

Outlooks on Participating People, Plans & Places 1

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This special issue brings together a set of contributions on public participation, from international scholars and practitioners. They provide insights into the 'state of the art' of citizen involvement in the governance of the built environment, including planning, design and management of places. The evolution of this field, and its current salience, is evidenced by the wealth of theory, empirics, and viewpoints brought to bear. For this reason, 'People, Plans & Places' is to be two issues of *Built Environment*, 45(1) and 45(2).

From the outset, our aim was 'to reflect on the current spectrum of participatory planning activities, and its implications for collectively shaping the built environment'. The work presented builds on long-standing debates over the uses and **misuses** of collaborative planning, and the relationship between citizens and state. Yet it goes beyond this to consider explicitly the contribution of citizen involvement to delivering physical development, communities and places. For some time, I have been arguing that the 'substance' of participation is critical. In other words, it matters what you are participating 'in'. And for participation in the built environment there are three aspects: people's rights to involvement in environmental decision-making; the processes of engaging with planning; and the ultimate effect of participation on places. Therefore, the articles in 'People, Plans and Places' foreground the spatial and environmental aspects of public involvement in the planning, design and management of built environments, while reflecting on issues of socio-economic justice and legitimacy of governance.

In this first part, entitled 'Outlooks on Participating', we take a step back to look at the

current perspectives on public participation in planning and place making. This begins with a theoretical piece from Brownill and Inch examining the purposes and challenges of participation, looking at historic priorities and those that endure. This is followed by four empirically informed articles that help 'take stock' of current tools and practices of participation, in a range of governance contexts and cultures of engagement. These reflect on the substance and meaningfulness of public involvement and the most recent international experiences, across formal and informal means of influence. We conclude the issue with a salutary call to a more participatory democracy from the Honorary President of the European Council of Spatial Planners.

The opening theoretical piece examines two seminal documents from 1969, which continue to have great relevance as they celebrate their 50th birthdays this year: the *Skeffington Report* that established key principles of involvement in planning in the UK; and the article by Sherry Arnstein on an eponymous ladder of participation with its 'rungs' of citizen empowerment. Reflecting on these, Brownill and Inch argue that the 'shifting terrain' of participation in planning is shaped and reshaped by underlying tensions and contradictions, and this can open up and close down opportunities for citizens to have influence. The following studies provide evidence of such 'openings and closures'.

The first two empirical papers examine two of the most high profile new channels for formal public participation; civic crowdfunding and citizen science. Sedlitzky and Franz examine *civic crowdfunding*, from the perspective of inclusion and empowerment. Using

data from North West Europe and North East USA, they unpack the rationales and practices associated with this disruptive mode of financing, as well as critical aspects of the governance context. The lessons suggest some potential to encourage participation and strengthen place attachment, particularly as applied to financing smaller scale developments, with the warning against over-reliance on this 'additional tool' or assumptions of inclusivity.

Newnam presents an in-depth case study of the work of *citizen scientists* engaged throughout the processes of a major development in Sydney, Australia. This work illustrates the complexities of knowledge production and the enormity of the task. It sheds light on the coalition building required for lay actors to bring new scientific knowledge into statutory processes, and suggests that the independent agency of communities can provide a valuable check on institutional assumptions about 'expert sources' of science.

The next two articles reflect on cases where the public have direct influence through actions that remain outside formal processes, and evaluate them in relation to concepts from participatory theory. Dudley *et al.* broach the critical topics of sustainability transitions and public acceptance. Their study of the dockless bike hire system in Manchester demonstrates the power of 'direct action', and shows how just how far this public is from being a 'passive receiver of technology'. Findings bring out the tensions inherent within the goal of deliver-

ing 'what is wanted', and challenge orthodox notions of what might constitute non-participation.

Zhu's ethnographic work in Beijing neighbourhoods brings out the realities of everyday life as a space for enabling place functions and community management. Framing these as performances highlights the continued agency of citizens and continual creativity in the search for influence within a highly top-down governance context.

These articles expose how the ongoing struggle for participation, that exists both within and outside statutory channels, is inherently a negotiation with existing governance structures. Our final article is a valuable response from the European Council of Spatial Planning-Conseil Européen des Urbanistes calling for greater public participation and setting out the aspirations of the *Charter on Participatory Democracy* based in an appreciation of diverse cultures, collective intelligence, and mutual respect. Bouche-Florin's direct call to action offers a rare insight into the drivers and brakes on international coalition building. It recalls the importance of reflective practice and fragility of 'thought leadership' within governance networks.

NOTE

1. With debates stemming most notably from the work of Healey, Forester, Innes, Flyvbjerg, Rydin and Yiftachel.