Collaborative planning

Having opposed different concepts and levels of involvement in planning and outlined the idea of collaborative planning, we will now put more precisely what it is and what it takes to speak of collaborative planning.

Characteristics of collaborative planning

Five characteristics, three of which can be grouped together, distinguish a truly collaborative process: First, there are three preconditions somewhat related to each other: **inclusiveness**, **diversity and interdependence**. These are accompanied by two ingredients that are essential to ensure true deliberation: **authentic dialogue** and a **mutual gains** negotiation style.

INCLUSIVENESS, DIVERSITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Inclusiveness means that *all parties* having an interest in a project should be represented in a collaborative process. Even if a smaller circle has the power to act alone, their perspective may be narrowed and their decisions may lack legitimation. Excluded stakeholders can later destroy agreements.

But as the word 'represented' suggests, inclusiveness often requires representation. It is hardly ever possible to let every single individual take part in a collaborative process. Those participating must be selected in a way such as to represent all existing opinions on the matter, and to represent a *variety of opinions*.

This precondition of **diversity** has been pointed out by Innes and Booher[1] as being essential 'to take full advantage of the creativity that can come from trying to find solutions and actions that can respond to a wide set of competing interests.' That is, diversity fosters creativity and ensures that the outcome of a planning process is well adapted to diverse circumstances in real life.

The third precondition of **interdependence** means that 'the stakeholders must know that they cannot meet their interests working alone and that they share with others a common problem.' While being dependent is usually considered a handicap, we all know that many claims of independence are no more than conceit, based on the suppression of facts or other people's rights. Being conscious of one's mutual interdependence is essential for successful collaboration.

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[1] Innes, Judith E; Booher, David E. (2000): Collaborative Dialogue as a Policy Making Strategy. University of California, Berkeley, U.S.

AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

One essential element of a collaborative approach to decision-making is what Innes and Booher have called 'authentic dialogue':

To be authentic, a dialogue must meet certain conditions; each speaker must legitimately represent the interest for which he/she claims to speak; each must speak sincerely; each must make statements that are comprehensible to others; and each statement must be accurate. These speech conditions do not come into being automatically, but can be largely ensured by facilitators.

Thus, the two key features of authentic dialogue are:

- **Authorisation:** Participants must be able to truly reflect and attend to the interests of those they claim to represent.
- **Honesty:** Participants must stick to what they know to be true, deliver accurate statements and do so in a way others will understand.

Authentic dialogue between stakeholders leads to reciprocity, relationship building, mutual learning and creativity. These in turn give rise to what Innes and Booher call 'system changes': Participants develop shared identities, shared meanings, new explanatory models for problems and innovative approaches to their solution.

MUTUAL GAINS NEGOTIATION STYLE

As for the way participants enter a discussion, we may distinguish two styles revealing fundamentally different approaches to negotiating:

A **distributive negotiation** style assumes that negotiation is competition and that the other party is an adversary to be intimidated and weakened. Under this concept, the appropriate approach is to take an extreme position and then back off incrementally, to focus on one's own needs and reveal as little as possible. It is easy to see that this kind of negotiation style will not promote collaboration.

The **mutual gains approach**, by contrast, takes a reciprocal posture, trying to understand other parties' interests and focusing not so much on positions but on underlying values and concerns. This makes it easier to shift positions when having reached a common understanding of those values and concerns. It implies the ability to recognize and avoid the long-term consequences of hardball negotiation style – that losers get revenge.

The mutual gains negotiation approach outlines the essential elements of collaboration which are reflected in Healey's assertion that those that come to a collaborative process should come with a **perspective** rather than a position.[2]

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[2] Healey, Patsy (1999): Collaborative planning: Shaping places in fragmented societies. Macmillan, London.

The two faces of collaborative planning

The collaborative approach is an attempt to reconcile **technical** and **social** issues of planning which both occur invariably with every new project human societies launch. 'Social issues' in this context does not mean the implications a project may have on social mobility or the accessibility of resources. These, along with environmental and ecological aspects, can be subsumed under 'technical' for the purpose of this reflection. 'Social' refers to the way opinions are formed, brought to weight and taken into account during the planning process itself.

In societies based on representative democracy, the social aspect of planning is usually determined by the planning procedures prescribed by legislation. These may or may not include collaborative and participatory elements, but the procedures themselves are rarely subject to negotiations during the planning process.

Collaborative planning cannot override legislation. However, European civil law, based on the idea of liberated citizens pursuing their individual interests, has always had the main object of settling dispute among conflicting parties; it does not usually ban amicable arrangements. That is the point where collaborative planning is to some extent free to modify procedures. The proceeding in social terms can be *part of the planning process* rather than being entirely determined by factors beyond the reach of people involved.

That is, collaborative planning takes place on two levels:

- A **technical level** where a certain planning decision is expected as outcome. The technical issue is solved when a plan has been set up or a decision has been made that settles the problem identified at the outset of the process.

- A **social level** where a certain mutual understanding and general satisfaction with the technical result is expected as outcome. The social issue is solved when everybody involved can accept (not necessarily favour or even endorse) the technical outcome of their own free will.

Planners engaged in a collaborative process should be aware that they are always acting on both levels simultaneously, and that both are equally important and must be coped with.

On the **technical** side, the collaborative approach does not change planning very much: building legislation, planning frameworks and statics calculations do not change because stakeholders discuss them. There is, however, one aspect for planners that may be considered technical and needs to be adapted to a collaborative process, namely the way of communicating and documenting their work. Collaborative planning usually requires more, quicker and more easily comprehensible communication on technical details.

On the **social** side, however, there are serious challenges for planners leading or taking part in a collaborative process. This is what CoPack will deal with in the 'Preparing for a collaborative process' section.