

Targeted Public Participation in Sustainable Mobility Planning: A Case Study of Aalborg, Denmark

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Abstract

There has been consistent agreement in both the academic literature (e.g. Banister, Pucher, Tolley) and in the policy guidance literature from the European Commission (e.g. PILOT, CIVITAS, Eltisplus) that broad public participation and stakeholder involvement in sustainable mobility planning projects is necessary in order to ensure their successful implementation and to generate sufficient political support for further measures. However, the results of a recently completed case study of the planning and implementation of a high volume cycle 'motorway' in Aalborg, Denmark, suggest that targeted public participation, where planners actively choose which segments of the public participate, may be more widespread than is commonly presumed. This raises important questions about transparency, efficiency, democratic process, and fairness that will be outlined within this paper.

Through a study of relevant planning documents at the municipal, national and supra-national levels and in-depth interviews with the planning staff working for the city of Aalborg, the authors found that the planners responsible for the implementation of the bicycling measures implement through a EU-funded sustainable mobility project possess a more nuanced appreciation of the need, relevance and usefulness of public participation than is commonly thought to be the case within academic, planning, and policy communities.

Key words: public participation, sustainable mobility planning, bicycle infrastructure

1.0 Introduction

Across many European countries, extensive public and stakeholder involvement within sustainable mobility planning processes has been promoted as a way to build political legitimacy and increase the acceptance of sustainable mobility measures (Banister, 2008; Pucher & Buehler, 2008; Wolfram & Bührmann, 2007). Some of the more common rationales for doing so include: 1) public participation and stakeholder involvement strengthens democratic planning, in turn supporting a more engaged populace; 2) more transparency in the decision-making process yields more widespread acceptance of contentious policy and planning measures; 3) the knowledge exchanged within the public participation process helps to strengthen the policies and plans by exposing them to public comment, criticism, and revisions; and 4) public participation and stakeholder involvement builds trust between planners, politicians, and citizens.

Policy guidance from the European level also mirrors much of what the academic literature advocates. For example, The GUIDEMAPS handbook from the EU CIVITAS sustainable mobility project asserts that:

'There is a growing belief that communities would support transport schemes more readily if they were more actively involved in designing them. They would better understand the need for the project and perhaps be more willing to accept compromises, and they would be able to suggest ways in which the proposals could be better adapted to meet their local needs. In short, they would 'own' the scheme, instead of regarding it as having been 'imposed' on them from above.' (Kelly, Jones, Barta, Hossinger, Witte, & Wolf, 2011, p. 20)

While there may be elements of this sentiment that hold true, much of the rhetoric surrounding public participation and stakeholder involvement often belies reality, particularly when it comes to the ways in which planners themselves perceive public participation (Bickerstaff, Tolley, & Walker, 2002). While limited consultation and one-way communication with affected communities is a relatively low-risk proposition for planners, more extensive power-sharing processes that allow citizens to actively shape plans, procedures, and outcomes tend to inflame latent tensions between competing roles that planners must negotiate today between what Tore Sager terms the dialogic ideal and neo-liberal reality (Sager, 2009).

It is within this space, between the communicative ideal of the deliberative practitioner (Forester, 1999) and the actual practices of planners today, that this paper will explore. Despite the extensive amount of research and policy attention that has been directed toward the issue of how planners *ought* to perceive public participation and stakeholder involvement, to date there has been comparatively little attention focused on how planners *actually* perceive public participation and to what extent it is desirable or effective (Laurian & Shaw, 2009), particularly in the field of sustainable mobility. This matters for two reasons. Firstly, many of the measures necessary to achieve sustainable mobility, such as congestion road pricing, capacity reductions for motorised transport, modal shift to non-motorised forms of mobility, and parking restrictions, are often politically unpopular (Isaksson & Richardson, 2009; Lee-Gosselin, 2010; Driscoll, Theodorsdottir, Richardson, & Mguni, 2012). Therefore the encouragement of public participation may in fact retard more progressive sustainable mobility strategies that seek to lower greenhouse gas emissions, decrease social exclusion, encourage compact urban development and reduce air, noise and water pollution from motorised transport. Secondly, the shifting (and often countervailing) tensions in planning as practised opens up a more nuanced theoretical space in relation to what the authors have termed targeted public participation, where the planners are able to exercise their expert judgement in choosing which particular "publics" that they choose to engage with.

In this paper, the authors are particularly interested in cycling since, despite its importance within a sustainable mobility strategy, there remains a lack of in-depth research regarding participation in planning of cycling infrastructure. Moreover, public participation within planning has still not been widely accepted among many EU countries, particularly among the southern and eastern EU member states. One of the goals of the paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the role and significance of public participation within the sustainable mobility planning process in a Scandinavian context. Additionally, understanding planners' perspective on public involvement is important for the research community since planners often have a very different perception of public participation than researchers and policy analysts do. Although there have been previous studies on planners' perception of public participation in transport planning (Bickerstaff, Tolley, & Walker, 2002; Laurian &

Shaw, 2009), the literature review did not reveal previous peer-reviewed studies into the planning process of bicycle planning and public participation.

The remainder of this article is structured into four main sub-sections. Firstly, a state-of-the-art review of the literature pertaining to sustainable mobility planning and public participation is developed. This includes documents such as EU White Papers and other policy guidance from the European Commission and the EU-funded CIVITAS and Eltisplus sustainable mobility projects as well as peer-reviewed literature. Secondly, the main research methods used in the data collection and analysis are presented, including key limitations of the study. Thirdly, the relevant outlines of the case study are analysed and discussed, including a comparison of the normative participatory framework and the actual practices of the planners. Fourthly, and finally, three main conclusions will be established that are relevant to researchers, planners, and policy makers going forward: 1) planners' own perceptions of public participation differ in important ways from the manner in which they are typically presumed; 2) the use of targeted public participation is a defensible, although ethically sticky, means of guiding sustainable mobility strategies and plans through the thicket of potential opposition; and 3) that for more far-reaching measures that reduce individual mobility options, particularly car-based ones, it is practically unavoidable that planners will more and more be faced with the 'tension of inclusivity' as to who and how the "public" will be involved in the decision-making process.

2.0 Sustainable mobility and public participation: The state-of-the-art

What is sustainable mobility?

For the purposes of this article, sustainable mobility is defined by the European Commission White Paper 'Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area-Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system' (2011) that states the sustainable mobility challenge "*is to break the transport system's dependence on oil without sacrificing its efficiency and compromising mobility*", with a notable emphasis that "*curbing mobility is not an option*" (European Commission, 2011a, p. 5). Leaving aside the question of the feasibility of achieving such ambitious (and contradictory) policy goals, such as a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector by 60% in the 2050 without significant reductions in overall mobility levels or the imposition of road pricing, sustainable mobility is understood as a system of movement that is not reliant upon fossil fuels, but also takes into account relevant social and environmental considerations such as equal accessibility, safety, and reduced air, noise, and water pollution.

Interestingly, a search of both the White Paper and the accompanying Impact Assessment (European Commission, 2011(a)(b)) revealed that neither document mentions public participation in any form in within the policy recommendations or strategic aims. In a comprehensive review of sustainable transport planning in the United States, the European Union, and Canada, researchers claim that "*acceptability is an essential (yet often neglected) element of sustainable transport*" (Banister, Pucher, & Lee-Gosselin, 2007, p. 36). Within the European Commission, this message apparently has yet to be heeded, for perhaps understandable reasons. People generally react quite strongly and aggressively toward travel demand reduction measures that restrict their personal mobility, in the absence of emergency situations

such as wartime rationing or energy shocks such as those experienced in the 1970's (Lee-Gosselin, 2010). Although there are notable differences between North America and Europe regarding public acceptability of state regulatory interventions, even within the EU there is frequently strong resistance to impositions and restrictions on mobility, particularly if private motoring is at stake (European Commission, 2011b).

The lack of public engagement and absence of participatory mechanisms within the European Commission in relation to transport planning is not mirrored in the guidance and policy documents that are produced by the European Parliament. In a 2010 report delivered to the Committee on Transport and Tourism entitled 'Sustainable Urban Transport Plans', the authors state that:

One of the core elements of SUTPs [Sustainable Urban Transport Plans] is public participation in its preparation. Undeniably, ensuring comprehensive citizens' involvement at the planning and evaluation stages offers the opportunity to raise awareness of the objectives and substance of the strategy and measures of SUTPs. Besides the contribution in terms of transparency and accountability of the process, public participation may facilitate mainstreaming, ensuring a common approach to policies that affect residents' quality of life and the urban area's growth perspectives. Finally, with respect to SUTPs, public involvement should also be aligned to the modalities of public participation set out in Article 2 of Directive 2003/35/EC (EC, 2003). (Trasporti e Territorio, 2010)

Here the linkage between public participation and sustainable mobility is claimed to be essential. Many of the rationales (transparency, awareness-raising, accountability, and acceptability) are frequently encountered in both academic and policy circles, with little in the way of critical assessment of what type of public participation is being discussed and how exactly the planners themselves encounter and perceive public participation.

What is public participation?

Following Sherry Arnstein's (1969) well-known conceptualization of the ladder of citizen participation, public participation here is understood as citizen involvement in the actual decision-making processes with the underlying goal of affecting the outcomes and influencing choices (Arnstein, 1969). There is a key distinction to be highlighted in Arnstein's work, that public participation in the broadest sense is not equivalent to holding workshops, communicating with affected citizens, and producing promotional brochures describing the benefits of a given plan or strategy. Rather, it is the more radical notion embedded within the progressive planning tradition that citizens have the right and the responsibility sit at the same table as politicians and planners when decisions are taken. Within the European Union, there remain large differences in how municipal planners understand and apply public participation in sustainable mobility planning, and the idea of citizens wielding real political power within the planning system is still quite a radical notion.

There is a spectrum of citizen involvement that covers a distance from manipulation to one-way distribution of information from the authorities to the citizenry, through widespread inclusion of the public during the entire process of formal decision-making, to handing over authority to the public to decide how plans will be decided upon (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). However, as noted in the EU-funded CIVITAS handbook on stakeholder involvement, "*politicians tend to have an ambivalent attitude towards participatory approaches*" (CIVITAS Secretariat, 2011, p. 8). In fairness to politicians, they are not the only ones with ambivalent attitudes towards

participation. Much of the planning guidance to be found on how to engage with citizens to develop and implement sustainable mobility plans also demonstrates a certain wariness as to who, when, and how planners should pick those who participate in the process. Within the same CIVITAS handbook on stakeholder involvement, planners are encouraged to screen the potential actors using a two-by-two influence/interest matrix (see Table 1 below for an example). Not surprisingly, most of the measures discussed in the handbook, ranging from mobility management, clean fuels, bicycle measures, collective transport, and safety measures, listed public authorities, politicians, and transport authorities as the key stakeholders in the “high influence/high stakes” category that are central to a public involvement strategy (CIVITAS Secretariat, 2011).

Table 1: Sample influence/interest matrix

	Low influence	High influence
Low stake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs • Consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidents of local associations and organisations • Local celebrities • EU • Citizens
High stake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip generators (schools, hospitals, etc.) • Companies • Public transport providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government • Politicians • Transport authorities • Media

The stated purpose of such a screening process is to help planners decide how to target the different “publics” that are relevant to a given sustainable mobility measures. Additionally, such practices reveal what Bickerstaff, Tolley and Walker call the ‘tension of inclusivity’ (Bickerstaff, Tolley, & Walker, 2002, p. 71), where planners face difficult dilemmas concerning representativeness (how can they be certain that special interest groups speak for society at large, and how can the presumed or actual spokespeople of the special interests groups speak for the group?) and inclusiveness, since it is practically impossible to include every potential stakeholder and affected citizen at each stage of the planning process. This raises an uncomfortable issue regarding the ability of well-connected, articulate minority groups to capture the agenda when it comes to participation and planning, something that Todd Litman, among others, contends can lead to biases and distortions favoring mobility over accessibility and an undervaluation of non-motorised forms of travel (Litman, 2002). Lastly, the tension of inclusivity also opens up sticky ethical and moral questions such as: 1) within which planning contexts is it justifiable for planners to selectively engage the public; 2) what are the implications for democratic decision making, transparency, and fairness when planners actively suppress participation of citizens that are opposed to certain measures or goals; and 3) is it justifiable that planners engage in targeted public participation in order to achieve sustainability goals that would otherwise be disrupted or destroyed by wide-spread public engagement (for example, road capacity restrictions, road pricing schemes, removal of free parking, and increased fuel taxes).

What is targeted public participation?

For the purposes of this article, targeted public participation is understood as a selective approach by planners to engage specific segments of the public for specific purposes at specific times.

3.0 Methodology

The research design is a single critical case study using qualitative data sources including: relevant local planning documents and reports, European Commission documents, and expert interviews with three planners directly involved in the planning and implementation of the planning connected to the construction of a 'cycle motorway' within ARCHIMEDES¹ project (Achieving Real Change with Innovative transport MEasures Demonstrating Energy Savings) in Aalborg, Denmark. What makes this case critical is the bringing to empirical ground some key theoretical assumptions about the way in which planners ought to perceive public participation in sustainable mobility projects. Furthermore, Denmark has a well-deserved reputation for strong public and state support for sustainable mobility planning in general and bicycling provision in particular. One of the guiding hypothesis of the research is that given the positive pre-disposition toward sustainable mobility strategies and plans, coupled with strong traditions of democratic control and transparency, then planners in Denmark should possess strong inclinations toward extensive public participation.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted for approximately 1 hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition to the responses of the participants, background data on participants (educational background, position and main responsibility, time spent in current position) was collected. The analysis and interpretation of the data was conducted through the use of structured queries developed by the authors using a syncretic method combining EU-level policy guidance and best practices for sustainable transport/mobility planning in combination with an analytic frame derived from key academic contributions in the field of sustainable mobility planning and public participation.

3.1 Limitations of the study

As with any case study, particularly single case studies, there are of course issues with the generalizability and validity of the findings. The transferability of the findings from a Scandinavian context is also untested. One of the next steps in the research is to extend the methods to a number of different bicycling projects that have been realised within the CIVITAS program, looking at cities that have different levels of transparency, divergent planning cultures, and differences in political and social systems. Another caveat to this study is that since the planners interviewed were working within an EU funding framework, it is not entirely clear that ordinary municipal planners working on other sustainable mobility projects have similar attitudes to targeted public participation.

¹ ARCHIMEDES is a part of larger EU-funded CIVITAS sustainable mobility project

4.0 Case description and analysis: Planners' perception of public participation in bicycle planning in Aalborg, Denmark

Even though Denmark is one of the most bike-friendly countries in the world, with excellent cycling infrastructure and strong public support for bicycling among citizens, planners and politicians, the overall levels of cycling in many Danish cities has been generally stagnating or declining while car ownership rates and per capita vehicle kilometres travelled are rising (Statistics Denmark, 2010; Lautrup, 2011). In order to reverse this trend, many Danish cities have implemented various plans and strategies that address barriers to cycling. Aalborg, the fourth largest city in Denmark with a metropolitan population around 120.000, is one of those cities. The Municipality of Aalborg developed a Cycling Action Plan in 2008 with the aim to prioritise a list of cycling infrastructure projects to be completed by 2020. The plan was approved by the City Council at beginning of 2009. Also, in the same year, eager to demonstrate a strong political commitment to cycling in the city, the city council approved the project Cycling City Aalborg, co-financed by the Danish Ministry of Transport. The project focuses on commuting cyclists, aiming to provide high-class cycling commuter routes.

Additionally, Aalborg has participated in multiple generations of the sustainable mobility project CIVITAS (CItY-VITAlity-Sustainability), funded by the European Commission. The project was launched in 2002 in order to encourage cities to introduce transport measures and policies that support sustainable urban mobility. The City of Aalborg has participated in two out of three phases of the CIVITAS project (CIVITAS I from 2002-2006, and CIVITAS PLUS 2008-2012). Each CIVITAS project involved between 4-6 European cities in research and demonstration projects. In the CIVITAS PLUS project, Aalborg participated with 5 other cities within the ARCHIMEDES project. One of the primary goals of the ARCHIMEDES project for Aalborg is to put a particular focus on cycling mobility aiming to become a Cycling City. One of the key measures related to cycling improvements that Aalborg implemented is the construction of a cycling motorway.

Through this cycling motorway, the city centre is linked with University campus located 6 km to the southeast. This stretch of the cycle motorway was chosen since it represented one of the primary routes for cyclists traveling on the city centre-university axis. Prior to the construction of the grade-separated bicycle motorway, there were only painted cycle lanes, creating shared space between motorised and non-motorised traffic. An investment for infrastructure work, of approximately 1.2 million Euros has been financed outside of the ARCHIMEDES project (Lautrup, 2011). However, the project contributed through staff time to design, plan and manage the implementation of the measures.

4.1 The need for public participation

Unlike binding legal requirements for Environmental Impact Assessments or Strategic Environmental Assessments, there are no EU requirements for public participation or consultation in transport projects (Trasporti e Territorio, 2010; European Commission, 2011b). When planning the cycling motorway project in Aalborg, the planners interviewed stated that they did not have a binding legal requirement to include the public in the planning process of building the cycling motorway.

However, in light of the fact that the project was nested inside of a larger cycling strategy, Cycling City Aalborg, there was 8 weeks of public comment/communication space set aside where planners held workshops and other public events to communicate the goals of the cycling motorway. As noted by one of the planners within the municipality, *[t]his is part of an EU project and we do not have any requirements for doing this [public participation] in particular. But of course, the European community is very interested in having these experiences with citizen engagement. And that way we are kind glad that we did this. Because, now we can say in Europe, this is the way that you can have a good process about planning for cyclists* (GF).

Another rationale for public participation that is often put forward is that involving the public can “*get new ideas for the project but also to hear whether there are certain specific problems that were relevant for the people that are cyclists within in city*” (AMLN). In the case of the cycle motorway, the planners interviewed agreed that public involvement here was also important to avoid costly and divisive conflicts further down the road. As one of the planners explained:

‘If you do not spend the time and money at that point (early planning) you could easily spend later on. Because if you do not involve people in the beginning of the planning process then you could easily spend all the time and money on people complaining. You have to respond to every complaint that enters the municipality. So, in that way you will spend the time in some point anyway. Why do not do it at the beginning where it is positive involvement, instead of the negative feedback later on...It takes some resources but you would have spent, from my perspective, these resources anyway.’ (MV)

4.3 Targeted versus comprehensive public participation

“I think this might sound weird if you have a theoretical background in public participation, but if we had a very large number of people who will just come in because we had a public advertisement for this for instance, we would also have a lot of ideas that would not be practically possible. We could not stand with one hundred different ideas out of workshop. So we worked with small target groups – to make it more specific.”(GF)

While our research shows a high degree of agreement with much of the academic and policy literature on the value of public participation for conflict avoidance and engaging citizens in planning, it is when we turn our attention to which publics participate and in what fashion that the empirical evidence tells a different, and more nuanced, story. The quote above illustrates quite clearly the ‘tension of inclusivity’ (Bickerstaff, Tolley, & Walker, 2002), whereby planners are often restricted in their ability to have a completely open process due to time, resource, and practical constraints. Since most of the ARCHIMEDES projects were already committed to specific outcomes prior to the public consultation period, the planners decided to forego more open public consultations that would have elicited ideas and comments that were unworkable or impossible to implement given the project schedule and budget. So whom to choose and how should they be chosen? A response that emerges from this case study is that planners use a combination of expert knowledge and agenda-setting power to include the groups that fall within the high influence/high stakes end of the sustainable mobility stakeholder matrix: professional planning staff,

consulting engineers, transport authorities, and key civil society interest groups that have a strong disposition toward supporting the project. The list of stakeholders that participated in the planning process of building the cycling motorway is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Stakeholders involved in the cycling motorway project

Government/Authorities	Businesses / Operators	Communities/Local Neighbourhoods	Others
Local transport authority	Engineers/contractors (COWI - consulting firm)	Local interest groups (Vejgaard Samråd)	University (Aalborg University)
Traffic police	Transport operators/providers (Public transport unit, Aalborg municipality)	Cycle group (Danish Cyclists' Federation)	
Planners		Transport users	
Professional staff (designers, engineers, health and sustainable departments)		Citizens	

When questioned as to how participants were invited to a workshop organised by the municipality in order to finalise the design and placement of the cycle motorway, a planner for the municipality noted that *“it was very pragmatic process of choosing who should be in it, and it was made in the Archimedes Project Secretariat at that time, and we decided who should be invited in the workshop. And they were invited directly. It was not that we made a broad announcement of the workshop-it was made internally.”*(GF) The use of targeted public participation in this context can be seen as a good strategy to engage specific citizen groups and stakeholders that have a strong interest in realising the project while avoiding the typical pitfalls of open-ended public participation processes of multiple rounds of discussions, meetings, map making and the like that ends up ultimately being ignored when the plans are decided between the technical and political actors within the municipality and powerful stakeholders. Another reason that the planners gave for using this type of engagement is that they frequently encounter a lack of interest from the public, and therefore more precise engagement with motivated actors avoided long delays in the planning process. The workshop was the most proactive point of interaction of the project team with public and stakeholders.

As to the question of when the public was included within the planning process for the cycle motorway (see Table 3), it is readily apparent that there were relatively few opportunities for active public involvement over the 4-year project time span. In Arnstein’s ladder of public participation, this type of involvement could be reasonably located within the degrees of tokenism, somewhere between informing and placation.

Table 3 Stages of planning and public participation for the cycle motorway project

Stage/ Name	Actions	Stakeholders	Time
Stage 1			
Development of “tool box” with innovative bicycle initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of possible initiatives (measures) on the route • Inspection of the topology of the route in order to get ‘an impression’ of the route and possible initiatives. • Vision workshop with different groups of stakeholders and public 	Representatives of all four stakeholders group (see Table 2)	Autumn 2008 / Summer 2009
Stage 2			
Design of the route and project engineering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalizing the planning and drawings • Contacting the manufacturers of technical equipment and signing the contracts • Sending the application to the Danish Road Directorate in order to get approval for the lane light project (since this initiative, as a new and untried solution, needed an exemption from existing Danish legislation to be implemented) • Obtaining the approval to implement the project for a test period • An ex-ante count of cyclists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional staff • Project managers • Danish Road Directorate 	Autumn 2009 / Summer 2010
Stage 3			
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing of the initiatives on the route • Informing the citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engineers/contractors (COWI - consulting firm) • Project managers • Transport users • Citizens 	Summer 2010 / Summer 2011
Stage 4			
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ex-post count of numbers of cyclists • Evaluating average speed of the cyclists • Evaluating cyclists’ attitude about implemented measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project managers • Professional staff • Transport users • Citizens 	Summer 2011 / spring 2012

Using the framework of the decision-making process set up by (Kelly, Jones, Barta, Hossinger, Witte, & Wolf, 2011), the role of the public and stakeholders in this project is identified. As Table 4 shows, in the process of decision-making (problem definition, option assessment, and formal decision-taking) there were little to no public participation, other than small groups engaged by the planners themselves. Even if the theory suggests that engagement is desirable in all stages of decision making process, here, in this case could be seen that from the planners' perspective, there was little compelling reason to engage the wider public in any significant way.

Table 4 The Stages of the decision making process and main actors involved

Stage	Actors
Problem definition	Project team
Option generation	Project team, stakeholders (targeted)
Option assessment	Project team
Formal Decision taking	Project team
Implementation	Project team, stakeholders (targeted)
Monitoring and evaluation	Project team, stakeholders (targeted)

5.0 Discussion

A reasonable person may ask: so what? What are the practical ramifications for planning that emerge from this study? The answer (or set of possible answers) has a few dimensions worth noting. Firstly, it may be necessary to re-visit both the theoretically- and policy-driven guidance regarding public participation and stakeholder involvement in sustainable mobility planning. Despite more than two generations of exhortations from planning researchers and practitioners, participatory approaches to planning have limits and those limits ought to be more clearly discussed as to how, when, and where public participation is employed. Transparency and fairness (both perceived and actual) are important planning values, but they should not come at the expense of abandoning professional expertise and insight developed through years of experience. One of the interesting tensions that emerged from the study is that the planners who were responsible for the cycle motorway project were all younger planners educated at a program at Aalborg University that places a strong emphasis upon on public participation and collaborative decision-making. Yet when faced with the constraints of real-life planning, there was little visible reluctance to engage in a much more specific and narrowly defined version of public participation, whereby the planners themselves chose which publics should be heard.

Secondly, the relentless focus the presumed need for public participation as a means to secure political support for sustainable mobility measures ought to be examined more critically. While this may be true for small-scale changes in transport modal shifts, when it comes to more contentious issues such as road pricing, removal of parking and capacity restrictions for motorised transport, broad public participation will likely encourage a continuation of the status quo rather than a shift toward non-motorised and energy-efficient modes of transport. If urban planners are serious about realising sustainable mobility goals, then they will have to, sooner rather than later, become more comfortable with the idea that large segments of the population will be strongly opposed to ANY restrictions on personal freedom in the material expression of the automobile. The recent planning disaster in Copenhagen regarding the

proposed implementation of a congestion ring neatly illustrates the point. The idea generated virulent opposition not only from predictable political corners, such as the conservative, free-market parties, but also from many of the Social Democratic municipalities that are located on the periphery of Copenhagen. Despite strong central government support, the city had to abandon the plan due to overwhelming public opposition.

Thirdly, and finally, there are a number of ethical paradoxes that are raised here. Denmark, along with the rest of Scandinavia, has a long history of democratic governance, and public participation and engagement have been integrated into planning system for many decades. The planning culture in Denmark recognises the significance of public participation, even if there are no legal requirements for doing so. Customs and norms of democracy and participation are also embedded in planning practice, even in the absence of formal legislative or regulative measures. Moreover, Danish citizens generally have a high level of trust in authority and there is culture of communication between citizens and planners at the local level, creating more space for planners to operate and decide without constant consultation with citizens and stakeholders. In political cultures that are more corrupt, contentious, or litigious, targeted public participation can easily assume a more ominous character, where existing power imbalances between the expert and the citizen are amplified by the ability of the planner to freely choose the particular public that they wish to engage.

Conclusions

How planners actually perceive public participation and how they ought to perceive it, according to both policy guidance and scientific literature, is not necessarily the same thing. One of the main conclusions to be drawn from this study is that from both a research and practice perspective, more empirical work needs to be conducted that seeks to understand how exactly planners today engage with the public. If we collectively are to realise our goals of living and moving in a more sustainable manner, then radical changes will have to be made in our current patterns of mobility and consumption. These will not be popular changes in the near term. Empty exhortations of “collective decision-making” and “public participation” often serve to mask the reality that the key decisions have often already been taken and what is required from the crowd is merely to give the thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Human beings are quite clever at sorting out the rules of the game and most people do not really enjoy being a part of a consultation process that is, at root, a charade of democracy.

The tension of inclusivity is also emerges quite strongly in the current paper. In the space between the communicative ideal and the difficult choices that need to be made in real life, what kinds of tools, practices, and ethical guidance will be required to make these difficult choices in a defensible manner. There may be little in the way of clear-cut right and wrong, but if planning wishes to move away from an elite exercise, then more work needs to be done to clarify exactly how and in what ways the public ought to or even wants to be involved in these decisions.

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