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Understanding context and its influence on collaborative planning processes: a contribution to communicative planning theory

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ABSTRACT

Communicative Planning Theory (CPT) has been heavily criticized for neglecting context and for not paying sufficient attention to how it influences collaborative planning. While some CPT scholars have attempted to address this critique, there are still limited insights into how context hinders or facilitates the realization of collaborative qualities in planning. The paper contributes to attempts to make CPT more attuned to context by focusing on how context influences specific collaborative processes. It develops an approach that sees collaborative processes as embedded in and shaped by the immediate interplay between institutions and agency. The approach is demonstrated in the analysis of two collaborative planning processes in Ahmedabad, India and Bloemfontein, South Africa. The paper argues for the need to look at the interplay between institutional and agential factors when analysing context. It also highlights the important role that agency plays in mediating the influence of context in specific planning processes.

Introduction

Collaborative approaches to planning are well-established in policy and practice. Underpinning such approaches are different strands of theory, including participatory, deliberative (Forester 1999, 2009) and collaborative planning (Healey 1997; Innes and Booher 2003), often gathered under the umbrella term *communicative planning theory* (CPT). The centrality of CPT within the field of planning has led to extensive scrutiny of its underlying ideas and associated practices. Subsequent critiques and academic debates have been centred on the limited attention that CPT places on issues of power and conflicting differences, hence questioning the practical applicability of CPT principles (e.g. Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2002; Huxley and Yiftachel 2000; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998; Watson 2003).

An interrelated, but less debated, critique of CPT concerns its neglect of *context* (Healey 2003). It is argued that CPT overlooks how forces that operate beyond a particular planning process may facilitate or hinder realization of collaborative qualities such as inclusiveness, power balance and consensus (Calderon 2013; Huxley and Yiftachel 2000; McGuirk 2001). This critique is significant in Global South contexts where underlying assumptions of CPT, such as an advanced Western liberal democracy and a well-functioning civil society, may not hold (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Watson

2008). It is thus argued that context matters and that the realization of collaborative qualities is significantly influenced by the context in which it takes place (Connelly 2010).

Nowadays, it is broadly recognized that planning processes are situated and shaped by their context. Hence, good awareness of context and a capacity to diagnose and act according to it through context-specific responses are considered crucial for realizing collaborative qualities (Healey 2003; Innes and Booher 2003; Laws and Forester 2015). Despite these recommendations, leading CPT scholars such as Forester (2016) note that there is rarely any clear reference to what is meant by context and what about it actually matters.

A few studies of collaborative planning have engaged with context, exploring it mainly through New Institutionalist ideas. The focus has been on how context hinders or facilitates shifts towards collaborative modes of governance (Gonzalez and Healey 2005; Healey 2007a, 2004); the mainstreaming of innovative collaborative practices (Coaffee and Healey 2003); and the institutionalization of transnational legal frameworks for collaboration (Bjarnadóttí 2008; Blicharska et al. 2011). These studies have been important in making collaborative planning research more attuned to context. However, their focus on broad long-term institutional dynamics and transformations at the level of a country or city provide limited insights into how context influences *specific collaborative planning processes*, i.e. sequences of facilitated activities intended to enable deliberation between multiple stakeholders across differences towards consensual outcomes. This knowledge gap is problematic since it prevents a deeper understanding of how context influences the specific and situated processes that constitute the everyday practice of many planners.

This paper aims to contribute to ongoing attempts to make CPT more attuned to context. This is done by focusing on how context influences specific collaborative planning processes. First we assess how New Institutionalist ideas, in particular the interaction between 'structure and agency' (following DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Giddens 1984), are used to understand context. We argue that current New Institutionalist approaches used in collaborative planning studies (e.g. Gonzalez and Healey 2005; Healey 2007a, 2004) need to be adjusted in order to study specific planning processes. We then present an alternative analytical approach following Jessop's (2007, 2001) and Hay's (2002) focus on the immediate interplay between institutions and agency in everyday socio-political activities. We operationalize the approach and use it to examine how context influenced the implementation of a CPT-inspired collaborative approach in two planning processes in Ahmedabad, India and Bloemfontein, South Africa. We conclude by emphasizing the need to look at the interplay between institutional and agential factors when analysing the influence of context and argue that although context does indeed matter for specific collaborative processes, its influence will ultimately depend on the agency of the actors involved.

New institutionalist ideas in the understanding of context

The concept institution is used differently in different fields of social and political inquiry. In this paper, we follow Moulaert, Jessop, and Mehmood's (2016) definition of institutions as 'socialised structures' comprising a relatively enduring and interconnected set of formal regulations and procedures, and informal norms and routines that (more or less) govern specific spheres of action, such as specific planning processes. As socialized structures, institutions shape how things are normally done or what is considered appropriate action within a particular government, organization or community. Accordingly, institutions provide opportunities for particular forms of 'doing' planning (e.g. expert or technocratic-based processes), encouraging and prioritizing, for instance, certain actors, procedures for decision-making and outcomes, while constraining or excluding others that do not comply to them (Raitio 2012; Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012).

All planning is embedded within several nested institutions (Alexander 2005). Institutions are thus commonly associated with the context within which planning occurs and acquires meaning (Verma 2007). Planning actors, such as planners, residents or other stakeholders, are also institutionally embedded; what they can do in a planning process, how they do it and how much power they can

mobilize to do it, are influenced by the nested institutions within which they operate. However, institutions are not fully determining on actors' actions. Actors can act and use their agency, i.e. their ability to pursue and achieve their intentions, in ways that reproduce or differ from their institutions (Hay 2002; Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012). As explained below, this gives actors and their agency an important role in the constitution of institutions and in determining the influence that context has on specific planning processes.

Similar ideas on institutions have been used to stress the significance of context within CPT (Healey 1997, 31–68; Healey 2003). However, such ideas have not been central in CPT-related research. As recognized by Healey (2003) or as seen in the work of Forester (1999; also Laws and Forester 2015), preference has been for fine-grained accounts of planning practices and planners' work, with little analytical focus on the broader institutional setting where these are situated.

Recently, however, new institutionalist ideas have been revisited and refined in studies of planning and collaboration (Alexander 2005; Blicharska et al. 2011; Coaffee and Healey 2003; Gonzalez and Healey 2005; Healey 2007a, 2007b; Raitio 2012; Verma 2007). These studies engage with context by focusing on the way that institutional opportunities and constraints interact with the specific histories and geographies of individuals and social groups (Healey 2007b, 2003). Such understanding follows sociological analysts, such as Giddens (1984) and DiMaggio and Powell (1991), who claim that structure and agency do not exist in isolation, but are in continuous interaction. As socialized structures, institutions shape actors' actions, but those same actions reproduce or transform institutions. Accordingly, analytical attention should both be paid to institutions, their constraints and opportunities, and the capacity of individuals to act in ways that sustain institutions or deviate from, and potentially change, them (Healey 2007b).

Institutionalist ideas are mainly used in studies of collaborative planning to investigate how context influences the processes of embedding policies, tools and governance modes which encourage stakeholder involvement and collaboration in planning at national or municipal level (e.g. Bjarnadóttí 2008; Blicharska et al. 2011; Coaffee and Healey 2003; Gonzalez and Healey 2005; Healey 2007a, 2004). The focus on embedding processes, also referred to as 'institutionalisation' or 'institutional transformation', often leads to an analytical emphasis on institutions rather than the role of agency. Thus, although institutionalist-based collaborative planning studies stress the importance of context through the ontological duality (interplay) of institutions and agency, it can be argued that they deliver analytical dualism (separation). This dualism is problematic for the study of specific collaborative planning processes, as explained below.

Jessop (2007, 2001) and Hay (2002) propose an alternative approach which we consider appropriate for studying *specific collaborative planning processes*. The approach responds to their critique of Giddens' analysis of the structure-agency relationship, which suggests 'methodological bracketing' or temporary suspension of structure when analysing agency, and of agency when analysing structure (Giddens 1984, 281–372). Jessop (2001, 1224) describes this as 'dualism masquerading as duality', which is similar to the analytical dualism that arises in institutionalist-based collaborative planning studies.

The value of Jessop (2001) and Hay's (2002) approach for the study of specific collaborative planning processes is its focus on the immediate interplay between institutions and agency in everyday socio-political activities, rather than during long processes of institutional transformation. A key feature of this approach is that it follows a social constructivist understanding of institutions which recognizes that, although existing within a government, organization or community, institutions are not material factors that can act on their own (Hay 2002). They emerge and are reproduced within the specific spatial and temporal horizons of action pursued by specific actors. In other words, there is a context in which planning processes are situated which has institutional constraints and opportunities, but its influence only becomes activated through, and in the face of opposition from, the actions and behaviour of those that participate in a given activity (Hay 2002). This shows the key role of actors in mediating (supporting, reinforcing or diminishing) the influence of institutions, and thus context, in specific planning processes. It also shows how conflicts and

power relations are inherent in the interaction between institutions and actors (Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012).

In their mediating role, actors who strategically or unconsciously operate, or direct others to operate, in a conventional manner not only reproduce and sustain existing institutional constraints and opportunities, but also generate compliance with such institutions (Hay 2002). This reinforces the influence that context has on specific planning processes. In contrast, actors that act, or provide opportunities to act, differently from what is 'normal' challenge existing institutions and thus potentially diminish the influence of context. The latter can be seen for example in Connelly's (2010) study of how planners use their agency to implement collaborative ideals even in contexts where public engagement in planning is not welcomed. Hence, an analysis of the influence that context has on specific planning processes cannot be performed without close attention to actors and how they use their agency to reproduce or deviate from the institutional setting in which they operate.

For the present analysis of how context influences specific planning processes, we adopt an analytical approach that, following institutionalist ideas, stresses the duality of institutions and agency. However, to avoid the risk of analytical dualism, we use Jessop's (2007, 2001) and Hay's (2002) approach to how institutions and agency operate in relation to one another and the important role that the latter has in analysis of how institutions are reproduced or challenged in specific everyday socio-political activities.

Analysing the influence of context in specific collaborative planning processes

In investigating the influence of context in specific collaborative processes, we operationalize the ontological and analytical duality between institutions and agency by identifying a set of institutional and agential factors. These factors are *norms, regulations* and *routines* (at the level of institutions) and *understandings*, *values*, *resources* and *relationships* (at the level of agency). Each of these factors and their analytical focus is explained below.

In selecting the factors at the level of institutions, we follow North's (1990) definition of institutions as the 'rules of the game' and Ostrom's (2006, 16–17) conceptualization of institutional rules as: (i) norms or cultural prescriptions that guide prudential or moral behaviour; (ii) regulations mandated by an authority which permit or forbid certain actions; and (iii) commonly used strategies or routines for engaging in a situation or solving a problem. Hence, our respective focus on norms, regulations and routines. By focusing on these three factors, we also tailor our approach to institutions specifically related to collaborative planning practices (Raitio 2012, 2008). We chose factors that can be easily recognized by actors and described to a researcher if asked to explain and justify their and/or other's actions (see also Ostrom's (2006) conceptualization of 'working rules'). This responds to critiques of the commonly used all-encompassing definitions of institutions, considered problematic for both analysis and theorization (Lowndes 2002).

Accordingly, in our analytical approach the focus on *norms* is on unwritten rules that guide and legitimize participants' behaviour within a planning process. Concerning *regulations*, the focus is on legal frameworks or written guidelines that stipulate how (collaborative) planning practices and procedures ought to be. For *routines*, the focus is on the repertoires and embedded ways of working of individuals and organizations involved in a planning process. Following the previously described social constructivist understanding of institutions, we direct analytical attention to the way that these institutional factors are reproduced, or not, in a process by the participating actors.

The agency factors, i.e. understandings, values, resources and relationships, are based on a definition of agency as the capacity of actors to pursue and realize their intentions within the structural constraints and opportunities provided by institutions (Hay 2002; Jessop 2001). For the purpose of this paper, this means actors' capacity to act or behave in ways that facilitate or hinder the realization of collaborative qualities within a specific planning process. Knowledge and values about planning and collaboration and resources (including capital and time) are considered important in determining such agency (Connelly 2010; Moulaert, Jessop, and Mehmood 2016).

Furthermore, actors always face possible opposition from other actors who activate institutional constraints or opportunities with their actions when pursuing their own intentions (Jessop 2007, 2001). Thus, it is important to look not only at the agency of individual actors but also at how such agency is influenced by the relationship and interaction among different actors (c.f. the main focus on planners of Connelly 2010; Laws and Forester 2015).

Accordingly, our analysis of *understandings* considers actors' knowledge of collaborative planning and of the issue handled within the process. For *values*, we consider the motivations and attitudes of actors to work in collaborative ways. When looking at *resources*, we examine the material and human resources that actors have or can mobilize in order to operationalize the process in a collaborative manner. Finally, concerning *relationships* between the actors that are involved in a process, we consider interpersonal relationships based on personality or behaviour and stakeholder relationships based on interests or agendas.

Turning to practice

In this section, we use the factors listed above to analyse how context influenced the implementation of a collaborative planning approach, the Inquiry-Based Approach (IBA), in two planning processes in Ahmedabad, India, and Bloemfontein, South Africa; two contexts where legislation and political rhetoric promotes stakeholder involvement in decision-making, but where planning remains a government/expert-driven matter. The value of this analysis is twofold. First, IBA is a practice-orientated guide for collaborative planning that reflects many CPT ideals (see below and SWEDESD (2014a) for details). Our analysis thus provides insights into the influence of the studied contexts in the two planning processes regarding realization of CPT qualities of collaboration, such as inclusiveness, power balance and consensus-building. Second, our analysis deals with parts of the world in which neglect of context in CPT is perceived as particularly problematic. This, reflects the broader debate on the challenges of 'exporting' CPT ideas and practices from the Global North to the Global South, often via international development programmes (Connelly 2010; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Watson 2008, 2003).

The empirical data used in the analysis were obtained from documents regarding collaborative planning in the two contexts and reports and evaluations of the two planning processes. Five semi-structured interviews were held with process participants, corresponding to half the main stakeholders that participated in the two processes, and one focus group discussion was held with managers and facilitators of IBA. These were complemented with participant observations (by the second author, who was one of the managers of the programme supporting implementation of IBA in the two cities). Data collection and analysis followed the institutionalist ideas and the distinction between institutional and agential factors presented in previous sections.

The inquiry-based approach

The Inquiry-Based Approach was developed by the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDESD), in partnership with a large number of international organizations[1] (for details on the design of the IBA see Westin et al. 2013). It originated as part of the Supporting Urban Sustainability (SUS) programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented in two editions. The SUS programme assisted multistakeholder collaborative processes in 14 cities in Southern Africa, South-East Asia and Sweden, focusing on ecosystem services and poverty alleviation projects. The two planning processes studied here were among the six cities that participated in the first edition (2010–2011). These particular cases were selected to ensure contrasts regarding institutional settings, the actors involved, the issues addressed, the outcomes achieved and implementation of IBA.

The IBA was designed for enabling multi-stakeholder groups, to reach a set of process objectives: the *IBA process objectives (POs)* (Table 1). These *POs* were inspired by CPT principles regarding

Table 1. The Inquiry-Based Approach (IBA) process objectives (adapted from SWEDESD 2014a).

IBA process objectives
PO1. Establish an inclusive and representative stakeholder team
PO2. Provide equal opportunity to participate
PO3. Handle conflict and dissonance in a constructive way
PO4. Mitigate power asymmetries
PO5. Co-create knowledge about a wicked situation
PO6. Make decisions in consensus

inclusiveness, power balance and consensus-building (as found in, e.g. Forester 1999, 2009; Healey 1997; Innes and Booher 2003). *POs* 1 and 2 represent the *engagement dimension* of an IBA process, focusing on forming a multi-stakeholder team of representatives from different sectors of society and establishing a process that provides opportunities for their equal participation in discussions and decisions. *POs* 3 and 4 concern the *deliberation dimension* of IBA, aiming at handling differences, conflicts and power distortions through facilitated deliberations. *POs* 5 and 6 cover the *decision dimension* of IBA and involve joint development of shared understandings and knowledge that enable and support consensus in decisions (SWEDESD 2014a).

A unique feature of an IBA-based process is the use of an *inquiry* concerning the situation or problem to be addressed. The inquiry serves as a guide for participants' joint understanding of the problem and for making decisions on how to address it. In Ahmedabad, the process concerned living conditions in neighbourhoods around a polluted city lake and pursued the inquiry: 'How can we improve the quality of life in informal settlements around lakes and ponds in Ahmedabad?' In Bloemfontein, the process focused on developing a programme for greening the city while generating employment, with the inquiry: 'How do we improve ecosystem services through greening, cleaning and recycling while reducing poverty and creating economic opportunities?' (SWEDESD 2014b).

Participants in an IBA-based process are expected to jointly formulate and pursue the inquiry through implementation of POs. For this, IBA provides a database of activities and facilitation techniques, regarding, e.g. stakeholder mapping, trust-building, social learning, shared understanding, action planning and conflict management, that can be used in designing a collaborative process (SWEDESD 2014a).

As part of the SUS programme, the multi-stakeholder teams in each city attended three international workshops where SWEDESD provided inputs on the IBA and its activities. The SUS programme funded these workshops, primarily aiming at supporting local collaborative processes. Local authorities from the participating cities, in collaboration with local organizations that participated in development of the IBA, were themselves expected to design and implement their collaborative process in their contexts within the one-year framework of the SUS programme by following the IBA and its POs. The management and resources available for the local processes varied between the cities and depended on the local authorities and organizations involved. The focus of our analysis is on the local processes which 'imported' the IBA and attempted to pursue its POs. In the following section, we describe how the context influenced the two collaborative processes with regard to the institutional and agential factors described previously. Following the paper's purpose, the focus is on the collaborative qualities in each of the planning processes based on IBA POs, and not on evaluating the process or its outcomes (for details of the latter, see SWEDESD 2014b).

Analysis of the collaborative planning process in Bloemfontein

Bloemfontein joined the SUS programme through a partnership between the Regional Environmental Education Programme of the Southern African Development Community (SADC-REEP) and the City Mayor's Office. The goal of the collaborative process was to develop a programme conceived by the Mayor for greening the city while generating employment. Following IBA's suggested process design, the process was expected to start with an engagement meeting; in which

representatives from different sectors of society were to be invited to map relevant stakeholders and form a multi-stakeholder team. However, this activity did not take place. Instead, the Mayor hand-picked the team, appointing high-level officers and technicians from various government agencies working with issues related to his greening initiative. A participant from the private (banking) sector was the only non-government member invited to the multi-stakeholder team. This was a clear deviation from the intention to form a diverse team as suggested in PO1 of IBA.

The constitution of the multi-stakeholder team followed typical planning *routines* within the municipality where collaboration among government agencies is common, but involvement of civil society organizations or individuals is limited (Carrim 2011; Siddle 2011). Stakeholder participation in local government issues is highly promoted in *regulations* such as the South African Constitution of 1996, the Local Government Municipal Systems Act of 2000 and the South African Local Government Model. Mandatory stakeholder involvement is required in projects and programmes such as Integrated Development Plans and Community Development Forums (Heller 2012), but not to the type of programme that the process intended to develop.

The Mayor's direct appointment of the team members reproduced the existing gap between the ideals of the mentioned regulations and the commonly used routines. Within the later, stakeholder involvement relies mainly on collecting information from residents or in some cases on co-funding projects with private organizations and investors. This was the case with the involvement of the bank, invited 'to assist with funds for the project' through its corporate social investment programme and 'not because of its stake in it', as one participant explained.

As a partner in the development of IBA, SADC-REEP was expected to support the local process in the implementation of the approach by appointing a local facilitator. However, this was not possible due to logistical reasons and difficulties in coordinating with the manager of the process who was one of the high-level officers appointed by the Mayor. This person took the role of process facilitator despite having no training or experience for this task. Such inexperience echoed all members of the multi-stakeholder team whose lack of knowledge and experience with collaborative planning limited their *understanding* of the activities and methods suggested by IBA. For all participants, this was a new approach to decision making that differed from the top-down, expert-based processes to which they were accustomed.

In addition to this lack of knowledge and experience, the *norms* that were reproduced and became dominant in the Bloemfontein team made it difficult to establish a process that allowed equal participation in discussions as suggested in PO2 of IBA's engagement dimension. The norms enacted in the team displayed a mix of hierarchical and patriarchal patterns of behaviour. This was apparent from conduct where the actions and opinions of the high-level officers were seldom questioned and where female participants' participation was often suppressed. This included the process facilitator, who according to one participant, saw the role of 'facilitators as implanting their own ideas as to what needs to happen'.

The way that such norms influenced equal participation in the team, and how this was reinforced by one of the team members, was clearly described by a female team member:

> I wasn't going to be just a token. I felt that I'm credible, I have something to offer, and I can make the input for the greatness of what we're all striving towards. But I was then called to order (by one of the senior male officers) and I was not in a position to continue that.

Closely linked to these norms, the *values* reflected in the participating high-level officers showed little motivation and commitment towards deliberation and equal participation. Their high-level positions implied powerful actors with strong authority accustomed to giving orders. As described below, this not only had a significant influence to how differences, conflicts and power asymmetries were handled during the process, i.e. the deliberation dimension of IBA. It also created deeply conflicting *relationships* among team members. This was seen particularly among the high-level officers, who had a strong political orientation and saw in the process an opportunity to compete for individual recognition and funding opportunities, as one participant explained:

> You could see a power struggle. Everybody was in there to make their organisation win. Not everybody, but some. What I'm trying to say is that it's very easy to forget about the big picture and think about the organisation and your specific job expectation, and wanting to come back as a winner.

According to another participant, such relationships plus the lack of commitment towards collaboration reduced the process facilitator's incentive to carry out the series of planned meetings for developing the greening programme and dealing with the mentioned conflicts in a collaborative and facilitated manner. This was reinforced by the limited *resources* that were available for running the process, with no additional funding, staff support or time available to participants and their organizations outside their normal duties.

Against the intention of PO3 in the deliberation dimension of IBA, the process facilitator and another senior participant took over the process and decided to develop most of the programme in their agencies, following the routines of the municipality. Other team members including, the less senior and female participants were relegated to secondary tasks. This reinforced rather than balanced the hierarchical and patriarchal power asymmetries in the team, *vis-à-vis* PO4 in the deliberation dimension of IBA.

When becoming aware of this situation, the SUS managers stressed to the process facilitator the importance of carrying out the planned meetings and establish an inclusive dialogue among participants. This request was met with resistance by the high-level officer, who 'struggled to actually accept rules of democracy and equality', as a SUS manager reflected.

Another important aspect of relationships influenced the role and participation of the representative of the bank in the process. Bloemfontein Municipality was one of the main clients of the bank that the person was representing. This compelled her to act in ways that would not jeopardize the relationship between the bank and the municipality. At one point the bank representative felt the need to inform the SUS managers about the problematic dynamics within the multi-stakeholder team. Yet, she felt that her employer's relationship with the municipality conditioned what she could say and do:

> It became complex to, you know, give honest input … it was very tricky to, kind of, say: 'we need help, because this is not working' … when you're supposed to blow the whistle, you can't really, because of the repercussions of the relationship.

Decisions within the process led to a programme that conformed to the ideas that the City Mayor initially had for the greening initiative instead of co-creating new knowledge of the issue at hand, as P05 in the decision dimension of IBA suggests. 'It really was based on what we already had, what our Mayor already had in mind', reflected one of the participants. The Mayor's envisioned ideas and solutions and the dominance of government officers within the team created a uniformed *understanding* of the situation which gave little room for finding alternatives to the Mayor's ideas and solution to the problem. The involvement of the bank as the only non-government participant in the process created little resistance to this understanding. In addition to the above-mentioned relationship with the municipality, its participation was primarily based on its corporate social investments. Reflecting on this situation and on the overall dynamics of the process, one participant said:

> In the beginning we came up with very sound problem statements, which were really talking to the needs of the community, and that would have contributed positively, but because of those issues that I've mentioned, which played out along the way, we ended up having a particular project that doesn't necessarily speak to that.

Nonetheless, it was the participation of senior officers and the continuation of the government-based routines that enabled fast development and implementation of the greening initiative, creating important changes on the ground. However, contrasting PO6 in the decision dimension of IBA, this outcome did not result from a collaborative and consented effort, as one participant said:

> The outcome of the project would be presented as work done by the team, whereas the team really had minimal access and input to the whole project … it just didn't happen in the way it was meant to.

Analysis of the collaborative planning process in Ahmedabad

Local authorities in association with the Centre of Environment Education (CEE), a Centre of Excellence of the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests promoting environmental awareness and a partner organization in development of IBA, managed the collaborative process in Ahmedabad. The goal of the process was to explore new ways to improve the living conditions of informal settlements located around a polluted lake in the city.

A mix of participants from local authorities, academia and a NGO representing civil society formed the Ahmedabad multi-stakeholder team, as PO1 in the engagement dimension of IBA suggests. Members of the multi-stakeholder team were selected from nearly 20 stakeholder organizations, who attended an engagement workshop arranged by CEE at the start of the process. This differed from the predominantly expert-based planning *regulations* and *routines* of the city. Regarding the former, the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian Constitution acknowledge the importance of citizen participation for local governance (Sahni 2003). However, these amendments lack specific guidelines, leaving details of implementation to local authorities (Heller 2012). In Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act of 1976 regulates stakeholder involvement in planning processes and mandates it only for the city's comprehensive plan. Also for planning schemes over 100 hectares, which exceeded the focus area of the collaborative process in this city. Accordingly, a participant stated that in a typical planning process, projects such as the one they intended to develop as part of the SUS programme would 'not go through such a process of discussion with stakeholders'.

In line with the mentioned regulations, *routines* of stakeholder involvement in government-led planning processes are characterized by rigid procedures of public consultation based on notifications and hearings for collecting objections (Kumar and Pandit 2013). Other routines of collaboration in planning include working together with ward representatives to collect information regarding the needs and problems of each ward. However, community input often has limited influence over decisions (Kumar and Pandit 2013).

CEE played a key role in helping the process deviate from the expert-based planning regulations and routines typical of the municipality. The organization's authority and well-established *relationships* with the municipality and relevant organizations, helped to bring together stakeholders with extensive experience with Ahmedabad's polluted lakes and their surrounding neighbourhoods. This gave them well-grounded and diverse *understanding* of the problem, including physical and environmental planning, poverty alleviation and community development. CEE also appointed a local facilitator to manage the process and help the team pursue their inquiry.

Contributing also to the inclusiveness of the process, in relation to PO1 of IBA, was the experience and grassroots-based routines of the participating NGO and its representative. Both were well-established in the neighbourhoods surrounding the lake, with extensive knowledge of the living conditions and needs of inhabitants, as mentioned by another team member:

> She (the representative from the NGO) was very familiar with the people living around, she was very familiar with the lifestyle, she was very familiar with the incomes and what they wanted the land to be. So she helped with meetings with the residents around the lake, she facilitated those meetings, she brought people together.

Participants had nonetheless little knowledge and experience of collaborative activities and methods. Stakeholder mapping, deliberative workshops, collaborative action planning and conflict management activities such as the ones suggested by IBA were new to them. This included the local facilitator appointed by CEE who more than functioning as a facilitator in discussions, helped the team arrange meetings and document their process.

Despite this, participants' *values* were supportive of the collaborative ideals underpinning the process. They considered their participation as an opportunity to contribute to the living conditions of people living around the polluted lake. This gave them high motivation and led to positive attitudes towards their collaboration. Accordingly, they were determined to overcome their lack of experience with collaborative planning and to learn and apply the IBA and its activities:

> When we met, we were like: 'yeah, let's do something for the city of Ahmedabad and let's do it well. Let's apply this new approach, let's learn what it is and let's do it well'. I think that was something running across the people.

Contributing to this, were the dominant *norms* in the group of participants which showed inclusive and constructive patterns of behaviour distinctive of both the personalities of the participating individuals and the organizational cultures to which they belonged. This allowed behaviours in which it was possible to openly express opinions and question those of others. This also contributed to trustful and respectful *relationships* within the team. In relation to PO2 in the engagement dimension of IBA, participants thus felt that they were 'in this together' and could contribute equally to discussions.

Differences in participants' understanding of the situation led to moments of tension regarding the focus of the proposals. Members of the municipality emphasized actions towards the built environment, which were the most common solution for this kind of problems, while others stressed social improvements. This challenged the realisation of POs 3 and 4 concerning the handling of conflicts and power asymmetries. However, the inclusive and constructive environment that resulted from participants' norms, values and relationships allowed them to overcome these tensions. The managing support of the local facilitator, plus the high motivation of the participants, allowed the team to find a productive way to make use of their different expertise and individual resources:

> Everybody had a task and then after 10 days we met and said ok this is what we have done. We would share information, and discuss it during the meetings.

Eight facilitated meetings, including field visits and discussions with residents in the focus area, were conducted following this form of collaboration. This was considered by several participants as 'very important and critical to the outcome'.

POs 5 and 6 of the decision dimension in IBA were challenged by the limited amount of resources allocated to the process. CEE mainly provided the *resources* for engaging stakeholders and for arranging their meetings. However, these resources were limited and were depleted in the final stage of the process. This hindered participants from carrying out more meetings and from developing their proposal to the degree that they wanted:

> It was extremely difficult. We were getting exhausted in the end and we were also disappointed when we got no more resources for the activities … So in that sense it can be challenging, you can't do them anymore.

Participants' committed values towards the project and their collaboration were key for addressing this challenge. They used their own time and resources to finish a proposal that brought together participants' expertise. The proposal moved away from the predominantly physical-orientated plans of the government by including ecosystem services and livelihood initiatives. Accordingly, it provided new knowledge on the problem being addressed, as PO5 in IBA suggests.

Although the outcome of the process was agreed upon by the members of stakeholder team, following PO6 in IBA, it did not have a direct impact in the development of the area. When the proposal entered the conventional planning system, the process outcome was sidestepped by regulations and routines in which there is no mandate to include stakeholder opinions and where public influence is minimum. This was despite the commitment made by the municipality to join the SUS programme to implement the outcomes of the process. Participants from the local authorities nevertheless reported that they have tried to use the lessons from the process and the resulting proposal in other projects.

Concluding discussion

The cases described above explore the influence of context on realization of CPT-inspired qualities of collaboration regarding inclusiveness, power balance and consensus-building. Studies related to context stress that its supportive or constraining nature matters for collaborative planning (e.g. Calderon

2013; Connelly 2010). Yet few studies make explicit what is meant by context and what about it that actually matters (Forester 2016). Our analysis suggests that its influence on specific planning processes regarding the involvement of stakeholders and their role and contribution to the process and decisions are subject to the interaction between institutional constraints and opportunities, and the agency of participating actors. This adheres to our suggested understanding of context in which, following Hay (2002) and Jessop (2007, 2001), we argue for an ontological and analytical duality between structure and agency. Accordingly, we emphasize the need to look at the interplay between institutional factors (i.e. norms, regulations and routines) and agential factors (i.e. understandings, values, resources and relationships) in analysis of the influence of context on specific collaborative planning processes.

The case studies in Ahmedabad and Bloemfontein illustrate our analytical approach. They show how the interplay between institutional and agential factors may reinforce or diminish contextual constraints on realizing collaborative qualities, such as IBA POs, in a specific process. For instance, in the Bloemfontein case, constraints produced by weak legal frameworks, predominantly top-down government/expert-based routines and hierarchical and patriarchal norms, were reinforced by participants' lack of commitment, experience, resources and competing/conditioned relationships. The case in Ahmedabad, on the other hand, shows how factors such as participants' receptiveness and commitment to work collaboratively, availability, although limited, of resources and a close relationship between stakeholders can compensate for the constraints imposed by lack of explicit regulations regarding collaboration and the dominance of expert-based routines in planning.

These findings show that analyses which prioritize institutional factors may provide an insufficient account of the influence of context on a specific collaborative process. Such analyses may well be suitable in studies of institutional dynamics and transformations regarding the mainstreaming of CPT ideas and related practices in a city or country (e.g. Bjarnadóttí 2008; Blicharska et al. 2011; Gonzalez and Healey 2005). However, they may fall short in studies of specific planning processes, by disregarding the decisive role of agency in the constitution of institutions, and thus in mediating (reinforcing or counteracting) their influence. Accordingly, the cases also show that, regarding realization of collaborative qualities in specific planning processes, it is insufficient to focus only on broad, national/city scale analyses of context.

Both case studies illustrate the importance of our analytical emphasis on the interplay between institutions and agency. In Bloemfontein, for instance, the City Mayor reproduced the routine government/expert-based ways of doing planning when appointing the participants in the process, thus reinforcing the influence of dominant routines in planning. The decision by high-level officers to take over the process and develop the initiative had similar effects. Against such powerful actors, and faced by limited resources and commitment to work inclusively, it was not possible for other actors to press for formation of a diverse multi-stakeholder team or base decisions on deliberative discussions. This included the managers of the SUS programme. Likewise, despite their desire to be active and contribute to discussions and decisions, less senior and female participants were called to order when they challenged hierarchical and patriarchal norms of interaction. They also self-restrained from being more active and raising their voice. This as they feared sanctions for acting in ways perceived as inappropriate or against the interests of the organization they represented, as in the case of the participant from the bank.

Conversely, the Ahmedabad case shows that there can be institutional factors, such as regulations and routines, at the national or city level which hinder the inclusiveness, deliberation and joint decision making in collaborative processes. Yet participants deviated from, and thus diminished the influence of, such institutions, establishing new rules and ways of working. This was thanks to their individual values, fruitful relationships, experiences and resources, which were receptive and supportive of the collaborative principles of IBA. The qualities of these two processes regarding who participated, how they participated and the influence they had in discussions and decisions thus also illustrate how power relations are intrinsically embedded in the interplay between actors and institutions.

Based on these findings, we suggest that each collaborative process has a particular and immediate context, which ultimately influences realization of collaborative qualities in a specific planning process. This particular context is embedded within broader national or city scale contexts. Yet, it has the possibility to reproduce or deviate from its broader context based on the interaction between the institutions in which the process is situated and the agency of those involved. This means that contexts are not monolithic structures shaping specific planning processes. Contexts are instead dynamic and filled with conflicts and power relations, making their qualities, their constraints and opportunities, hence their influence, to be contested by many individual and collective actors.

The understanding and analytical approach to context in this paper, based on the duality of institutional and agential factors, is its main contribution to CPT and efforts to make it more attuned to context. By stressing the decisive mediating role that agency plays in the influence of context, our research differs from other studies of collaborative planning, which give greater priority to institutions. This could be interpreted as a return to the criticized emphasis that CPT places on agency, thus neglecting context. However, the main difference is that in our approach, and as shown in the two cases, agency is not seen in isolation. Instead, it is analysed in direct relation to institutions through their reproduction or deviation of the institutional constraints and opportunities that operate in the context of a specific planning process. Our approach also considers all actors involved in a process and not only the agency of the planner or process facilitator (c.f. Connelly 2010; Laws and Forester 2015).

Our theoretical and analytical discussions of context in specific collaborative planning processes seek to bridge the gap between CPT and contextual planning practice (Watson 2008). Of course, we see the need to further refine and test our understanding and analytical approach, and to engage other scholars in a discussion about its relevance and use. We hope that this paper encourages such discussion.

Note

1. Organisations contributing to development of IBA were: CEE- Centre for Environment Education, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, SADC-Regional Environmental Education Programme, Stockholm Resilience Centre, the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD), Global Action Plan International (GAP Int'l) and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).

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Disclosure statement

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