

# Stakeholder Participation in North-West Europe: Lessons Learnt from Green Infrastructure Case Studies

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Participation and governance approaches gain more relevance to improve the quality, acceptance and legitimization of planning and implementation. There is a need for strategies that unite public, private, scientific and community sector stakeholders for working jointly on innovative, sustainable solutions. This is especially important as local authorities are facing significant cuts with relation to staff and finance. Thus, considering and embedding stakeholders' input is becoming increasingly difficult, while it is at the same time becoming more and more relevant to give all groups of society the opportunity to have a say in planning to ensure that it meets their requirements and is carried out most effectively. Increased efficacy in participation is highly needed under the given circumstances and only achievable by advancing planners' understanding with local stakeholders' expertise (Mackrodt & Helbrecht, 2013; Young & McPherson, 2013; Faehnle et al., 2014).

In Europe there is not one sole planning system and thus, participation is carried out differently with regard to the planning culture in each country. The international focus is very important as many parallel approaches to participation in different countries need to be taken into account within the context of their respective planning culture. Furthermore, as participation is still an ongoing process and in development in theory and in practice always new aspects and methods appear, it is getting more and more complex, but needs always to be adapted context-wise. So, to learn from best practices in other countries, it is important to keep the planning backgrounds in mind when transferring promising approaches from other national contexts.

One of the most relevant planning topics in this sense is green infrastructure, “defined as a strategically planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, which is designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services and protect biodiversity in both rural and urban settings” (EU Commission, 2013:7). Strategic approaches for green infrastructure are still rare and institutionalization efforts of environmental or “green” governance are underdeveloped. However, in the case of GI planning stakeholders' preferences and values regarding their environment are valuable information for decision making and their integration in green infrastructure planning is hugely relevant as green infrastructure's multiple benefits for society are not rewarded enough. The consideration of adequate stakeholders at the right phases of green infrastructure planning processes and the choice of suitable participation tools are essential for a sufficient provision of public resources (Luyet et al. 2012).

This paper investigates examples of different green infrastructure case studies in Belgium, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands and evaluates their participation concepts considering the case studies' planning families. Thus, country and planning family similarities and differences related to participation in green infrastructure investments are identified and explained with the evolved planning culture in each country. By this means, we want to highlight the relevance of the planning-cultural context for efficient participation related to the example of green infrastructure. To address the need for more effective participation we illustrate GI stakeholders' views on the projects' participation concepts. This means that a key element in our investigation is to look at the difference between participation desired by stakeholders and the opportunities offered by local administration.

## 2 PLANNING CULTURES AND PARTICIPATION

Spatial planning is usually considered within the context of a national framework. Within this framework, several dimensions of planning are elaborated as physical planning, land use constraints, development incentives, environmental considerations and participation issues. The nature of public participation varies as much as spatial planning systems, and is equally affected by the specific historical, cultural, geographical

and governantal backgrounds in different countries (Town and Country Planning Association 2007, 15, Rymsa-Fitschen et al., 2014).

When characterizing legal and administration systems, usually five “families” are identified within Europe (see Newman & Thornley 1996):

- (1) British
- (2) Germanic
- (3) Napoleonic
- (4) Scandinavian
- (5) Communist-Centralist

As shown in Figure 1, this research paper discusses the results of case studies within a Northwest European context. So, we only discuss those relevant planning families in more detail. In our case, these are the British, Germanic and Napoleonic ones.

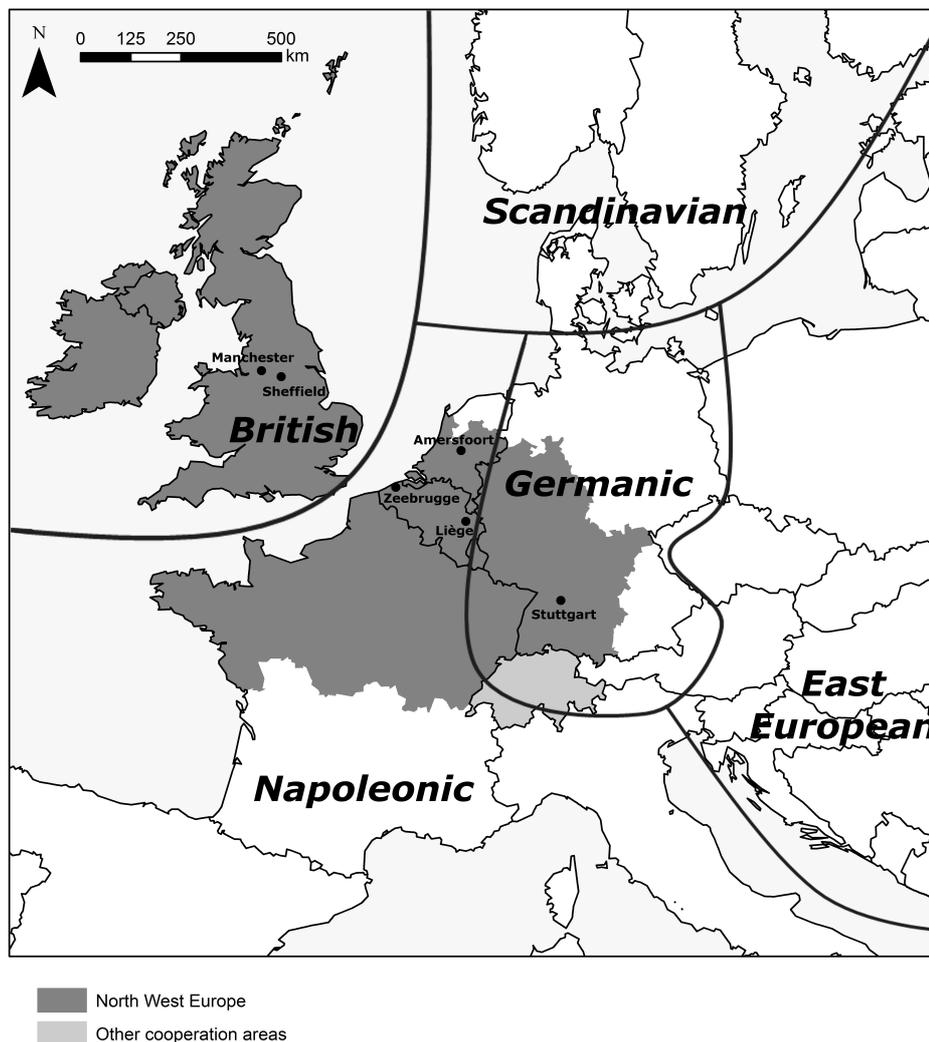


Figure 1: Map of case studies and planning families. Own illustration adapted from Newman & Thornley 1996.

The British planning family is grounded on the common law system. This means, it builds up on a long tradition of decisions based on decisions and relates to cases rather than being encoded in specific constitutions. The main controlling power is quite centralized, as the budget control is at the more national levels of government. In the UK, it is government policy to give stakeholders a better opportunity to participate in decision-making “and even, where appropriate, transfer control of assets to citizen groups” (EIPP 2009:11). White papers have been published promoting participation and setting a duty on public authorities to involve the public. All 400 local authorities in the UK were expected to apply participatory

budgeting till 2012. Nevertheless, there is an enormous gap between the capabilities of planners to involve stakeholders effectively. Culturally, public officials are sceptical regarding participation and its benefits such like politics that follow their own policy direction. However, the well organized and highly institutionalized civil society provides huge potential to overcome these limitations (see EIPP 2009.)

The Germanic planning system is characterized by high civic engagement. Participatory structures in planning are established since 30 years as the German building law defines public participation as a duty. This means that most formal participation is restricted to local and municipal level. At federal level, referenda, are for example forbidden. Participation is focussed on information and consultation. Innovative approaches to participation are mostly only found at local level such as participatory budgets. This has to been seen in the context “the current approach of the German government to citizen engagement, which is strongly influenced by notions of social capital. Civic engagement is not seen primarily as participation in political decision-making, but as a broader concept encompassing everything from donating money to volunteering and showing moral courage. Civic engagement is to a large degree self-organising. This in turn means that government practice and policy focuses on the consequences and costs of social and community engagement” (EIPP 2009:16) resulting in a reservation of the administration and traditional politicians towards participation and its impacts in Germany. Citizens are also disenchanted with politics and the polity. But while the government is set to improve the conditions for social volunteering, demands to improve direct access of citizens to decision-making forums remain lower down the agenda (see EIPP 2009).

The Napoleonic planning family is based on a very strong national code of planning regulations that creates a hierarchy of plans that are binding for lower-level administrations. Therefore, participation as a measure to change and react in planning is not a standard approach in policy making. Due to changes in society, this rather schematic classification does not hold anymore especially for the countries of Belgium and the Netherlands, which are the ones from the Napoleonic family that are within our case study approach.

In the Dutch case there has been a long tradition of opening the strict planning schemes for a participatory approach. In the Netherlands, participation became more and more popular from the 1990ties, mainly as a tool to strengthen public acceptance and implementation of decisions, when the delay of many large scale infrastructure projects caused resistance by the affected stakeholders. New ways of participation aimed at involving the public at early stages of policy development to include stakeholders` input already in the problem definition process and the gathering of ideas and proposals for project alternatives. Ministries also experimented with new forms of participation and at the local level interactive policy-making giving stakeholders a role in the decision making process was seen as key to re-connect politics and citizens. Now, stakeholders get involved as early as possible and reasonable in the planning process with the aim to really influence it (see Enserink et al. 2003).

In Belgium, some aspects of participation to planning processes are defined by law (the different legal settings for the three regions, with slight variations). As still the traditional legal frame by law, which defines minimum requirements for participation, is dominant. The most important tools are public hearing and various forms of consultative commissions. The duration of a public hearing can vary from in total 3 times 60 days for Regional Plans to once 30 days for individual projects of renovation to give the general audience the chance to react. Associations from civil society intervene to announce public hearings to the interested public. The procedure is almost unchanged since the 1970s. Public hearings are held on both supra-local and local level, for instance for the presentations of Regional Development and Land Use Plans, of provincial and of municipal plans. It is recently also used for the acceptance of local interventions such as the neighbourhood contracts. Informal participation tells its own story in Belgium as different large towns can look back on very active interest groups, for instance. Typically in Belgium is that as large scale projects are often planned with few stakeholders involved, backed from the argument of governing efficiency through enlargement of scale while the local scale of neighbourhoods and districts knows a very vivid multiplicity of associations as for instance Tagung neighbourhood associations (see Kuhk et al. 2006).

In summary, it can be stated that participation in getting more and more important in each of the three planning families. For our research, it is important to have a deeper look at how approaches and attitudes towards participation are changing and how this may be influenced by the planning-cultural backgrounds and histories. To be able to more specifically differentiate between the extents in which participation is taking

place in the case studies, it is important to classify the used participation measures based on the level of interaction that they offer to the public participants.

In spatial planning, this interaction can range from being just informative up to full empowerment. Between these two extremes, there are mid-way levels of participation. Consultation would be one step further than information, because the public opinion is asked for and at least considered for further decisions. After this, collaboration would be a more integrative step that opens more to peoples' perceptions by taking their ideas not only into consideration, but having rules on how these influence decision-making results. The next step that links to empowerment of the public is co-decision, in which power is equally distributed when decisions are made (Luyet et al. 2012).

### 3 CASE STUDIES AND METHODS

The investigated green infrastructure case studies are spread over four different countries in North-West Europe: Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK (see Figure 1). Accordingly, they are belonging to the Napoleonic (Amersfoort, Liege and Zeebrugge), the Germanic (Stuttgart) and the British (Manchester, Sheffield) planning families. Thus, their approaches to participation differ significantly, but, still, they have their common ground in green infrastructure planning and its strategic planning processes.

The types of green infrastructure investments also feature a wide thematic variety (see Table 1). While the Amersfoort investment, for example, is about the transformation of a former hospital site into an expansion area for a city park where the municipality and stakeholder groups are jointly acting as equal partners in a public private partnership, Sheffield's investment site is an example of converting a derelict site to an open green space where residents and 'friends of groups' were used to discuss land transfer, maintenance and design of the new park. Both investments applied different participation approaches such as meetings, open space method and world cafes in the Amersfoort case, where the public private partnership developed the final redevelopment and management plan, and meetings and workshops in the Sheffield case, where only the design issue was to be discussed corporately.

On the basis of the different case studies we identified traditional and novel participation methods that are of importance in green infrastructure planning and management. These case studies give us the opportunity to demonstrate and compare different participation processes. As discussed above, we have to take into account that every planning process is affected by its arrangement in the legislation and regulations of the particular country. Also, planning implementations are depended on the administrative system of each country, since mechanisms, processes and formal / informal relations between administrative sectors, shape up and enable planning implementations (Healey and Williams 1993).

We analyse the case studies' participation concepts related to their employed methods and their degree of involvement. In addition, we focus on the differences and specifics of GI participation in the respective planning families. We do this by using a mixed empirical approach. In the case studies, relevant stakeholders of each investment were chosen by the project manager. Those groups of relevant stakeholders were surveyed with a questionnaire about their experiences with participation in general and with relation to the specific project, their opinion on how future involvement approaches should be conducted. In the next step, those stakeholders got together in a focus group format to discuss the questions of the survey in more detail and face-to-face.

### 4 RESULTS

The results of questionnaires and discussions (N=50) in each case study region are summarized in Table 1.

The case studies are sorted according to their planning families and their respective countries. Accordingly, there is a horizontal bar chart for each green infrastructure project, which depicts two important aspects of participation methods usage. On the one hand, the dark grey shaded bar indicates up to which degree of participation the individual participation methods were used in each case study. On the other hand, the light grey shaded bar indicates the potential level of participation which this method is capable of. So, both can be used to compare achieved and potential levels of participation. Those can then be mirrored to general statements in our interactive approach to identify a possible gap between expectations of planners and the public on green infrastructure planning.

The most important general result of our empirical approach is that stakeholders in all case studies share the desire to be an active part of green infrastructure planning projects from the very early stages on. So, they do not only want to be asked on design alternatives, they already want to discuss on the development of ideas and on conceptualising projects. In addition, the majority of stakeholders stated that they want to be involved in planning projects to a higher degree than they are involved at the moment. More specifically, they want to be integrated in decision making by collaborating, co-deciding and being empowered.

Looking at Table 1, these general results are supported by the considerable gaps between achieved and potential degrees of participation. In this aspect the concept of planning families is very important, because it underpins and helps to explain differences between case studies with diverging planning cultural backgrounds.

At first, looking at the results for the British case studies in Manchester and Sheffield, some issues can be raised. Referring to the range of methods used, there is a mixture of rather traditional with contemporary measures of participation. For all participatory approaches, the degree of participation is at least one level lower than its potential. This kind of planning approach is in line with the characterisation of the British planning family. Due to the current political requirements of local neighbourhood action, more interactive and project-focused methods need to be implemented, while city administration seems to stick to well-known and approved measures.

Planning Family	Country	City	Project description	Methods	Level of involvement					
					Information	Consultation	Collaboration	Co-decision	Empowerment	
British	United Kingdom	Manchester AND Sheffield	Urban food growing as meanwhile use of brownfields AND Neighbourhood Park renewal	Presentation Social Media Opinion Survey Site Visit Meetings Round Table Focus Group Interviews Workshop Workshop (local fun day)	■	■	■	■	■	
Napoleonic	Netherlands	Amersfoort	Park enhancement through conversion of a hospital site	Social Media Open Space Method Meetings World Café Workshop	■	■	■	■	■	
Napoleonic	Belgium	Bruges AND Liège	Creation of a green corridor along a large scale infrastructure development AND Conversion of a former military area to a new green space	Meeting Interactive Website Round Tables Social Media Opinion Surveys Site Visits / Exploratory Walks Charrette 'Talking with friends' Workshop Experts-Workshop	■	■	■	■	■	
Germanic	Germany	Stuttgart	Regional route of industrial and cultural landscape heritage	Reports (Press Campaign) Social Media Meetings Symposia Site Visits Workshops Round Tables	■	■	■	■	■	
----- <i>Performative Participation</i> -----										
Legend:					■	possible level of participation in general (Source: Luyet, 2012, p. 215)				
					■	methods as used in case studies				

Table 1: Achieved and potential participation in case study regions. Own illustrations.

Results for the Napoleonic family differ quite significantly between each. The Dutch case study is a blueprint of a participatory approach, because it uses a mixture of methods that integrates almost all possible degrees of participation. Here, only minor gaps between achieved and potential degrees could be detected. While the case study in Flanders is quite similar to the Dutch in its way of enforcing active stakeholder participation, especially the Wallonia case reflects the Napoleonic family characteristics. There are many different methods used in this case study, but they are mostly used to inform the public rather than to integrate them equally in the decision making process. According to these results, the delineation of planning families needs perhaps to be changed. The Dutch speaking regions – in our case study approach – form a set of innovative regions that are open to intense stakeholder participation, while the French speaking regions are behaving more like top-down Napoleonic planning authorities.

In the Germanic family, the results can be seen quite similar to the UK. Here, there are still remaining gaps between the potential and achieved degrees of participation, but planning authorities seem to be used to exploit stakeholders' opinions in a collaborative way.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This paper examines the differences in participatory approaches between Northwest European countries. It does this by analysing survey and interview results and relating those to the planning-cultural background of the case study nations. In essence, the need for a more open and participatory approach is well recognised by planners and stakeholders. Nevertheless, there is a need to integrate the public to a higher degree in the planning phases. Also, people want to be included in decision making from the beginning of projects rather than at their end. In the sample countries seems to be a tendency to implement more open participatory measures, but this is not done with the same rigourness in each planning family context.

While the Dutch speaking case studies seem to be very keen to integrate stakeholders innovatively in decision making, German and UK cases are relatively more reluctant to change their traditional approaches. This is even more true for the French speaking regions, that begin to open up for higher degrees of participation, but mostly stop at the levels of information or consultation.

Comparing this tendencies with the planning family backgrounds, those results can be expected for the Germanic and UK families. Based on long traditions, laws and cases, approaches to planning do not open up and change very quickly. Interestingly, in the Napoleonic countries, especially the Dutch speaking regions seem to have a leading role in opening up top-down planning for more bottom-up, participation-lead approaches.

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