

## Levels of involvement

Striking as terms like 'participation' or 'involvement' are, they have been used for many different things in real governance and planning situations. We have seen so far that there are strictly participatory and deliberative/collaborative approaches to the issue of involving stakeholders and the general public in decision-making.

Put in a nutshell, involvement means to confer power to these parties. The degree of power transferred may differ considerably under both concepts, and there has been no lack of attempts on ritualised 'participation' that would appease the public but factually leave all power in the hands of traditional authorities.

### Arnstein's ladder

In 1969, American scientist and policy consultant Sherry Arnstein pointed out eight levels or 'rungs on a ladder' of citizen participation.<sup>1</sup> Her model refers to governance in general, opposing the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of power. Although Arnstein admits that both groups are seldom homogenous, and although the model is probably too simple to describe more complex situations both in politics and planning, Arnstein's ladder gives a good overview of how participation was conceived of as *yielding power* at her time.

Table 1: Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (left) and modern terminology (right)

	Arnstein's ladder		Modern terminology	
Participation	Citizen power	Citizen control	Delegated decision-making (delegation)	Deliberation
		Delegated power		
		Partnership	Collaborative planning (deliberation)	
Tokenism	Placation	Interactive planning (consultation)		
	Consultation			
	Informing		One-way exchange (information)	
Non-participation	Therapy			
	Manipulation			

<sup>1</sup> Arnstein, Sherry (1969): A ladder of citizen participation. In: Journal of the American Planning Association JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969.

Arnstein's bottommost two rungs denote attempts to 'educate' or 'cure' the public in a one-way process that does not give them any rights, not even the right to be heard. These are considered forms of **non-participation**.

On a level Arnstein describes as **tokenism** (symbolic policy), we may discriminate several forms of interaction between the powerful and the powerless, one-way or two-way, which serve to exchange information but do not grant the 'have-nots' a right to take part in decision-making. The public will be heard but will lack the power to ensure that their views will be *heeded*.

Finally, the topmost three rungs on Arnstein's ladder, described as **citizen power**, comprise opportunities for the 'have-nots' to 'negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders'. The one described as 'partnership' comes closest to what we call collaborative planning today because it implies an equal-rights basis for those participating. The other two denote shades of actually delegating decision-making to the public.

The coloured bar on the left shows the **degree of participation** as a direct measurement of the amount of power conferred to the formerly 'have-nots'.

## Participation and deliberation – the difference between yielding and sharing power

On the right-hand side of table 1, some more modern terms are juxtaposed to Arnstein's ladder, including the concept of collaborative planning already introduced.

On the lowest level of this model (**information**), the planning body collects data about the needs and objectives of stakeholders, by survey or by arranging public meetings. Vice versa, the public may be informed about plans and decisions, but the process is always one-way at any given time.

At the 'interactive planning' or **consultation** level, stakeholders are invited into planning groups, meeting several times during the planning process. Repetitive meetings enable members of the group to learn about the opinions and reasoning of each other. However, the decision about how to take proposals of these working groups into account in the final plan is still with the planning authority.

Under the concept of collaborative planning (**deliberation**), this power to decide is conferred to the group as a whole – the most important step towards equality and true participation. Planning authorities, planners and stakeholders engage in a process of jointly conceiving a plan all parties can approve.

Finally, on the **delegation** level, the planning body transforms its power to decide to the participants (stakeholders and the public), partially or completely.

While these levels can also be measured against a degree of participation, just as Arnstein did, the coloured bar on the right gives a different scale: the **amount of deliberation**. Participation, in its strict sense, means *yielding* power to the formerly 'have-nots', deliberation means *sharing* power. Under the concept of collaborative planning, it is the quality of deliberation and conjoint decision-making that matters, so the right-hand scale has a maximum on the 'collaborative planning' level.

The transition from yielding to sharing power, i.e. from the information, consultation and delegation levels to true deliberation, is accompanied by a **change in the quality of decision-making**: It is not possible to organise a collaborative process just by shifting the balance of powers. It requires a different approach to how power is exerted, namely by a conjoint decision of all parties involved rather than a majority rule of those to whom power has been bestowed by devices of participation.