

## Criticism of collaborative planning

In many cases, natural resources planning can be improved by using the collaborative approach. Solving planning problems together almost always results in more people brainstorming for ideas and building on each other's ideas. Collaborative planning should enhance trust and participation among stakeholders and increase commitment to defined tasks and goals.

However, collaborative planning has had many criticisms levelled at it as well and it is important to be aware of them. Some of the alleged shortcomings of the approach expressed by Fainstein<sup>1</sup> are listed below:

- Real issues are avoided in order to achieve a nominal consensus that does not reflect reality.
- Action/implementation is often a problem because the parties in the process are not honest about their intentions and purposes.
- It ignores the role of the powerful and their capacity to stall the implementation of agreed actions.
- If the planner acts as a facilitator only, new and creative thinking can be stifled and only those solutions that are incremental in nature will emerge.
- The process is usually too drawn out and resource hungry and can lead to cynicism and its being viewed as a 'talking shop'.
- The NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) effect can take hold among stakeholders and anything that changes the status quo in too extreme a manner will be excluded.
- There is evidence that experts acting on their own often come to better solutions than stakeholders operating in a collaborative process.

All these criticisms are quite fair and offer food for thought. However, the collaborative approach is not presented as a remedy for every problem. There are no guarantees that it will result in the best possible solution and that everybody will agree on the outcome. Some possible counter-arguments to Fainstein's criticisms are listed in table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Fainstein, Susan. S. (2000): New Directions in Planning Theory. In: Urban Affairs Review, 35 (4) (March 2000), 451-78.

Table 1: Some possible answers to Fainstein's criticisms

Criticism	Counter-argument
Real issues are avoided in order to achieve a nominal consensus that does not reflect reality.	Discussion and consensus finding can shape communities and establish a new reality of planning and acting.
Action/implementation is often a problem because the parties in the process are not honest about their intentions and purposes.	The problem is the same without collaborative planning, only with less impediments to implementing solutions that are not honestly intended to solve problems.
It ignores the role of the powerful and their capacity to stall the implementation of agreed actions.	Without collaborative planning, such powerful parties would have even much greater influence.
If the planner acts as a facilitator only, new and creative thinking can be stifled and only those solutions that are incremental in nature will emerge.	Creative thinking is not confined to planners. On the other hand, planning in small steps may be better adapted to the needs of people.
The process is usually too drawn out and resource hungry and can lead to cynicism and its being viewed as a 'talking shop'.	The same often applies to formal planning policy. The new thing about the collaborative planning 'talking shop' is that people can join the discussion.
The NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) effect can take hold among stakeholders and anything that changes the status quo in too extreme a manner will be excluded.	This is the only objection of real consequence. Collaborative planning is, as it were, an attempt to overcome the NIMBY idea. It may fail.
There is evidence that experts acting on their own often come to better solutions than stakeholders operating in a collaborative process.	There is also evidence that people directly involved and familiar with their surroundings often know better what they need than foreign experts.