

Concepts of involvement

Concepts of planning largely reflect the way societies are organised on a general political level. Planning and governance have developed similar ideas for the problem how to involve citizens in topical decision-making without giving up a general long-term strategy and technical competence.

In most European societies organised around the idea of **representative democracy** with its commonly accepted separation of powers, we can find a corresponding functional division in planning:

- Legislation and, to some extent, master planning frameworks are usually devised by governments and adopted by parliaments who constitute the **legislature**. This also applies to the rules of the planning process itself.
- Planning and building authorities implementing these are part of the **executive** with mostly technical and only limited political competence. Planners themselves may also be considered part of the executive.
- The third power of **judiciary** allows individuals to take action in case a planning project infringes on their rights. In some countries, institutions concerned with social and environmental issues have also the right to intervene if they consider law to be violated by a planning project without being affected personally (collective action).

If we were to follow this model exclusively, the general public and individuals or legal bodies interested in or affected by a project - all those we call **stakeholders** - would have very little opportunity to interfere, namely for two reasons:

- Electing political bodies is done at intervals too infrequent for stakeholders to influence concrete planning decisions by voting. Often it is difficult to predict how any particular candidate or party will decide on future issues.
- Legal action is confined to cases where law is violated. The majority of complaints or suggestions for improvement are not based on legal grounds.

Consequently, there have been attempts to improve the **participation** of stakeholders and the general public in decision-making processes. In order to avoid confusion between different concepts associated with the term of 'participation', the word **involvement** will be used here as a generic term for all attempts to include stakeholders and the general public in decision-making.

We will see that even the word 'involvement' can mean very different things. As an example, the following section deals with two concepts from governance approaching the aim of maximum involvement from different sides.

Involvement in governance

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY – THE REFERENDUM IDEA

Participatory democracy means turning away from the idea of mere representation of citizens by elected bodies and directly involving the general public (or part of it) in decision-making on topical questions.

The most consequent implementation of participatory democracy is the **referendum** where the totality of a population are given the chance to vote on a particular question with everyone's vote having equal weight. A referendum goes on the following two assumptions:

- It assumes that a majority of people are equally well-informed, competent and not more selfish than is accepted by the standards of society.
- It concedes that this majority shall have their will and impose it on the minorities outvoted.

Referenda are also associated with the term of 'direct democracy'. There are more and subtler forms of participatory policy, and the usage of the term is not unified. To give a generic idea of participatory democracy, it seeks to involve a maximum of a population in decision-making while respecting the majority rule.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY – THE ROUND TABLE IDEA

The political concept of deliberative democracy assumes that a thorough and honest process of counselling on an equal-rights basis (deliberation) will pave the way for a consensus in decision-making which is better than enforcing the majority rule.

A popular device of deliberative policy is the **round table**. Although it also gives equal weight to the voices of those taking part, there are two major differences from the referendum idea:

- Round tables do not include everybody. They usually comprise people having a strong interest in the matter in question (stakeholders). Other parties who are not directly concerned but have proven to be competent by constant commitment to the issue negotiated are also likely to be represented, as well as a few technical specialists, if the problem requires it. Within this circle, everybody present will have a say but not everybody *is* present.
- Unlike with a referendum, the idea of the round table is not that a majority will decide and impose their will on minorities. It is to achieve a consensus which is, from a viewpoint of social behaviour, something fundamentally different.

Thus, the essence of deliberative policy is counselling, not voting, although a final vote may decide on critical questions. Its focus, however, is on the quality of involvement, not necessarily on involving everybody.

Involvement in planning

Planning, apart from its technical aspects, has many things in common with governance and can draw from the political concepts explained above. Table 1 opposes two approaches to involvement in planning, a **participatory** one in the strict sense derived from participatory democracy and a deliberative one which has been termed **collaborative** in the realm of planning.

Table 1: Participatory and collaborative approaches to involvement in planning

	Participatory approach	Collaborative approach
Basic idea	Power holders make concessions to stakeholders	Stakeholders meet on an equal-rights basis
Scope of involvement	Stakeholder participation encouraged mainly to create support for a plan	Stakeholder participation encouraged to create a plan itself
Period of involvement	Participation of stakeholders only requested at certain points in the planning process	Continuous stakeholder participation throughout the planning process
Information flow	Bilateral – power holders receive information, the public receives education	Unilateral – stakeholders are supposed to inform and educate each other
Degree of formalism	Relies on rather formal input methods such as public hearings and voting	Relies on rather informal face-to-face dialogue among stakeholders
Decision-making	Compromise or majority rule	Deliberation and consensus

The terms **participation** and **participatory planning** were first conceived to encompass all forms of direct involvement, as opposed to mere representation. In a stricter sense, 'participatory planning' is often seen as a counterpart to the idea of participatory democracy, as set out in table 1. Planning, when derived from this idea, can use various forms of actual involvement, from public hearings and the possibility for everyone to submit written statements on drafted plans through internet participation platforms to public referenda. Those forms of participation typically include information exchange or consultation of stakeholders, in some cases even public voting, but no truly conjoint and consensual decision-making.

In the 1990s, the term **collaborative planning** was coined to describe an approach more based on the round-table idea. As with a round table, the idea of collaborative planning is to gather a group of stakeholders, possibly supplemented with people who have proven to be competent by constant commitment, to discuss a planning issue and work towards a consensus. Under this concept, planners themselves act as specialists consulted by the group rather than delivering readymade plans to be discussed or voted on. The goal is to make conjoint decisions and develop a plan together that can be accepted by all participants.