What's governance and what's it for?

Dealing with the communicative turn in spatial planning and urban design

Prepared by
Chair of Spatial Planning and Strategy. Dep. of Urbanism
TU Delft
What do theories of knowledge, communication and power tell us about our roles as designers and planners of urban places?
Ola Soderstrom: Big data modeling doesn't tell us how to govern the city (We need to bring politics back)
Frank Ekhardt:
We need to understand the
power of multiple narratives
in knowledge formation
(we need to step out of
exclusive expert knowledge)
Me (humbly):
We need to bring politics back
(Governance) +
We need to understand the
power of multiple narratives
(Accessible through governance)
Sir Peter Hall said:

It is easier to send a man to the moon than to plan and design a city
Urban planners and designers are moving away from ideas about superciliousness of the profession.

We don't know it all!
We are also moving away from ideas like the ‘ideal city’

Fra Carnevale, *Ideal City*, ca. 1480-84
Which have influenced urban design thought for so long

Le Corbusier, Ville Radieuse, 1931
And have produced some amazing results
But there is often an other side of the story which is not told. Cities are indomitable and the truth is that most cities in the world are either not planned or designed. Cities ‘grow out’ of plans and designs.
Or are we?

Abu Dhabi to realise one of architecture's greatest schemes
1 april 2008 / Bron: Arabian Business
ARCHITECTURE, URBAN DESIGN

A spokesperson to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, announced today that his government has reached an agreement with the Le Corbusier foundation over the rights of the architect's famous Ville Radieuse schemes.
The main task for urban planners and designers is to act as articulators and facilitators of spatial visions and solutions for sustainable and fair futures.

Spatial visions and plans that...

• Deliver sustainable and fair futures
• Increase public goods
• Redistribute gains
• Increase life chances and prosperity
Planners and designers do not “make” cities. They are one of the agents that act in order to steer the city.

We can’t control what happens even in a simulation like Sim City!
But who and what do we need to articulate or facilitate? And how?
In order to answer that question, we need to explore our current roles as planners and designers. What do we know and how do we know it? And how do we make decisions and help others make decisions?

We must explore processes of knowledge formation and the political networks in which we can have a role.
In order to do that I will explore ideas connected to knowledge formation and power struggles in real political arenas (where real decision making happens)
I believe the idea of Governance answers many of our questions, but what is Governance?
What does governance have to do with knowledge formation and political struggle?
Theories of Knowledge and Power

Necessary elements to understand the discourse about governance and what it is for
Cherry picking concepts?
His theory of practical knowledge identifies human interaction as ‘communicative action’ and describes the political world as a basically communicational world. **Knowledge is eminently inter-subjective and relational.**
He describes the (largely false) distinction between competent and incompetent agents. Some agents are deemed ‘incompetent’ by the established powers as a way to legitimate power structures. We need therefore to explore ‘other’ knowledges.
Ponty’s phenomenology describes our cognitive limitations to understand the world and form ideas, which means that our ‘points of view’ results in limited capacity to apprehend all the ‘sides’ of a problem. It is necessary therefore to multiply the points of view to have ‘true’ knowledge.
If we assume that...

Knowledge is INTER-SUBJECTIVE, as it happens between two or more reasoning beings.
It is easy to assume that knowledge is communicative, that is, only through communication can we achieve knowledge that is relevant or ‘usable’ or even TRUE.
Knowledge needs to be communicated and explained in order to become tangible, transmissible and verifiable.
Even EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE (acquired by experience or LEARNING BY DOING) needs to materialise into actions, things, or words that then need to be discussed and measured against other knowledge in order to become operational in the physical world.
Otherwise

One can never know whether what one has is true knowledge or just pure fancy.
Knowledge that exists only in your mind is IRRELEVANT

Because it is not operating in the world
It is more than validation

It is not only about validating knowledge. Communicating knowledge will make it EXIST in the world and BE USEFUL.

Communicating knowledge will also CHANGE YOUR knowledge, YOU and the person you are communicating with.
But what (the hell) does this have to do with spatial planning and urban design?
If we acknowledge that urban planners and designers are part of complex systems of governance and need to negotiate, convince, inform and steer processes rather than come with ready-made solutions.
Coalitions between sectors and within sectors
And if we then assume that...

Urban planning and designing are inter subjective activities, where it is all about understanding the wishes and aspirations of multiple stakeholders to help them achieve THEIR objectives.
...while promoting prosperity, public goods, equal distribution of spatial opportunities and avoiding negative externalities
Then we must conclude that any project or spatial intervention needs to have some degree of participation of those stakeholders.
This means that group or sectorial needs and wishes must be articulated into plans and designs that maximize the common good.
Why is this problematic?
There are no neutral or purely 'technical' parameters or agents in urban development. All decisions in urban development are political decisions, including yours (although you will certainly guide them by technical, ethical, aesthetic, economic and other parameters).
Urban development lies within the realm of politics, interests and negotiations. Knowledge and power are side by side, like in everything else.
The problem is that not everyone has a voice in urban development. Some agents are more vocal (powerful) than others.
Not everybody has access to relevant knowledge.
Worse still: the knowledge of some groups is considered irrelevant or is not recognized as knowledge.
Children

Young girl by CubaGallery at Flickr
Mothers

Pregnant woman by IzdelavaVabil at Flickr
The elderly
The homeless

Homeless man in Tokyo by theerwhitefrog at Flickr
Immigrants

We must step out of the dominant paradigm

White Heterosexual
Western Male Technocrat

anything but... Robert Moses

Image source: http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/ideas-city-istanbul-or-how-to-obtain-a-building-permit-for-central-park
Governance
Governance (normative)

Positive tension: checks and balances
Coalitions between sectors and within sectors
What does governance respond to?

Knowledge is eminently inter-subjective and relational.

We need to explore ‘other’ kinds of knowledge (other narratives).

It is necessary to multiply the points of view.
Governance entails an understanding of how policy making and implementation happens in complex societies, among a multitude of agents with different capacities, different knowledges and different objectives.
Changes in governing
(& planning and designing for cities)

Emergence of a particular style of
decision-making where there must be sustained co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and views of society, different types of knowledge and different objectives.

Adapted from Papadopoulos, 2007
Multilevel governance

‘Involves a large number of decision-making arenas, differentiated along both functional and territorial lines and interlinked in a non-hierarchical way’

Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004
Network governance

Policy-making and implementation is ‘shared’ by:

politicians, technocrats, experts, dedicated agencies, authorities, semi private and private companies, the public, NGOs, etc

which constitute NETWORKS of policy and decision making across levels, territories, mandates
Governance (normative)

Positive tension: checks and balances
Policy formulation and implementation

Networks involving:

- public actors (politicians and administrators) in different decision levels
- technocrats
- economic agents
- interest representatives (civil + corporate)
- OTHER STAKEHOLDERS (CIVIL SOCIETY) experts (e.g. planners)
New forms of steering complex governance networks

Deliberation
Bargaining
Compromise-seeking
How?
Example: River basin management in Brazil
National System for Water Resources Management

**Policy Formulation**
- **Scope**
  - Collegiate bodies
    - National Council for Water Resources
      - Water basin committee
    - State Council for Water Resources (CERH)
- Direct administrations
  - Ministry for the environment (MMA)
    - Secretary for Water Resources and Urban Environment (SRH)
  - State secretary
  - State bodies

**Policy Implementation**
- **Scope**
  - Power grantor
    - National Water Agency (ANA)
- **Statewide**
  - Water basin agency
  - Water basin agency

Alto Tiete River Basin Committee

- River Basin Committee Plenary
- Executive Board
- Technical Committees
- Area Subcommittees
- Executive Board

- Cities
- Civil Society
- State
Alto Tiete River Basin Committee

Civil Society

- Interest groups
- NGOs
- Religious or moral movements
- Social movements

Specific spatial demands and visions

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Specific spatial demands and visions

Specific spatial demands and visions
Analogy with the Republican model

Rule of Law

Executive

Legislative

Judiciary

Press

Public Opinion
An answer to 'radical democracy'?
Challenges of Governance
Governance has effects on the quality of our democracies.
Main issues

1. Hollowing of the State
2. Accountability deficiency
3. Representation and visibility
4. Decoupling of the realm of politics
5. Composition of networks of governance
Hollowing out of the State

Some claim that the networked nature of governance structures supports ideologies that endorse the minimal state.

Governance would be a way to hollow out the role of states
But...

Governance ultimately the result of the complexity of our societies. It must be embedded in the RULE OF LAW.
Accountability is at the core of discussions on networked governance.
Accountability...

...refers to the attribution of responsibility and mandate, and the possibility of check by other parties involved.

In network governance, it is difficult to attribute responsibility and mandates and ultimately difficult to hold anyone accountable (the problem of many hands)
For agents to be held accountable, they must be identifiable as accountability holders and they must belong to arenas where there is a possibility of sanction.

This implies a strong role for the State as regulator and upholder of the rule of law.
Weak visibility

Decisional procedures in policy networks are often informal and opaque (as this facilitates the achievement of compromise)

Networks dilute responsibility among a large number of actors (the problem of many hands)
Citizens as accountability holdees

Citizens should be the ultimate holdees of democratic accountability’

...but in reality the public is not the only judge of governmental performance and in many instances citizens can not sanction agents that are responsibly for policies that affect them directly (e.g. IMF, European Union, etc.)
Transparency

Transparency induces the accountability holder to provide justifications for their actions, but there are no guarantees that accountability holders can apply sanctions.

Publicity is a necessary condition for democracy but not a sufficient one.
Multilevel aspects make competencies fuzzy

Complex structures cutting across decision levels (e.g. federal states, emerging city-regions, but also the EU, IMF, World Bank, etc)

Entails cooperative intergovernmental relations, but the formal division of competencies is often fuzzy (e.g. EU)
Policy networks must be (re)coupled to public representative bodies that are able to regulate service provision or policy implementation and which provide the tools for identifying accountability holders and also tools for sanctioning them.

Policy networks must be re-coupled with the public arena.
For elected officers, we might think that elections are the ultimate test of accountability: the hanging sanction is the non-reelection.
But...

In networked governance structures, the role of elected officials is often not central in the decision making process.
Moreover...

We shouldn’t narrow the issue of accountability to that of democratic control

Grant & Keohane, 2004
Other forms of (necessary) accountability in policy making and implementation

- Fiscal
- Legal
- Administrative
But it is not that simple!
Composition of policy networks

Policy networks are largely composed of bureaucrats, policy experts and interest representatives, who are often only indirectly accountable to citizens and sometimes only accountable to their peers (other experts)
**Politics of problems** (problem solving politics) oriented towards a backstage network of knowledge and decision-making

**Politics of opinion** is the traditional politics in the media, party struggles and ideological assertions
Peer accountability

In governance networks, public accountability is often replaced by peer accountability.

Durable cooperative interactions between actors are expected to generate self-limitation, empathy and mutual trust, but also mutual black mailing and excessive reliance on reputation and trust.
Representation and visibility

In order to have good governance, networks must be sufficiently representative and pluralist.

Problem of ‘old boys club’ and the ‘incompetent subject’ must be dealt with.
often dwells in one single world view, denying that there are other kinds of knowledge that are relevant (white male Western capitalist technocrat )

President Kennedy visits NY World Fair, Photo source: http://ilongisland.com/Robert_Moses_Long_Island.htm
The problem of the 'incompetent actor' refers to the Foucaultian idea that knowledge is the property of certain groups, while other groups do not have their knowledge recognized as valid.
All this means that spatial planners must adopt a different attitude towards plan-making and implementation. They need to perform new roles...
THEN
All knowing

http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/ideas-city-istanbul-or-how-to-obtain-a-building-permit-for-central-park

NOW
Mediator

Robert Moses

U., a young woman
planner
Challenge (for planners?)

to clarify and strengthen the democratic anchorage of network forms of governance
Participation makes governance more effective

- Strengthens democracy
- Improves legitimacy
- Builds support and understanding for actions
- Likely to deliver more effective results
- A strong argument for participation is that knowledge is constructed in communication. It would be therefore unethical and unintelligent to impose top-down solutions that do not take into account the knowledge of stakeholders.
Thanks for listening!
Questions?
References


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