/skilled labour
	Flexible and quick public service (planning/building permissions, environmental approvals, etc.)
Important	General public service (kindergartens, schools, sport facilities, libraries, etc.)
	Low tax
	Housing policy/attractive housing
	Access to cheap land for trade and industry purposes
Less important	The municipality offers ‘business service’
	The supply of cultural activities
	There is a university (or the like) in the neighbourhood
	The municipality offers consultancy for ‘entrepreneurs’
	The municipality offers ‘experience-exchange-groups’ and similar networks

Figure 1: 12 requirements of priority that a regional and local authority in Denmark should fulfil if enterprise owners should start up a business from scratch in municipality/region [Deloitte 2005, p. 12]

Figure 1 shows several very important factors that will influence whether or not an enterprise owner will choose to establish his business in a certain municipality/region – and many of these factors are actually in control of the planning authorities. The majority of the requirements can be fulfilled through spatial planning and decision making. Thus spatial planning can be considered as both as a precondition of growth *and* a tool for growth management.

How about the factors in Japan? Although the priority of the factors in Figure 1 is not exactly the same, ‘good infrastructure’, ‘access to qualified/skilled labour’, and ‘access to cheap land for trade and industry purposes’ are also very important. [Kansai Economic Federation 2001]. That is, local authorities have the keys to attract/invite enterprises.

However, municipalities/regional authorities need to do a lot more than just fulfil the requirements of enterprises to support the businesses to create economic growth. Economic growth itself can only to some extent secure ‘wealth and prosperity’ in the (local) society. Also functional, environmental, nature and other ‘sustainability’ interests must be safeguarded, not at least because the municipalities/regional authorities are obliged to do so as it is stated in the legislation. And in addition, weighing out all these interests against each other the municipalities/regional authorities need to secure legitimacy in order to satisfy the public interests of the voters and safeguard the interests of the land owners. Therefore, the challenge for the municipalities/regional authorities is to balance their different roles, see Figure 2.

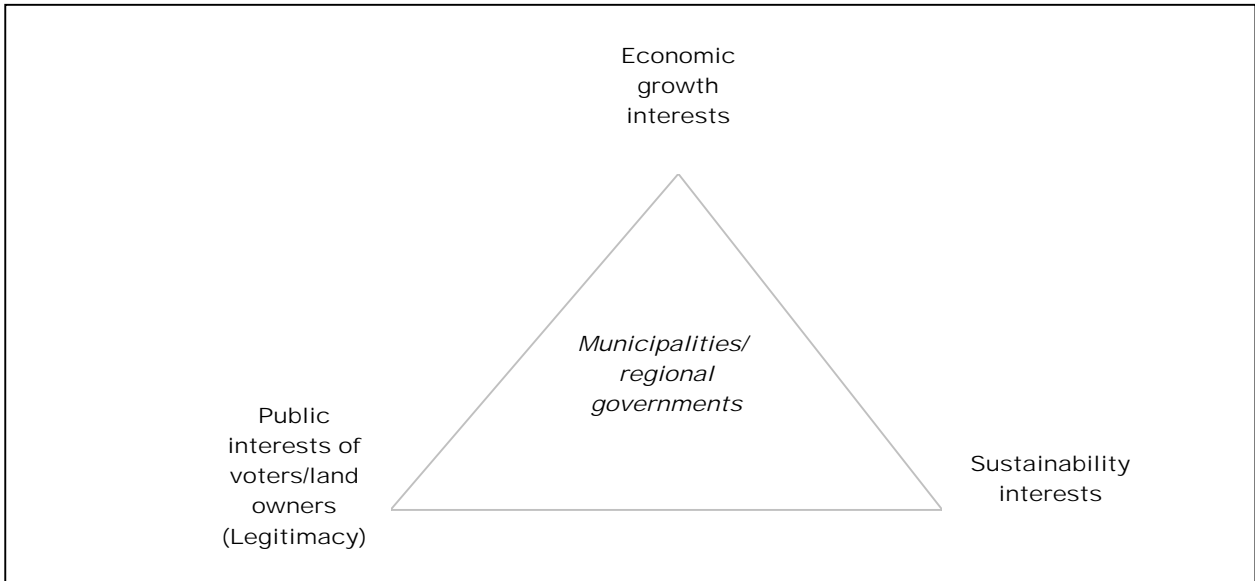
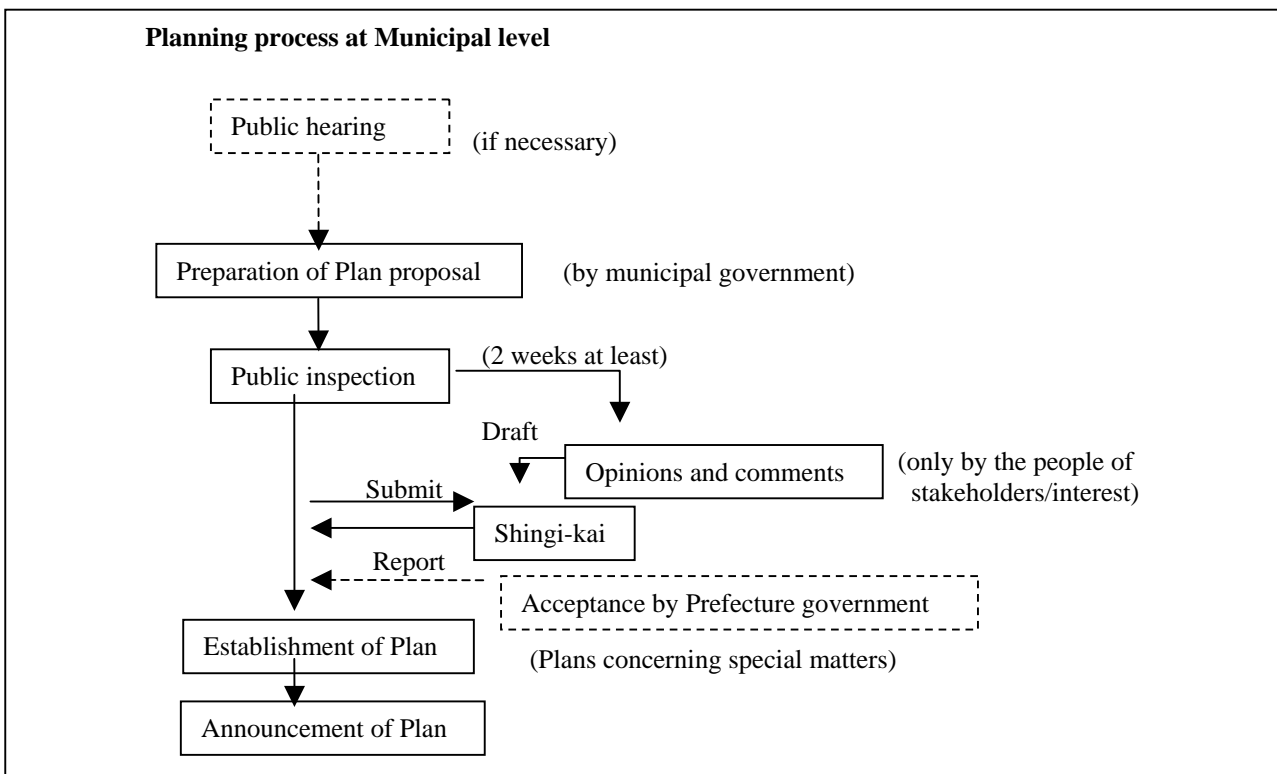


Figure 2: the challenge for the municipalities/regional authorities is to balance their different roles.

2. Growth management in Japan

2.1 The formal decision making system (including the planning system) in Japan

The Japanese planning decision making process is sketched out below.



2.2 How does Japanese participation/shingi-kai work in practice?

City planning shingi-kai system has been criticized in various ways [e.g. Shitomi 1999], although it has been utilized effectively and profoundly in reality. Based on an analysis of the criticism, the authors provided a questionnaire survey for municipalities¹.

2.2.1 Method of surveys about Japanese participation/ shingi-kai in practice

Table 1 shows the overview of the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three parts; (a) Member composition, (b) Management and shingi-kai's decision, (c) Information disclosure. In the member composition part, the questions for such as number of members, professions/occupations of members, organizations to which members belong were set. In the management and shingi-kai's decision part, the number of shingi-kai meetings par year, average meeting time, average number of proposals by administrative authorities, and the decision by shingi-kai, etc. were asked. And in the information disclosure part, announcement of shingi-kai date and plan proposals, public relations of member list, discussion materials and minutes, and openness to public/mass communication (observing shingi-kai meeting) were the question items.

Member composition	Number of members
	Profession/occupation of members
	Organizations to which members belong
	Term
	Method of choosing members
etc.	
Management and shingikai's decision	Number of shingi-kai meetings
	Average number of proposals
	Average meeting time
	Numbers of approval/amendment/rejection
	etc.
Information disclosure	Name list
	Shingi-kai's date and time
	Minute/draft minute
	Materials
	Openness to public/mass communication
	etc.

The questionnaire survey was conducted from May to October in 2003, over 264 municipalities (82 cities, 181 towns and 1 village) in Kyushu region. The collected/distribution ratio was very high at 246/264 (93.2%) in total. It is because of that the questionnaire survey was strongly supported by 7 prefecture governments (Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Oita, Miyazaki and Kagoshima), which also shows the prefectures' serious concern about municipal city planning shingi-kai system.

2.2.3. Analysis and results/main findings: What works and where are the problems?

1) Formation situation of municipal city planning shingi-kai

¹ The survey is carried out by Tatsunari Arashiro under supervision of the authors Tetsunobu Yoshitake and Chikashi Deguchi.

Firstly, we should have a glance at the population of the 246 municipalities.

Other cities	Population
Kurume city	236.543
Sasebo city	240.838
Miyazaki city	305.755
Nagasaki city	423.167
Oita city	436.470
Kagoshima city	552.098
Kumamoto city	662.012

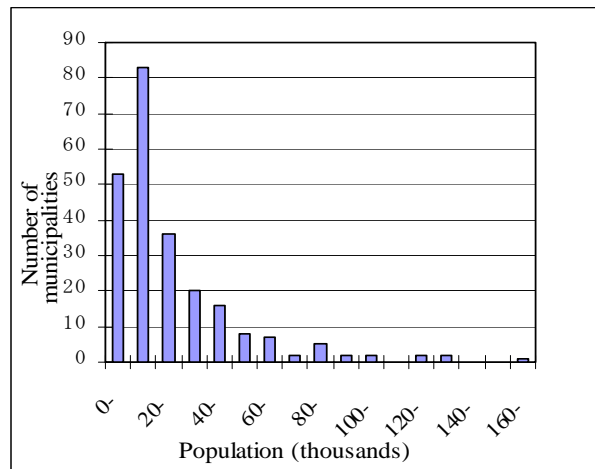


Figure 3: The population of the 246 municipalities.

Figure 3 shows the population distribution in 2000. Apparently, the population of most municipalities is less than 50 thousands. Contrarily, several municipalities such as Kumamoto city, Kagoshima city, prefectural capitals, have over 500 thousands. It means that the practices and problems on city planning must largely differ among municipalities.

Based on the respondents, 208 municipalities among 264 are found to have shingi-kais. (Municipal government may establish municipal city planning shingi-kai according to Japanese City Planning Law. In the case of a municipality does not establish it, the prefectural city planning shingi-kai works for the municipality.) Further analysis is to be conducted on the 208 municipalities.

2) Member composition

Shingi-kai members are appointed by municipal mayor. According to the planning guidance by the national government, the members should be appointed from the groups of 'relevant local authorities', 'municipal council', 'people of experience or academic standing', and 'ordinary residents'. Now, 'people of experience' are generally thought as the quasi-representatives of agriculture, commercial, business, industry worlds, and NGOs. Thus, shingi-kai naturally has a flavour of 'table for negotiation among stakeholders' as well as the function of 'rational planning', which characterize Japanese municipal city planning shingi-kai system.

Regarding the numbers of members of a shingi-kai, many shingi-kais consist of 10 members or more. Several municipal shingi-kais have more than 20 members. These municipalities are the prefectural capitals. Since our main concern is 'public participation', the facts of 'people of experience or academic standing' should be examined. Most shingi-kais are found to have 2-5 members from this category.

Let us investigate what kinds of people are appointed from the category 'people of experience' and 'people of academic standing'. In fact, only 61 municipalities have 'people of academic standing' (university/college professors) in shingi-kais. The rest 145 municipalities do not have them at all. The specialties of these professors are shown in Table 2.

City planning	33	Humanities	4
Architecture	21	Agriculture	2
Economy	8	Electro technology	1
Medical/Welfare	7	Public administration	1
Environment	5	Sociology	1
Law	4	Others	4
Transportation	4		

It is natural that many municipalities appoint professors in planning or architecture. It is also interesting that the professors in various specialties are appointed. However, 12 shingi-kais among 61 do not have any members from planning, architecture and transportation planning. These shingi-kais and the shingi-kais without any professors would not be able to discuss rightly on certain topics which require special knowledge.

How about the members of 'people of experience'? Table 3 shows the result.

Chamber of commerce	146	Ex-municipal official	30
Farmland committee	109	Ex-prefectur official	22
Farmers' co-operative	67	Fishermen's co-operative	14
Architect	37	Lawer	10
Neighborhood assoc.	35	Sightseeing assoc.	10

The number of municipalities that have people from 'chambers of commerce' is the largest at 111 among 208. The second largest is 77 from 'farmland committees', farmer's organizations that have the authority for farmland. The third is from 'farmer's co-operatives' of 50 municipalities. Obviously, 'chamber of commerce' and 'agriculture' potentially have a certain power in shingi-kai.

3) Management and shingi-kai's decision

How shingi-kais are working? As described above, 'the management and shingi-kai's decision' part consists of several questions. Here, among others, the relation of 'number of shingi-kai meetings' and 'number of plan proposals', and the features of 'shingi-kai's decisions' are examined.

Table 4 shows the cross analysis of 'number of shingi-kai meetings' and 'number of plan proposals' in 2002.

Number of proposals	Number of shingi-kai meetings						
	0	1	2	3	4	unknown	Total
0	32	13	2	2	0	6	55
1	1	45	8	2	0	2	58
2	0	19	14	2	2	1	38
3	0	2	9	0	1	0	12
4	0	2	5	0	0	1	8
5	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
6-	0	1	1	6	2	0	10
Unknown	6	7	0	0	0	11	24
Total	39	89	41	12	6	21	208

Surprisingly, 55 municipalities never had proposals and 39 municipalities did not hold shingi-kai meeting at all. It could reflect insufficient decentralization of Japanese planning system. Actually, important planning decision making is basically done at prefecture level.

Table 5 summarizes the features of 'shingi-kai's decision making'.

		Number of Municipalities	Total	Number of all proposals
Alternatives	Once	2	8	876
	Twice	1		
	4 times	1		
Amendment	Once	1	1	
Rejection		0	0	

In practice, only eight alternative proposals, only one amendment and no disapprovals were made among 208 shingi-kais with 876 matters to discuss. That is, most shingi-kais had approved most proposals. It is likely that the plan proposals were so polished and sophisticated that shingi-kais approve them as a corollary. Or, do shingi-kais have an ability to discuss planning matter? Actually, there are many critics that argue 'shingi-kai is nothing more than a government supporter'.

4) Information disclosure

Information disclosure gives a basis of public participation. The information regarding shingi-kai should also be disclosed. The questionnaire provides about 20 questions concerning the issue. Here, publicity of member list and minutes, openness to public are examined.

Table 6 shows the results of the publicity of member lists and minutes. 142 municipalities among 208 open their own lists in some form. However, among them, 82 municipalities open the lists in passive manner (in response to inquiry). Only 14 municipalities publish the lists in public relation paper/notice board, on their own motive. On the contrary, 59 municipalities never publish

the lists. A similar situation is found for the publicity of minutes. Only 12 municipalities publish them on their motive, and 112 publish in response to request, whereas 78 municipalities do not publish at all.

Object of disclosure	Situation	Number of municipalities
Member list	Opened	142
	Closed	59
	Unknown	7
Minute	Open	12
	Opened in response to request	112
	Closed	78
	Unknown	6
Public Observation	Open	44
	Partly opened	8
	Closed	139
	Unknown	17

Table 6 also summarizes the result of openness to public. Only 44 municipalities allow public to observe shingi-kai meeting, and 8 municipalities allow observing certain part of the meeting. However, 139 municipalities close the meeting to public.

5) What works and where are the problems?

As shown above, Japanese municipal city planning shingi-kais have many and serious problems. However, in spite of these problems, shingi-kais have actually worked in several decades. In fact, there had been only a few serious social concerns in these decades in Kyushu. How have they worked – and why? Several factors could give the key:

i) Centralization of power

Since Japanese governments system have been strongly centralized, municipal governments have not had power over certain important planning or infrastructure projects. Naturally, the proposals to municipal shingi-kai have tended to be subtle ones, and therefore, the decisions by shingi-kai have not given large impact to society. Thus, in spite of many problems, public concern about shingi-kai has been weak.

ii) Economic growth

In several decades, Japan have been a development-oriented country. Most plan proposals have also been development-oriented ones. They were thought to raise population's income and welfare. Under such circumstances, the interests of various stakeholders would accord with each other. And actually, it was. Then, municipal shingi-kai has not been required to discuss controversial proposals.

iii) Final stage of planning process

Nevertheless, shingi-kai has legal power because it is located at the last stage of planning process. Mayor submits a plan proposal to shingi-kai and, in response shingi-kai provides a report that says yes/no. Exactly to say, the mayor is given the final word to say, however he/she has to

respect shingi-kai's report. But the officials, who provide the plan proposals, always tries to avoid the rejection by shingi-kai to save time and budget. Before proposals, the officials actually negotiate with real stakeholders and other administrative authorities. Then, the proposals have been well-sophisticated in reality. It is, what the Japanese call, a 'balancing mechanism'.

iv) Negotiation among stakeholder-like members

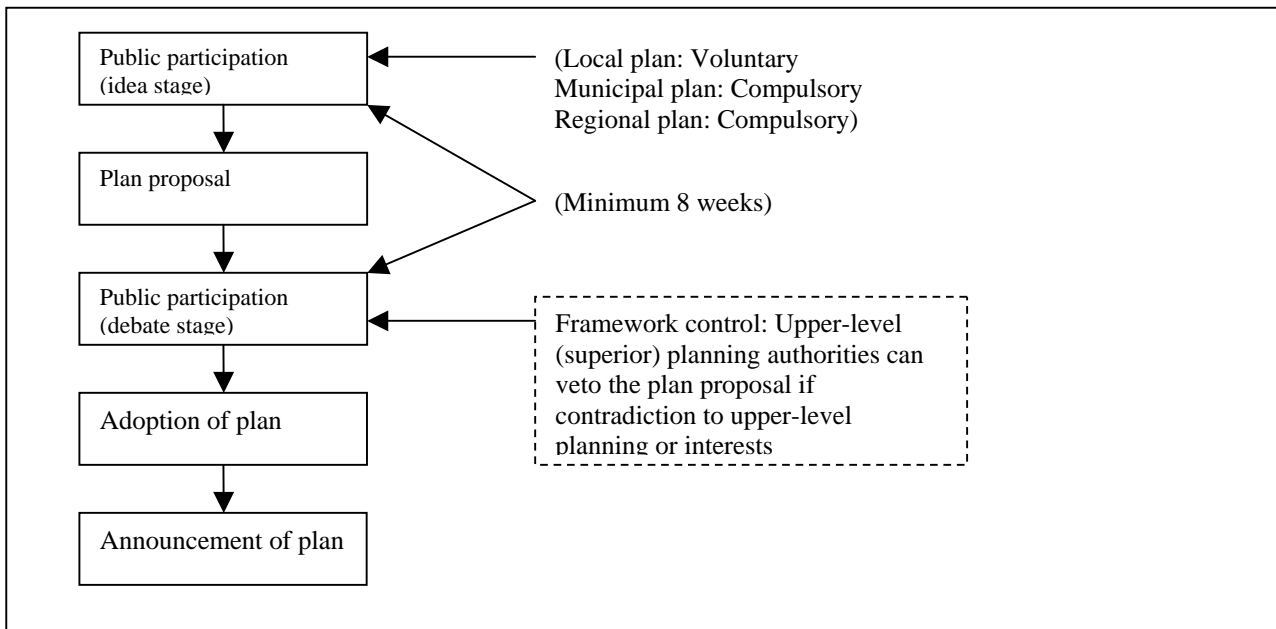
As described above, the existence of shingi-kai involve a 'balancing mechanism'. 'Sophisticated proposals' means well-negotiated and agreed proposal by various stakeholders. In the case of that the proposal is not well negotiated before shingi-kai meeting, the proposals would be negotiated among stakeholder-like members (people of experience) in shingi-kai. To avoid this situation, the officials seek a 'balance' in advance.

Does the shingi-kai system work in future as well as the past and present? The answer is no when shingi-kai remains as it is now. The Japanese planning system is rapidly changing recently. It seeks further decentralization and public participation under the circumstance of low economic growth, limitation of public fund, aging society, depopulation, glowing complex public interests and so on. Decentralization is to give many matters to discuss at municipal shingi-kais. To secure rational planning it seems to be a first step that shingi-kais have specialty knowledge and disclose information about themselves.

3. Growth management in Denmark

3.1 The formal decision making system (including the planning system) in Denmark

The Danish planning decision making process is sketched out below. The three types of plans (regional, municipal and local plans) are produced through more or less the same procedure.



Planning in Denmark is based on four principles:

- Zoning: The national territory is divided into zones to maintain a sharp delimitation between urban and rural,
- Decentralization of powers: The Planning Act pick up the thread from the general administrative sphere about decentralized responsibility,

- Framework control: Lower-level planning must not contradict higher-level planning decisions,
- Public participation in order to secure the legitimacy of planning decisions, and in order to protect legal rights for individual land owners. As a particular element the decision making power (plan adopting, planning permission etc.) belongs to a collegiate organ - the county council/municipal council - of elected politicians (which is contrary to Japanese municipalities where the mayor is more or less an absolute 'city king').

3.2 How does Danish participation work in practice?

Like the Japanese city planning shingi-kai system has been criticized in various ways, also the Danish public participation system has been criticized. It has widely been held that the public participation system needs to be re-vitalized to get the public (in a wide sense) more engaged and to secure 'public ownership' to the planning. Recently, when the "Regional Planning Committee" was created in spring 2002 to investigate the potential to simplify and develop the content, form and production of regional plans, the work included the re-vitalization issues related to the public participation system. Based on an analysis of the criticism, the authors provided a questionnaire survey for municipalities and counties².

3.2.1 Method of surveys about the Danish participation system in practice

Table 7 shows the overview of the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three parts; (a) the purpose of involving the public in the planning and decision making process, (b) methods used to involve the public in the planning and decision making process, and (c) the effects of and experiences with public participation.

The questions have been asked to the planner/planning official in charge of the public participation process in all *counties* (regional plan authorities) in Denmark, and to all *municipalities* (municipal plan and local plan authorities) of Fyn County. The questions have been collected by telephone interviews, partly to secure the right interpretation of questions and answers, partly to make it possible to get more detailed information of the background for the answer which is needed in relation to especially (c) the consequences of and experiences with public participation.

Purpose of involving the public	To get ideas and inspiration from the public?	
	To clarify potential problems and prevent them?	
	To legitimate the plans?	
	Mainly to obey the Planning Act which oblige the planning authorities to involve the public?	
	Other reasons?	
Methods used to involve the public in the planning and decision making process	Public meetings?	
	Information via the internet/e-mails?	
	Send out discussion papers/debating points?	
	Other methods?	
	The planning authority is in general passive?	
Effects of and experiences with public participation	Who says the decisive word in planning/development decisions?	
	Is it in general difficult to engage the public in planning questions?	Yes
		No
	Is the public participation in crisis?	Yes
No		

² The survey was carried out in spring 2004 by Jens Peter Petersen, Arnold Thomassen and Rasmus Ørtoft under supervision of the author Michael Tophøj Sørensen.

The collected/distribution ratio was very high: Regional planning authorities at 11/12 (91,6%); municipal planning authorities at 24/32 (75%).

3.2.2. Analysis and results/main findings: What works and where are the problems?

1) Population of the 24 municipalities and 11 counties

Firstly, we should have a glance at the population of the 24 municipalities and 11 regions:

Regions/Counties	Population	Regions/Counties	Population
Nordjyllands Amt	495,669	Sønderjyllands Amt	252,936
Ringkøbing Amt	274,830	Fyns Amt	475,082
Århus Amt	653,472	Storstrøms Amt	261,884
Vejle Amt	355,691	Vestsjællands Amt	302,479
Ribe Amt	224,595	Hovedstadsregionen (the capital region)	1,806,667
Bornholms Regionskommune	44,126	All counties in Denmark	5,397,640

The 4 largest municipalities in Fyn County	Population
Odense	185,206
Svendborg	43,115
Middelfart	20,280
Nyborg	18,833

Population in the other municipalities	Number of municipalities
10,000 – 12,000	5
7,000-10,000	2
4,000 – 7,000	11
Less than 4,000	2

Figure 4: The population of the 11 regions/counties and

Figure 4 shows the population distribution in 2004. Apparently, the population of most municipalities is less than 7,000 inhabitants, but it varies a lot. Also in the regions/counties there is a big variation in population.

2) The purpose of involving the public in regional, municipal and local planning decisions

It has been discussed – in theory and practice – whether the Danish participation system actually is a ‘public *involvement* system’ or just an ‘obligation for the planning authorities to *inform* the public’ [Nielsen 1990, p. 124].

According to the strict letter of the Planning law the Danish participation system obviously is just an ‘obligation for the planning authorities to *inform* the public’. Only superior planning authorities have a formal right to veto a plan proposal.

However, according to the spirit of the law it was a distinct aim to involve the public in planning issues so that planning is not only established top-down, but also to some extent established bottom-up based on attitudes from the public [Gaardmand 1993, p. 192].

Purpose of involving the public		
	To get ideas and inspiration from the public?	96%
	To clarify potential problems and prevent them?	75%
	To legitimate the plans?	21%
	Mainly to obey the Planning Act which obliges the planning authorities to involve the public?	58%
	Other reasons?	4%

Purpose of involving the public		
	To get ideas and inspiration from the public?	82%
	To clarify potential problems and prevent them?	91%
	To legitimate the plans?	9%
	Mainly to obey the Planning Act which obliges the planning authorities to involve the public?	73%
	Other reasons?	9%

As we can see from table 8 and 9 both the regional and municipal/local plan authorities use participation with the main purposes of getting ideas and inspiration from the public and clarifying potential problems. But it is also significant that many planning authorities involve the public mainly to obey the Planning Act which obliges the planning authorities to involve the public.

This indicates that public participation in Denmark is at least to some extent a 'bottom-up' process. The planning authorities have the intention to be open to proposals from citizens, land owners, companies, interest organization, etc. – in general – the private sector which are the actors who shall realize the planning.

However, this openness and willingness to use the private sector actors as 'correctives' to the planning proposals (which are usually provided top-down by the planning authorities) cannot necessarily be considered as only the fulfilling of local democracy ideals/the spirit of the law. Based on the fact that the private sector shall realize most of the planning there is basis for the presumption that the planning authorities mainly involve the public because they are dependent on the citizens, land owners, companies.

3) Methods used to involve the public in the planning and decision making process

i) The 'idea stage' in the planning and decision making process (prior to the plan proposal)

Methods used to involve the public at the idea stage in the planning and decision making process (prior to the plan proposal)		
	Public meetings?	88%
	Information via the internet/e-mails?	46%
	Send out discussion papers/debating points?	46%
	Other methods?	42%
	The planning authority is in general passive?	8%

Methods used to involve the public at the idea stage in the planning and decision making process (prior to the plan proposal)	Public meetings?	64%
	Information via the internet/e-mails?	73%
	Send out discussion papers/debating points?	82%
	Other methods?	55%
	The planning authority is in general passive?	0%

ii) The 'debate stage' in the planning and decision making process (between the plan proposal and the final plan)

Methods used to involve the public at the debate stage in the planning and decision making process (between the plan proposal and the final plan)	Public meetings?	46%
	Information via the internet/e-mails?	38%
	Send out discussion papers/debating points?	29%
	Other methods?	50%
	The planning authority is in general passive?	8%

Methods used to involve the public at the debate stage in the planning and decision making process (between the plan proposal and the final plan)	Public meetings?	36%
	Information via the internet/e-mails?	73%
	Send out discussion papers/debating points?	64%
	Other methods?	64%
	The planning authority is in general passive?	0%

As we can see from table 10-13 the planning authorities use different means and methods to involve the public – beside publication and announcement of the plan proposal.

Most of the data speak for itself, but the category 'Other methods' needs some further explanation. Many of the planning authorities insert an advertisement in a paper to attract the public's attention. A few authorities also release press statements with the purpose to get television and national newspapers interested in particular planning issues. A couple of authorities even have definite 'press strategies' on how to handle the press. Else, some planning authorities have done experiments on work shops and invited 'focus groups'.

So far, no case studies have provided evidence for the effects of these particular 'Other methods'.

4) The effects of and experiences with public participation

<i>Table14 - municipalities (municipal plan and local plan authorities)</i>			
Effects of and experiences with public participation	Who says the decisive word in planning/development decisions?	Most powerful	Politicians
		2 nd most powerful	Planners
		3 rd most powerful	Citizens, interest organizations, companies, others (e.g. the press) have in general equal influence
		4 th most powerful	
		5 th most powerful	
	6 th most powerful		
	Is it in general difficult to engage the public in planning questions?	Yes	67%
		No	21%
	Is the public participation in crisis?	Yes	54%
		No	21%
<i>Table15 - counties (regional plan authorities)</i>			
Effects of and experiences with public participation	Who says the decisive word in planning/development decisions?	Most powerful	Politicians
		2 nd most powerful	Planners
		3 rd most powerful	Citizens, interest organizations, companies, others (e.g. the press) have in general equal influence
		4 th most powerful	
		5 th most powerful	
	6 th most powerful		
	Is it in general difficult to engage the public in planning questions?	Yes	100%
		No	0%
	Is the public participation in crisis?	Yes	27%
		No	64%

According to the Planning Act it is evident that the power in planning and development decisions belongs to the politicians in the county council and municipal council respectively.

Therefore, it is hardly no matter to surprise that this survey point out the politicians as the most powerful (cf. table 14-15).

However, what might be a surprise the planning officials consider themselves as the 2nd most powerful actors (several respondents actually pointed out the planners as the most powerful).

Of course the planners possess indirect power by being the ones who provide the analyses and whole background for the plan proposals as well as they administer the final plans as a basis for planning and development permissions. But the 'second prize' probably tells more about the planner's role as advisers of the politicians and the politician's (lack of) commitment to comprehensive spatial planning. Most of the respondents answer that the politician's involvement varies a lot depending on the matters. The main part of the politicians is more engaged in specific development projects (and thus local planning) than in the comprehensive regional and municipal planning.

About the engagement of the public it can be concluded that it seems very difficult at especially regional plan level to engage the public – 100% of the respondents find it difficult. But also on municipal level (municipal and local planning) it is rather hard to get the public interested in planning questions (67%). However, most of the municipal respondents feel it is most difficult to get the public engaged in the (comprehensive) municipal planning, and somewhat easier to get the public interested in the local planning.

This probably tells that the closer planning questions relate to the public's conditions of life and interests the easier it is to get the public engaged – simply because planning as a frame of their conditions of life and their economic life becomes obviously relevant.

In this light, however, it is somewhat surprising that only a minority of the respondents (27%) at region level find the public participation in crisis. At municipal level a little more than half of the respondents find the public participation in crisis.

The explanation of this inconsistency between the two last questions occurs through the supplementary comments from the respondents: The regional respondents find it 'natural' and understandable that the public in general have little interest in the general and comprehensive regional planning which is very abstract and mainly of 'academic interest' for them. In addition, some respondents even point out 'lack of knowledge' about the complex planning issues as the main reason for the public not to be engaged in the general comprehensive planning.

In other words, it seem that the respondents think: well, that's the way it is!

5) What works and where are the problems?

i) Centralisation/decentralisation of power

The Danish planning and development system is highly decentralised and 'open' through public participation. In principle all citizens, land owners, economic interest group and other interest groups have access to influence the decision making. However, it is in reality very hard to get the public interested in planning questions in the planning process – especially the comprehensive regional and municipal planning. The public has a lack of knowledge and finds the planning inscrutable, according to the respondents. However, it is somewhat easier to get the public engaged in the local planning which obviously relates to their conditions of life and their economic life.

This public engagement does not only apply to the local planning initiated by the municipal council. The engagement often applies to a certain development proposal from a developer etc. who request a local plan to be produced. In that way planning is often initiated by 'from the bottom' by developers, and in consequence the upper-level plans (municipal and regional plans) are often changed because of the frame work control system.

These rather frequent amendments of municipal and regional plans contribute to explain why the public in general have little interest in comprehensive municipal and regional planning – simply because it can be and actually is changed frequently.

ii) Economic growth and final stage of planning process

Because local planning is often initiated by 'from the bottom' by developers, it can rightly be argued that the public (developers etc.) participate in Danish planning, and thus contribute to economic growth. However, this participation 'from the bottom' is out of the formal public participation system which consists of two phases: the idea stage and the debate stage. One reason for that economic growth issues are only weakly integrated in the two formal phases in regional and municipal planning answer could be the fact that the planning officials (who are responsible for the production of the plans as well as responsible for the public participation phases) normally are educated as civil engineers, architects or chartered surveyors with only little insight in growth management. But there might be other answers, too.

This leads to the question: How can economic growth issues be better integrated in the two formal phases in regional and municipal planning? Below, we will try to answer this question, based on a hypothesis that Denmark and Japan might learn from each other.

4. Discussion and conclusions

4.1 What can Japan learn from Denmark? Could Danish experiences contribute to improve the Japanese planning and decision making process?

Firstly, public participation is essentially based on information disclosure and transparency of decision process. As shown in the analysis, the Japanese planning system, shingi-kai especially, has certain problems in information disclosure and transparency. And, public opinions should be also opened to public. In relation to this particular issue the Danish system has an advantage compared to Japan.

Secondly, collecting as many as public opinions as possible are important. According to the Japanese City Planning Law, the public participation for idea stage is not duty for authorities, even though many authorities are now trying recently. There is no doubt that the public participation on the idea stage contributes to better participation.

The campaign and publishing about planning through various media, to vitalize public concern are possibly effective in Japan, too. When the purpose of public participation is to collect wide and many opinions from public, the Japanese definition of the people who can legally propose opinions seems to be too limited. And, longer inspection term is desirable.

Thirdly, uncertainty of responsibility is a serious problem in Japan. That is, mayor has the final power for planning decision making, but with respect to shingi-kai's decision. Mayor hardly changes shingi-kai's decision. However, the relation between mayor and shingi-kai is based on 'submission (by mayor) and report (by shingi-kai)'. That is, what to discuss by shingi-kai depends on mayor. Which has formal/real responsibility, mayor or shingi-kai? Who does actually consider and judge rightly the opinions from public? This uncertainty is disincentive for public. From this point, the responsibility is clearly on the councils in Denmark.

And fourthly, the Danish system allows local (municipal/regional) authorities' to give opinions to other authorities which are very important. Although Japan has 'framework control'-like system, it does not have the negotiation/coordination system between authorities on the same level. Consequently, shingi-kai is not able to discuss such issues. Nowadays, planning issues often cover wide area, and therefore, mutual dialogue among authorities is necessary.

This is what Japan can learn from Denmark.

4.2 What can Denmark learn from Japan? Could Japanese experiences contribute to improve the Danish planning and decision making process?

As mentioned above the main part of development projects in Denmark are initiated by developers, and usually these projects require production of a local plan. Many of these projects/local plans are not in accordance with the upper-level planning, which consequently will be changed 'bottom-up'. This indicates that the comprehensive planning only to some extent is a frame of the future development in Denmark, and the rather frequent amendments of municipal and regional plans are a symptom of how little the comprehensive plans reflect growth issues and development interests. These plans almost only contain restrictive provisions about where development should not occur or is forbidden. They hardly ever are about development opportunities that directly invite/attract enterprises to generate growth.

However, if an advisory shingi-kai-like organ was an integrated institutional part of the planning process in Denmark the regional and municipal planning might change from its present restrictive focusing to a more pro-active development focusing.

And in addition, the public participation phases in which the engagement of the public seems very difficult at especially regional plan level a shingi-kai-like organ with representation of different institutional and other interests (trade interests, agricultural interests, nature and environmental interests, residents organisations, member from upper-level authorities etc.) could bring up certain central focus points for debate – and thus 'catalyze' the public participation process. Such a re-vitalisation of the public participation system might improve the engagement from the public.

These ideas are what Denmark can learn from Japan. But, of course, any idea or inspiration has to be implemented with respect to the already established decision making system, and fit into the national culture and mind – which is very different crosswise Japan and Denmark.

5. Final remarks

As a part of the approaching 'administration structure reform' in Denmark (which is to be put through in 2007) counties and municipalities are to be given new and changed roles and duties. On regional level the regional plan will be replaced by a 'regional development promotion plan', and to support and promote growth as a 'bulwark' to safeguard against regional stagnation it has been proposed that a 'regional growth forum' should support the new regional councils in producing a 'growth promotion plan'.

Thus, at present time the Danish planning and decision making system probably can anticipate a movement towards a better integration of different trade interests and other interests.

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