The interplay between citizen initiatives and invited participation in urban planning: An interaction research project

This project proposal is designed in cooperation with *Mistra Urban Futures,* a new global centre for sustainable urban development. The consortium consists of seven partners, four of which are involved in this project proposal: Chalmers, the University of Gothenburg, the City of Gothenburg, and the Region of Västra Götaland (VGR).

Background and problem areas

In the global competition for investment many cities become objects for gentrification with subsequent reshaping of certain areas and withdrawal of the state from others, a process reinforced by restrictions in public expenditure. In Sweden and other European countries suburbs are increasingly viewed as 'peripheries' attributed with 'territorial stigma' (Wacquant 2003) and commonly portrayed as places of 'fundamental otherness' (Dahlstedt 2005). Electoral participation is significantly lower in these areas than the national average (Tahvilzadeh 2009) and the inhabitants are underrepresented in other democratic activities (Blomqvist 2005).

One of the problems of uneven development in cities is a lack of good relations between established institutions of representative democracy and different groups of citizens. In addition, the passivity of the welfare state has reduced the efficiency of public services (Åström & Granberg 2009). The challenges are substantial to mitigate and adapt to climate change while at the same time meet the needs of a growing urban population and achieving an economically and socially sustainable development.

Often, citizen initiatives emerge as a response to the failures of formal planning. There are a multitude of such citizen initiatives, ranging from the *Right to the City* movement to local community groups organising meeting places and creating new solutions for sustainable development in their neighbourhood (Sassen 2009, Harvey 2006).

Another type of response, from the formal governing institutions, is *local government* in urban development processes. This refers to a political setting where public sector organisations are inclined to use interactive and inclusionary methods of decision making to a

larger extent than before (Hedlund & Montin 2009, Kooiman 2003, Rhodes 1997). In urban planning theory, this has been called the 'communicative turn' (Allmendinger 2002). In addition to arguments for democracy, planners argue that citizens participation can lead to a more human scale in urban design (Gehl et al. 2006), as well as new types of architectural practice (Blundell Jones et al. 2005).

The focus of our research is to examine the relation between the public institutions' attempts of inclusive planning processes and different forms of citizen initiatives. At present the institutions involved in citizen participation often lack knowledge and methods required to create successful processes (Swyngedouw 2005, Forester & Fischer 2005, Hickey & Mohan 2004). The implementation of citizen participation in Swedish urban planning has had different outcomes, and not always as 'democratic' as the intention (Åström & Granberg 2009, von Sydow 2008, Faga 2006). Therefore an essential part of this research project will be to develop knowledge about how to create an 'interplace' in planning (Stenberg 2004), i.e. processes where citizens and formal planning institutions can meet in constructive dialogues.

Aims and project design

The project's aim is a transdisciplinary production of knowledge about the role of citizen initiatives in local governance and how current design and planning practices may be developed in order to more fully draw from these initiatives as resources for sustainable urban development. This requires a reflective process involving research and practice in concrete planning situations. As we are specifically interested in responses to urban deprivation, we will perform a case study in a Swedish suburban area suffering from socio-economic stigmatisation.

The main research question: *How can citizen initiatives interplay with invited participation in local development work*? This question raises sub-questions:

- Which kinds of citizen initiatives exist? How do they function? What interests are manifested? How do they relate to formal planning institutions or other institutions involved in urban development? How do they influence local development?
- How can invited participation in planning processes be understood with regard to its democratic quality? What are the constraining and enabling factors increasing empowered participative governance? How do invited participatory measures interact with citizen initiatives?

- How can constructive dialogues between citizens and formal planning institutions be facilitated to support empowered participative governance and sustainable urban development?
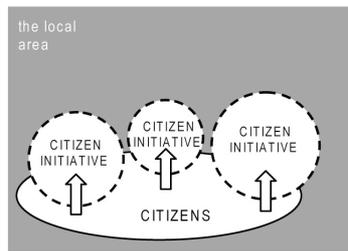
The sub-questions correspond to the three phases of the project: (1) mapping phase; (2) interaction phase; (3) synthesis phase. The phases partly overlap, each phase conditioning the following one. According to the components of each phase, different methods and theories are required:

1. *The mapping phase*. The objective is to map relevant experiences of citizen initiatives and invited participation in local development work, in the context of Swedish suburbs and in urban peripheries around the world. This work involves literature studies, seminars and study trips. We will also map the case study area, to get an overview of formal and informal actors, networks, activities and policies relevant for the research questions.
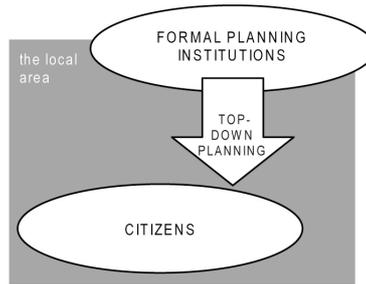
2. *The interaction phase*. The main activity is to develop participative processes based on seminars, workshops, exhibitions and interventions in public spaces. The aim is to create neutral meeting arenas ('interplaces') where citizens and representatives of formal planning institutions can meet and work together. The spectrum of competences in the project team is crucial for the combination of practice and research required.

3. *The synthesis phase*. The experiences are analysed and the findings formulated and presented. One important aim of this phase of the project is also to see how we may continue the work, building on the organisational and knowledge platforms we have created locally and internationally.
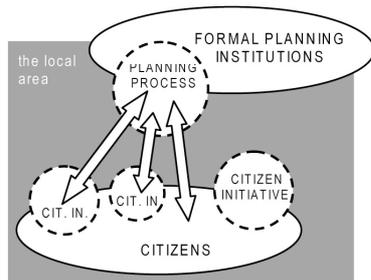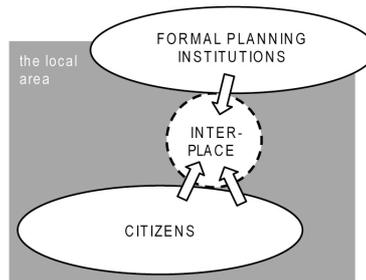
Theoretical Framework

A. Citizen initiatives   B. Top-down planning

C. Traditional participation   D. Planning in interplace

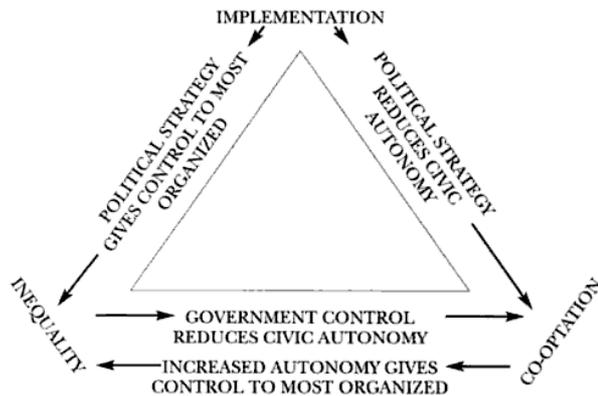*Schematic illustration of key concepts.*

1. Understanding invited participation

Discussions about democracy has characterised the last decades of political theory (Johansson 2008). While representative government remains the principle order it has been exposed to a number of critical inquiries (Gilljam & Hermansson 2003, Montin 2006). Part of this critique focuses on the limitations the system poses in realising equal participation for all groups. Despite the formal right to participate in political life, the actual rights practiced differ considerably between individuals and groups. Multiculturalists (Kymlicka 1995, Benhabib 1996), feminist (Eduards 2002) and radical theorists (Mouffe 2005) have all articulated critiques of representative government calling for multi-various instruments and reforms in order to deepen democracy.

This critique in mind we focus specifically on participation of citizens in urban planning. The design and implementation of a planning process can be viewed upon as a *policy process* (Hill 2005), involving analytical components such as interests, knowledge, relationship between actors, agenda-setting, and social equity (Granberg 2004). Policy processes in the planning departments shape the conditions for top-down invited participation. In particular, the perceptions and performance of public administrators in e.g. urban planning offices are

important for the interplay between citizen initiatives and formal planning (Wiberg 1987, Fischer & Forester 2005). As an example the role of the 'expert' often functions as a power mechanism vis-á-vis laymen in situations of deliberation. Further it is important to examine the purpose and who is invited to participate. A description of the dilemmas of participation can be seen below (Abers 2000:10).

Figure 1.1   The dilemmas of participation

2. Achieving empowered participatory governance

It is possible to classify varieties of local governance processes in order to understand its participatory outcomes (see table below). There are two modes of organisation: the *adversarial* model represents a competitive process where actors seek to maximize their interests through negotiations, and the *collaborative* model is aimed at solving common problems by seeking the 'broadest commonalities of interests' (Fung & Wright 2003). The governance process can in turn be either *top-down* (where decisions are made by actors at the apex of organisational hierarchy) or *participatory* (where the direct involvement of bottom tier actors is substantial). The combination of decision making and governance structures gives four possible outcomes of the processes. Achieving 'empowered participatory governance' is dependent on the form of decision making and the actors involved in the process.

Character of the decision-making process

Governance structure	Adversarial	Collaborative
Top-down	Conventional interest group politics	Experte/elite problem solving
Participatory	Some town meetings	Empowered participatory governance

Comment varieties of governance structures and processes in (Wright and Fung 2003:262)

Fung and Wright (2003:16) outlines three principles for successful citizen participation: *Practical Orientation; Bottom-Up Participation;* and *Deliberative Solution Generation.* Important components are: concrete concerns; the initiative needs to establish new channels for meetings between citizens and officials; and their task is to facilitate deliberative decision-making. Åström & Granberg (in Hedlund & Montin 2009) similarly focuses on the *scope of decision making*, *the communication* and the *influence*.

3. Forming an 'interplace'

In planning literature theories stress the importance of a focusing a so-called third world – the 'interplace' (Stenberg 2004) – in order to make use of citizens' activities and opinions in planning processes. Sociologists maintain that consciousness of *place* is born in an inter*space*, i.e. the capacity for learning and self-reflection needs an inter*space* between places to develop (Forsén & Fryk 1999). In comparison inter*place*, being a planning/design concept, got its name as it focuses on a real place: an inter*place*.

The notion of 'interplace' thus is about artifacts and how they can be designed in order to be more inclusive and support interaction (von Busch 2008). There are also important aesthetic considerations with citizens participation. Such initiatives may generate new spatial conditions and new types of architectural practice – challenging the normative values of traditional architecture and planning (Blundell Jones et al. 2005). With this in mind, it becomes clear that an interaction perspective entail power aspects: the interplace approach considers learning from conflicts, rather than just striving for consensus. This shift from traditional professionalism to one respecting participatory activism is also a shift of focus in professional practice to how practices interact with other actors and agencies, i.e. a shift from exclusive to inclusive. Interestingly, there are researchers combining actors and their networks with artifacts, thus not only stressing power being strengthened by networking, but also by artifacts and their durability. 'A difference in relative size is obtained when a micro-

actor can, in addition to enlisting bodies, also enlist the greatest number of durable materials' (Callon & Latour 1981:284).

Interactions

One of the interactions will be to develop an 'interplace' for organisational learning related to an initiative within the new campus in Hammarkullen: the master course *Suburbs – design & future challenges*. This course focus built environment in relation to social aspects of sustainable development and the students learn to practice participative tools and methods for design and planning in collaboration with citizens.

A second interaction process will be developed in Hammarkullen within the realm of the project *Young Energy* initiated by VGR. The project aims to develop methods for young people's participation in policy work concerning climate change. The idea is that politicians and public administrators are directly involved from the beginning of the project.

Another method used to involve citizens and local actors in the improvement of public places is *Safety Walks*. In Hammarkullen, a housing company and NGOs have used this method. As a third interaction process, we will use these walks to study gender-sensitivity and democracy issues.

The interactions will be facilitated by the ongoing process of reorganising the city into 10 instead of 21 districts, possibly implying the districts will have its own department for urban development issues (*Kommunstyrelsens protokoll 2010-01-27*). In this way, the municipality with its S2020 network (aimed at inclusion of social aspects in the municipal vision of sustainable development) can be a recipient of the knowledge gained in the research process.

Methodology

The project recognises the need for transdisciplinary research methods (Nowotny et al. 2001). In traditional academic research knowledge is often fragmented in its relation to theory and practice, whereas in more action-oriented, transdisciplinary, research approaches the aim is to link research and practice and create new theory, tools and practices (Reason & Bradbury 2001, Faga 2006). To secure reliability and validity, we apply a two-tier research design, based on participatory action research (PAR) and case study research (Stake 2006). PAR is a reflective process involving a systematic cyclical method of planning, taking action,

observing, evaluating (including self-evaluation) and critical reflecting prior to planning the next cycle (Reason & Bradbury 2001). Compared to PAR, traditional case study methods takes a short step back from the object of study to identify roles of, and interaction between, different stakeholders and of how events merge into the wider political and institutional context. Focus will be on identifying the sequence of events leading up to observed changes, where the main variables are the actors and their perceptions and goals within formal and informal institutions. Such analysis also includes elements of policy discourse analysis (Fischer & Forester 2005).
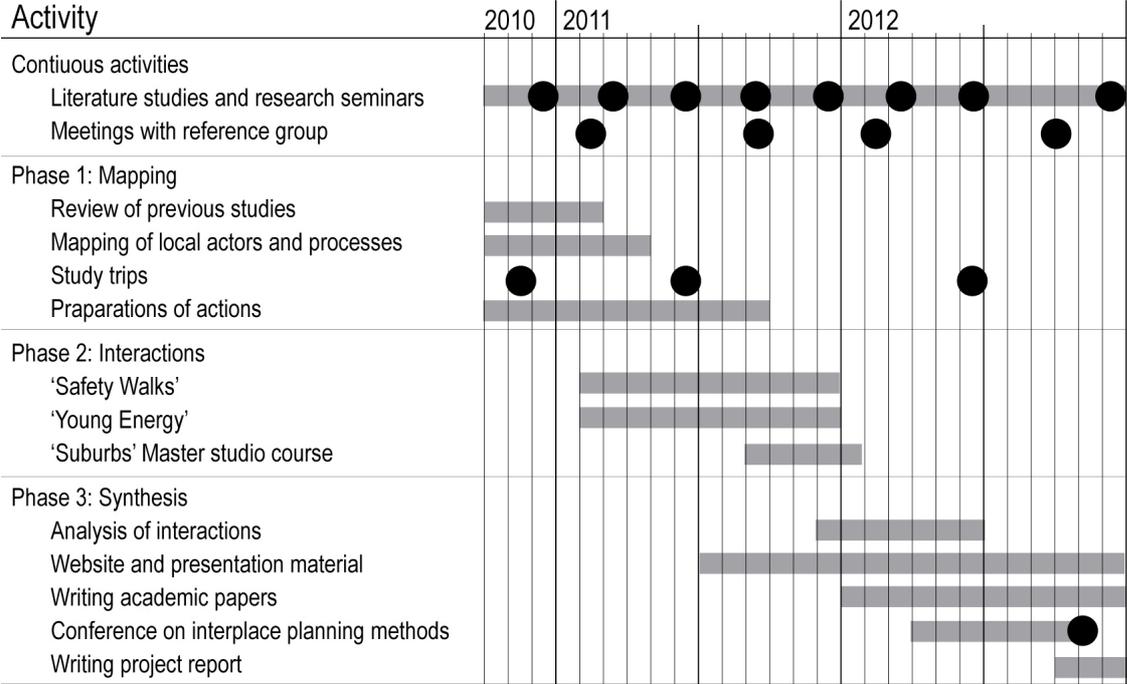
Our criteria for case study area selection have been to find a place which suffers from a territorial stigma of being deprived and where there is a richness of citizen initiatives. Moreover, we needed a place where we can involve local stakeholders in a series of interactions. Hammarkullen in Gothenburg meets the criteria. It has a specific advantage in the foundation of a new education campus (*Centre for Urban Studies*), gathering students, teachers and researchers from eight faculties, with a wide range of courses in the fields of social work, education, arts, music, architecture. There is also a direct connection to research, as the campus is in focus for one of the pilot project in *Mistra Urban Futures*.

There are several methods for capacity building based on interactive and collaborative learning processes, such as knowledge workshops (Innes & Booher 1999, Lieberg in Eriksson 2002) where the importance of a community of inquiry as a basis for the learning process is emphasised. The role of the participant can be described as that of a reflective practitioner (Schön 1995).

One key construct in the research design of our proposal is the *interactions*. They aim at opening 'interplaces' where different stakeholders meet. In order to achieve a high degree of reliability and gain a greater understanding of the process, all parts of the interaction phase will be documented and analyzed. The purpose is to analyze how relevant topics and concepts are talked about, described and understood. The analysis also includes the researcher/practitioner leading the interaction. We argue that this method allow the project a certain degree of reflexivity upon its own design, practice and learning outcomes (Argyris et al. 1985). We will also have a reference group with concerned actors to share experiences and discuss the outcomes of the interactions. When it comes to data collection techniques, several methods will be combined, aiming at cross-examination or triangulation. These include

ethnographic methods such as participant observation and key-informant interviews (Bernard 2002).

Timeplan

Activity	2010	2011		2012	
Contiuous activities					
Literature studies and research seminars	● ● ● ●	●	●	●	●
Meetings with reference group	●		●	●	●
Phase 1: Mapping					
Review of previous studies	▬				
Mapping of local actors and processes	▬				
Study trips	●	●		●	
Praparations of actions	▬				
Phase 2: Interactions					
'Safety Walks'		▬			
'Young Energy'		▬			
'Suburbs' Master studio course			▬		
Phase 3: Synthesis					
Analysis of interactions			▬		
Website and presentation material			▬		
Writing academic papers			▬		
Conference on interplace planning methods			▬	●	
Writing project report				▬	

Resources

As this is a transdisciplinary project proposal, it involves not only academics from different disciplines at GU and Chalmers but also practitioners from the City and VGR. For information about 'inkind' see attachment J.

Jenny Stenberg (project leader), researcher at Chalmers Architecture, is an associate professor in urban design and planning with a special focus on sustainable development. She is vice manager for the recently started higher education campus *Centre for urban studies* and examiner for the master course *Suburbs – design & future challenges,* both in Hammarkullen.

Hans Abrahamsson is an associate professor in peace and development research at the School of Global Studies, GU. He is also visiting professor in Global Political Studies at Malmö University with focus on local impressions of globalisation.

Pål Castell is landscape architect about to finalise his PhD in sustainable urban design at Chalmers Architecture in June. His thesis *Managing yards and togetherness* is about citizen participation in ethnically segregated and stigmatised areas.

Henric Benesch has a PhD in design at the Faculty of Applied and Performing Arts GU. In his thesis *Under the canopy – an environment for artistic research* he, as an architect, focused on issues of change regarding the relation between environments and activities.

Nazem Tahvilzadeh is PhD student (planned dissertation Dec 2010) at the University of Gothenburg, working with public administration theory with a focus on womens' and ethnic minorities' participation in political processes.

Martin Berg has a M.Sc. in global studies with a focus on sustainable urban development and transdisciplinary knowledge production. He has facilitated this amongst practitioners, researchers and civil society in Angered.

Lars Jadelius is an associate professor in architecture and lecturer in cultural science and pedagogy with focus on modernity, knowledge progress and learning processes for creative cities. He is active as a consultant and chairman of the Society of World Village.

Emma Corkhill has a M.Sc in geography. She is employed by VGR to develop citizen dialogue *Young Energy* in collaboration with municipalities and city districts on city planning and climate change.

Vanja Larberg has a Master in Architecture. She is employed by City of Gothenburg to be involved in the development of S2020 which aims at including social aspects in the vision of sustainable development when implemented in the city.

Sara Danielsson has a M Arts in Design at the School of Design and Crafts and she has published several manuals to facilitate for citizen initiatives in urban planning, e.g. *Three steps for new city life*.

Mia Andersson-Ek is a human geographer and environmental planner with focus on gender and democracy. In 2008 Mia Andersson-Ek performed an evaluation of *Safety Walks* for Gothenburg's Central Crime Prevention Secretariat (TMG).

Outcomes

We expect outcomes primarily on three levels. For the international research community the main strategy for communicating result is by publications in academic journals. Second, we see planning practitioners and policy makers as an important group of stakeholders. Here, concrete examples of how general findings can be applied are important and we plan to reach out through a website, information material, lectures and a national conference on participatory planning methods. Third, we also acknowledge outcomes in terms of capacity-building in the local area. Our activities will be a learning process, for ourselves and for local actors participating. Moreover, we will contribute to the networking between involved local and municipal actors, which builds capacity for the future.

Except from these results, we expect a number of spin-off results in terms of projects and collaborations. We have plans to apply funding for comparative case studies in Kisumu, New Dehli and Cape Town. *Mistra Urban Futures* provides an organisational basis for collaboration in these and other cities. Through the Centre for Environment and Sustainability (GMV) we also have a platform for outreach and future research proposals.

To sum up, our tangible deliveries will consist of:

- Four papers submitted to international academic journals

- Website

- Information material and lectures directed towards Swedish planning practitioners

- Conference for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers

- Final project report to Formas

Societal value

The project has relevance for all prioritised areas in Formas' call:

- It deals with processes and forms of collaboration and partnership in urban planning. The focus is the interplay between the inhabitants and the city's institutions.

- The search for transdisciplinary system solutions to local development problems is an essential part of the project. One of the planned interactions is explicitly aiming at promoting more sustainable lifestyles.

- The third prioritised area accurately describes the very basis for what our interactions aim at. The project will propose guidelines for how local participative planning processes could be designed in an integrative and inclusive way.

- A focus on the social dimension of sustainable development has to a great extent been neglected in research on design and planning processes. This project may contribute to a change in society, in accordance with Agenda 21 and other visionary documents on sustainable development.

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