

Democracy in progress: using public participation in post-industrial landscape (re)-development

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Abstract: The last decades have seen a rapid change in attitudes towards the environment, which reflects a greater environmental awareness of environment amongst professionals as well as the general public. Public participation has become increasingly more important, playing a relevant role in determining the way society will manage, protect and reclaim the environment. This trend is “now” recognized by landscape architects, landscape ecologists, and sociologists, among others. A wide range of methods have been established all over the world, including new ways of people interacting, new types of events, new services and new support frameworks. This paper addresses the benefits of using public participation in the reclamation of post-industrial landscapes, and the ways in which the introduction of public opinion can improve the design process. Although public participation has gained wide acceptance among private and public domains, academic literature and research offers still limited understanding on how to accomplish it and what contributes to its success. The relevance of public participation is discussed through exploring the definitions of public participation, why the public should be involved and the role of participation in project acceptability. Using a best practice approach, this article discusses the use of public participation in the re-development of a post-industrial landscape, Emscher Park, located in the Ruhr Region, Germany. This case is selected to explore contributions to achieve sustainable development and the reasons why public participation should be an integral part of post-industrial landscape reclamation. We conclude that public participation may encourage awareness of “belonging to” a community, sharing common culture and creating identity. It improves community consciousness and responsibility while fostering a “collective sense”. These are “feelings” of considerable importance in the development of new, satisfying and concerted projects.

Key-words: Public Participation, Landscape Reclamation, Democracy, Involvement, Consensus, Post-industrial Landscapes, Emscher Park.

1 Introduction

It is often recognized by landscape architects, landscape ecologists, and sociologists, among others, that the social component plays a relevant role in urban planning and management activities, and that participation processes are linked both to landscape and strategic environmental valuation [25]. The last decades have seen a rapid change in attitudes towards the environment, which reflects a greater environmental awareness of environment amongst professionals as well as the general public [42].

Furthermore, there is a growing trend in government to conclude that the commitment and will of the population is a crucial element to the development of a sustainable city [26], and that the reclamation of derelict, abandoned or underutilized land can play a significant role in development [36]. For this reason it is often recognized by landscape architects, landscape ecologists, and sociologists, among others that the social component plays a relevant role in planning and management activities [16, 23, 29, 37].

However, the above-mentioned subject is not new (nearly a century ago, Burnham (1910) mentioned that the role of the public was crucial in planning

activities) [14], the increasing need for public participation since the early seventies of the twentieth century (Figure 1) is probably related to the growing dissatisfaction with the results of the technocratic administrative process [3, 20], once as it is known after the World War II the role of the governments has expanded dramatically. Since then a long time has passed and the necessity of introducing public participation into planning and management activities has been reinforced not only by governments and private associations but also by several international conventions. Examples include Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992); the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998); and the recent Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007), among others [1, 34, 46].

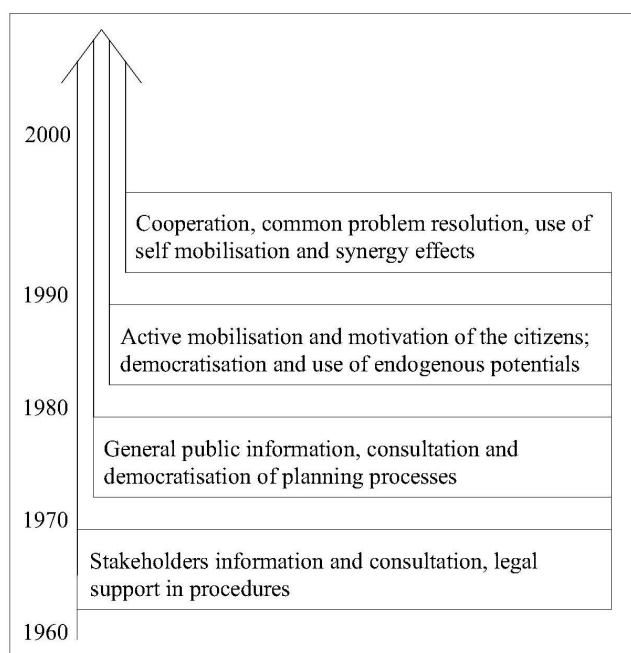


Figure 1 – Development of the participation-understanding (Adapted from Selle, 1996) [48].

In fact, public participation has become increasingly more important, playing a relevant role in determining the way society will manage, protect and reclaim the environment. Furthermore, the recognition that the economic and social dimensions cannot be dissociated from the environmental and cultural ones, contributed to increase the relevance of public participation [35].

A wide range of methods have been established all over the world, including new ways of people interacting, new types of event, new services and new support frameworks. Governments look now to

provide greater community input in the identification of needs and problems, and in the design and implementation of remedial and preventive solutions [18, 31].

The present article discusses the use of public participation in the re-development of a post-industrial landscape located in the Ruhr Region, Germany, trying to emphasise its contributions to achieve sustainable development.

2 The use of public participation in landscape reclamation

Although public participation in planning, management and reclamation of post-industrial landscapes has gained wide acceptance among private and public domains, in part motivated by the introduction of public participation in several international design competition (Fresh Kills Parkland, Duisburg Nord Landschaftspark, Downsview Park, among others) academic literature and research offers still limited understanding on how to accomplish it and what contributes to its success [10, 19].

Before starting to address the topics related with public participation in landscape reclamation it is important to define what does public participation mean. As it is common among “concept definitions”, the answer is not unanimous, once there are always different perspectives of understanding a specific concept. “Democracy is a work in progress” [18] is a fact that contributes to its evolving meaning over time.

Ladders, or spectrums, of participation are a time-honoured metaphor used to understand differing degrees of participatory practices. Sherry Arstein’s 1969 seminal article “A ladder of citizen participation” launched the ladder metaphor [4]. Her work focuses on degrees of citizen power and local control in government decision making scaling from non-participation, to degrees of tokenism, to degrees of citizen power.

Desmond Connor followed almost two decades later with his ladder focusing on creating a progression for resolving conflict about major issues [17]. His approach begins with an education approach and escalates through mediation and litigation to resolve conflicts.

Connors ladder does not extend to the point of engaging citizens in decision making. William Potapchuk followed shortly after with a ladder emphasizing levels of authority or government decision making from unilateral, to joint, to delegated [44]. His model acknowledges the power

of citizens to block or support decisions and ramps upward from small scale individual input to working with representative and special interest groups to build decision support. The IAP2 spectrum (a 21st century variation of the ladder) reflects an emphasis on the relationship of participation impact and agency decision making [11]. The spectrum includes example techniques employed to achieve the participatory impact goals. The first four levels (inform, consult, involve, and collaborate) represent situations where the government or organization retains final decision authority and responsibility. The fifth level culminates with empowerment, placing decision making in public control. Bryan Bruns (2003) expands upon the 5th IAP2 level, empowerment. He extends empowerment into six levels: partner, delegate authority, establish autonomy, advise, and enable.

Ross *et al.* (2002) re-visualize a participation ladder with a focus on natural resource management. Their work acknowledges that decision making affecting natural resources (and cultural resources) includes more than just authority or government controlled processes. The ladder includes resources controlled by private ownership, community collectives, organized interests groups, government stewardship, and non-participatory government management.

Public participation is not a neutral concept. Both, definition and degree of public participation are directly connected to the conception of democracy and citizenship, and to the role of political authorities. Public participation definitions can be wide or restrictive: for example, the World Bank's definition of public participation has little in common with other conceptions. According to their definition public participation is a process that "enables the public to influence the quality or volume of a service through some form of articulation of preferences or demand", a definition that is "closely linked to the concept of governance" [54].

In a more direct definition Beierle and Cayford (2002) defined public participation as "any of several 'mechanisms' intentionally instituted to involve the lay public or their representatives in administrative decision-making" [9].

Fiorino (1996) characterize public participation as the involvement of people outside formal governmental decision-making processes [24]. Nevertheless, there are still some authors [12, 43] that defend that public participation is one of the components (together with public consultation) of what they consider to be 'public involvement'.

For Briton (1998) public consultation includes education and information shared between decision-makers and the public in order to make better-informed decisions and public participation is the act that brings the public directly into the decision making process [12].

The presented approaches are not contradictory in their main principles. All of them comprise public activities directed at cooperation and team work, providing the authority with opinions and information about public will, needs and objectives.

Public participation in landscape reclamation and management can take several different forms [9, 18, 23]: Public meetings, workshops, charettes, citizen juries, focus groups, internet, mail interviews, face to face interviews, etc. each of them legitimate *a priori*, and justified by the context in which the project takes place. Public participation in planning, management and reclamation projects is, in fact, mostly accomplished through public workshops, where the different perspectives and possibilities are presented and discussed [52].

Although the selection of the public participation method is a relevant part of the process, Bass, *et al.* (1995) stresses that what decision-makers really need to understand is that science-based and interdisciplinary approaches are not enough to define social, environmental and economic needs; and that therefore, public participation is a people-centred approach [5].

Even with the changes that have been introduced in policy and attitude during the last decades, there are still a number of obstacles to a successful transition to a more participatory decision-making process. These obstacles range from low indices of trust in government [33], to administrative, and policy driven constraints [39, 40], to the choice of the appropriate and most effective methods of public engagement [27, 28, 53].

Design professionals themselves can be an obstacle with concerns about relinquishing power in the design process, perceptions of participatory practices being unprofessional and scepticism about anaesthetic outcomes [32].

An aspect that is considered to be indispensable in any project with an objective to serve the public is transparency. As quoted by Faga (2006) "Transparency in an essential part of any fair process," and includes among other features openness and honesty [23] (Table 1):

Table 1 – Transparency. Adapted from Faga (2006) [23].

TRANSPARENCY
- The process should be open and honest;
- There should be no secret meetings or assurances;
- People should attend the meetings with an open mind being flexible with their opinions in order to enable the agreement among different parts;
- Elected officials should be invited, and attend;
- The process is portrayed honestly to the public in the clearest way possible;
- All available information is released to the public;

2.1 Why should the public be involved in planning, management and reclamation processes?

As it was mentioned, public participation is one of the essential values of democracy. In this context, it is related to such categories as: civil society, principle of subsidiarity, decentralization, common will, articulation and representation of interests.

Public participation also begins laying the ground work for sustainable practices in physical planning and management as well as social community building. Creating sustainable communities 1) involves local citizens [2], 2) allows citizens to analyze their own problems and fashion their own solutions [15], and 3) supports community initiatives which allow them to be the instruments of their own change [6]. Attention to sustainable community development practices fosters social goals which can strengthen the connections between participatory practices and government or authority decision making.

According to Beierle (1999) the use of public participation helps to achieve five different social goals:

- Incorporating public values into decisions;
- Improving the substantive quality of decisions;
- Resolving conflict among competing interests;
- Building trust in institutions; and
- Educating and informing the public [8].

Once the role of public participation is to increase efficiency of the local authority activities as well as to build stronger social base for the authority, the reason why it should be introduced in the planning process is clear (table 2).

Table 2 – Reasons to use public participation. adapted from RESCUE (2004) [45].

Reason why should citizens should have the opportunity to participate in planning
- Public involvement is a significant form of enforcing land use laws, once citizens informed about planning laws and with access to the planning process ensure that the laws are applied properly.
- Generally, our systems of government and legal frameworks give citizens the right to have a voice in all matters of public policy, including planning.
- The public should be involved in the collection and production of the information needed to develop, implement and maintain a comprehensive plan. Professional planners and local officials should collect and use comments and ideas from those who know the community best: people who live and work there.
- Public participation educates citizens about planning and land use, contributing to the creation of an informed community, which in turn leads to better planning, giving sense of ownership of the plan to the members of the community.
- It fosters cooperation among citizens and between them and their government, leading to fewer conflicts and less litigation, reducing costs for re-planning and conflict resolution and leading to a higher acceptance of results.
- Public participation increases planning security for planners, developers and investors, offering an additional chance to promote the project and giving the possibility to improve the project approach according to local needs.

2.2 The role of participation in project acceptability

The relevance of the social acceptability of a specific project should never be underestimated: often in the past, scientific and technological options having a negative environmental impact appeared to be inappropriate, not in terms of technical performance but for reasons of social acceptability [45]. In recent years, due in part to a need to reduce social conflict and litigation, the planning paradigm has shifted to give the general public greater input in environmental decisions [21, 30, 49].

Public participation is a systematic attempt to involve the citizen in the design, planning decision, implementation and evaluation of planning, management and reclamation projects. This, not only to ensures and improves their social acceptability, but also certifies that public space is really being

constructed according to public will. Public participation will also contribute to expanding the number of possible choices, making them more precise and enabling that the different actors involved in the process take “ownership” of the decision.

Through ownership, commitment and the infusion of “local knowledge” in project development, unique places, genuinely native to the culture and environment, can be sustained [7].

The social acceptability of results in a decision-making process is linked to the way the different parts involved in the process perceive it: if they feel it is adequate and equal, they find it legitimate. For this reason, improving the social acceptability of specific design options during the process often results in higher legitimacy of the whole process.

In the specific case of reclamation-rehabilitation projects, as they are often located in highly visible and accessible areas, public perception and support is essential to the long-term success of the project [41] and to enhance the social, economic and environmental benefits that they provide.

Frederick Steiner reinforces the importance of public engagement and ecological planning in that “the success of a plan depends largely on how much people affected by the plan have been involved in its determination,” [50].

3 Case study - IBA – Emscher Park

In order to ensure better organization and efficiency it is necessary to develop a new power of reclamation alignment between the social and the political sphere, enabling the creation of conditions for an active and participative citizenship.

In the past years, government development of large post-industrial landscape reclamation projects have increased on international, national, regional and local levels. Professionals involved are becoming more and more aware of the fact that specific local human and social factors need to be considered and introduced in the planning process of rehabilitation of industrial derelict sites. Public participation holds nowadays an essential position in the post-industrial regeneration process.

Post-industrial redevelopment is a complex topic with many actors and stakeholders who often pursue contrasting aims in the development process. A socially well balanced planning process, assuring participation opportunities for all the affected parties, provides the necessary conditions for

sustainability standards and is as such a prerequisite for each post-industrial reclamation project.

To exemplify the relevance of using public participation in post industrial landscape reclamation, as it was mentioned before, this paper will address the Emscher Park reclamation project (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – Emscher Park redevelopment plan – source: <http://www.flickr.com/>

Located in the heartland of Europe’s steel and coal industries (the Ruhr valley of north-western Germany), Emscher Park is one of the best practice examples pointed out by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2001 [51], although there are other good examples of post-industrial landscape reclamation where public participation played a significant role not only in design but also in program definition, as it is the case of Hunters point park, Fresh Kills parkland, and Hammarby Sjöstad (Figures 3, 4 and 5).



Figure 3 – Hunters point redevelopment plan – (Adapted from: http://www.asla.org/awards/2007/07/winners/550_ha.html)



Figure 4 – Aerial view of Fresh Kills Parkland. (Adapted from <http://www.bureauit.org>)



Figure 6 – View of the post-industrial complex in Duisburg. Used by permission of Luis Loures © 2008, all rights reserved.



Figure 5 – Aerial view of Hammarby Sjöstad. (Adapted from <http://www.bureauit.org>)

With the restructuring of these heavy industries over the past 30 years, derelict steel works (Figure 5) and abandoned coal mining operations spread throughout the northern Ruhr region, leaving the legacy of high unemployment and environmental contamination [22].

In order to try to change this scenario the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia created a regional redevelopment approach - the International Building Exhibition (IBA) at Emscher Park with the objective of repairing the environmental damage left behind from these heavy industries (Figure 6), while also designing urban communities of the future [22].

Approximately 100 projects have been developed and implemented on five sites in the area between the cities of Duisburg and Kamen, covering an area of over 800 km². These projects illustrate the latest thinking in the ecological and economic regeneration of post-industrial industrial landscapes. Many of these innovative urban and architectural designs were fostered by IBA's workshops (Figure 7), competitions, and spatial planning guidelines [22].



Figure 7 –View of a public exposition of the Emscher Park projects. Used by permission of Thomas Panagopoulos © 2007, all rights reserved.

The success of Emscher Park is associated with the use of a strategy that instead of creating a completely new landscape, attempts to celebrate the area's industrial past by integrating vegetation and

industry (Figure 8), promoting sustainable development and maintaining the spirit of the place [38]. This strategy enabled the creation of collaborative partnerships with local authorities, private industry, professional associations, environmental groups, and citizens, in order to understand the will and the needs of the society.



Figure 8 – Integration between vegetation and industry in the post-industrial landscape of Duisburg. Used by permission of Luis Loures © 2008, all rights reserved.

Both, rehabilitation quality of the project and efficient urban development were improved by the use of this framework. Giving each and everyone an opportunity to be personally involved in regional and local redevelopment processes, was considered an important factor to encourage cultural identity (Figure 8) as a condition for improving quality of life in this post-industrial landscape.



Figure 8 – Panoramic view of an old industrial complex in the Emscher Park. Used by permission of Thomas Panagopoulos © 2007, all rights reserved.

However, despite decades of large interventions of public authorities, former coalfields across Europe haven't fully achieved their reclamation. Recently, a collective awareness of the importance of the specific human and social factor has been growing and citizen participation is increasingly put at the core of the reclamation process [22].

4 Final Remarks

One of the problems that happen in post-industrial reclamation projects is that sometimes the results do not match the original aspirations. Not only because some projects are just speculative, using “sustainable” and “communitarian” labels as a marketing device, but also because public will is often not a relevant part of the project. In recent years several Architects, Landscape Architects, Urban Planners and other planning specialists have built a number of outstanding iconic landscape reclamation designs that do not represent the community of which they are an integral part. These fail in what should be considered essential in a landscape reclamation project: connectivity to the place and to the society.

Once public landscapes in general and reclaimed pos-industrial landscapes in particular are viewed as “systems” that possess multiple intellectual, cultural and social meanings able to influence public behaviour both physically and spiritually, it is evident that the integration of public will and needs in the whole urban planning and regeneration processes is crucial.

In fact, the integration of public participation in the decision making process benefits both project quality and society. For this reason it is essential to develop a framework that specifies how public participation can be introduced in the different planning phases.

It is critical to shift the power paradigm in the urban planning process to allow residents to proactively envision and create public green spaces that would reflect the diversity of the society it represents. The use of public participation and the incorporation of human preferences and needs in post-industrial landscape reclamation is a safeguard to achieve success and to develop a sense of community.

Regarding the presented case study it is possible to conclude that the right for citizens to take initiatives was a core objective of the IBA Emscher Park experience and also one of the reasons that made it one of the best landscape reclamation projects ever developed, responding both to

environmental sustainability and cultural uniqueness, but also to social needs and desires.

In summary we may conclude that public participation encourages awareness of “belonging to” a community, sharing common culture and creating identity. It improves community consciousness and responsibility while fostering a “collective sense”. These are “feelings” of considerable importance in the development of new, satisfying and concerted projects.

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