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Dilemmas of participatory network planning. A multidisciplinary and European comparative research project

An anthropological perspective

This is how you can influence!

- On the home page of the city of Botkyrka, inhabitants will find this headline when opening the website for community and political issues
- Part of an elaborated strategy for increasing inhabitants' involvement in local issues and planning
- Part of a worldwide discourse of and interest in participatory planning

Botkyrka challenges; local threats and timely discourses

- Segregation, migration, unemployment, a divided society
- A declining number of people actively involved and engaged in politics
- A discourse of participatory planning related to the discourse of a sustainable society

Participative network planning

- Urban planning for sustainability requires long-lasting participative network processes in order to formulate and implement integrated and holistic solutions.

- Horizontal modes of policy-making and planning 1. enhance efficiency and outcomes 2. vitalize and deepen democracy

- Participatory network planning is not easily reconciled with representative democracy as it risks undermining the chains of democratic accountability.

A multi-disciplinary approach

- ***A political science approach:***
- Participatory planning networks seen as institutional arrangements developed by interdependent actors, including politicians, planners and other participating actors, in order to fulfill their aims or the aims of the social groups they represent.

- Democracy theory and ideal models of participatory planning a means to understand ongoing participatory processes

- ***An anthropological approach:***
- Participatory arrangements are negotiated, acted upon and moulded in social interplay in which practical activities and social relations paint and give meaning to them.

- Participants motives and strategies are seen as embedded in their everyday lives and social networks inside and outside the social relationships and positions of the participatory frame and the formal political system. Understanding participants' lifeworlds , a bases for understanding participatory networks

A lifeworld perspective

- Lifeworld; the immediate social environment that contingently embeds the actor when taking part in participant planning/ decision making and when participant planning is actualized in discourses or other activities.

- Hence we investigate the field of social relations and positions embedding the individual actors and how an actor's way of participating in and giving meaning to participant planning is related by the concerns produced by his or her experiences and social networks inside and outside the participatory planning arrangements.

- When doing fieldwork this means a perspective open to the complexities in which the participatory network efforts might be embedded. Thus the phenomenon is on not on beforehand strictly defined nor what might be relevant to observe and investigate clearly delimited

A political field with an emerging culture

Methods:

- Fieldwork; talking, making contacts, observing and participating at events and meetings, investigating

Preliminary findings:

A political field of participatory planning/democracy

- A field a social relations, key persons, actors holding formal and informal positions
- A complex of strategic policies, policy declarations organization principles , committees and routines
- A elaborated complex of positions, levels, offices and departments

Involving young people. A field work trajectory

- Dialogue forum
- Invitation to women to take part in a renewal project
- A group of young women, a planner, a professional
- Youth centre, two processes: a dialogue and a coordinating network
- A group of young people, professionals working with young people and youth issues on different levels
- A young people's government
- Young people, professionals

Some points to explore further

- There are many and different ideas about participation around, when the Botkyrka Dialogue is motivated and argued for in formal policy documents. The policy idea of the Dialogue Policy, that is, is quite complex.
- Conflicts between the principles of participatory planning and representative democracy emerge in the interaction on the ground and may be seen as reflecting a genuine lack of experiences and knowledge about how to manage.
- There are tensions between different views on politicians' and planners' mandates, and obscurities about what questions one the hand politicians and on the other hand planners are responsible for and this seems to confuse the roles of dialogues.
- Inhabitants views on representative democracy vary and influence their expectations of and willingness to participate in dialogues.
- Participants' engagement, time, and resources vary as well as how they interpret what the dialogues mean and this influence the dialogue processes and outcomes.
- Differences in individual and collective interests, strategies and priorities have impact on participatory processes and the way the forum are used by the actors.