Public Participation in Planning in India

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Edited by

Ashok Kumar and Poonam Prakash

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INTRODUCTION: FRAMINGS AND FORMULATIONS

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Context

Participation has always been a concern in development practice, particularly since the sixties. In the early years, many practitioners worked with communities at a local level as individuals or in small groups. By the eighties, the focus on participation was up-scaled. This was reflected in the introduction of decentralized planning and the creation of participatory institutionalized structures through the Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendment of 1992, along with other larger economic reforms initiated in the early nineties. In India in most of the states these structures have been put in place through amendments in the local government laws. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the second generation of economic reforms was initiated. Most of the funding of the central government programmes to states was linked to participation. In 2007, as part of the urban renewal mission a model participation law was prepared for states to enact as part of the reforms. According to the data from the Ministry as given in the TERI report by 2009, twelve states in India had enacted this law (TERI, 2010: 17). This mission also required 'stakeholder consultations' to be undertaken in preparation of 'city development plans'. In the recently launched Smart Cities mission by the government of India, this focus on participation has been further enhanced. It requires the preparation of the Smart Cities plan through citizen engagement framework. Thus participation from a being a localized project in small communities has now pervaded institutional structures and planning processes, affecting decision making.

This increased emphasis on participation reflected in the changes in structures and programmes at national level also affected town planning. Participation in development projects and plan preparation needs to be

distinguished. Development projects are more focused on the implementation of programmes and plans, whereas plan preparation actually influences decisions related to the land and the built environment, and are thus part of the decision-making process.

Public participation in planning in India has been in existence since the town planning and development acts in the form of objections and suggestions usually at the stage of the preparation of existing land use in some states, as well as at draft plan preparation. In states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, the participation, particularly of land owners, is required at the scheme level. Additionally, in the last decade, 'stakeholder consultations' and other forms of participation are beginning to emerge. Planning processes are also changing in response to these larger reforms taking place at a national level. Many such changes are taking shape through so-called participatory mechanisms of stakeholder consultations or through the invitation of public views. Various citizen groups and non-governmental organisations are making use of these spaces, as well as creating their own spaces. The focus of public participation has thus changed from the implementation of decisions to the nature of decision-making itself. The functioning of these 'invited spaces' and 'claimed spaces' of participation in town and country planning, an arena influencing decision-making, has never been the focus of discussion in India.

It is in this context that a seminar was proposed to initiate a critical reflection on these participatory processes, particularly in planning. The seminar was organized with the financial support of the Housing and Development Corporation and organizational support from the Town and Country Planning Organisation. There were about fifty participants from the state town planning organizations and academic organisations. This provided a view both from the practice and the theory.

Rhetoric and Practice of Participatory Planning

Theoretically idealized and a buzzword in the planning and development practice, the initial promise of the idea of participation for radical social transformation and empowerment continues to be delusory. From its emergence as an idea that could lead to the empowerment of the poor and marginalized through the fair redistribution of material resources, participation over the years has been turned into a matter of methods and techniques, rather than influencing radical processes capable of designing fair and equitable decision-making processes with similar material outcomes.

As far as urban governance is concerned, international aid agencies have pushed the envelope of public participation and made it a requirement for policy-making, as well as centrally funded programme implementation. Participatory structures in an institutionalized manner were introduced for the first time through one of the biggest programmes initially funded by the UNICEF - the Urban Basic Services Programme – which was launched through community participation throughout India and Southeast Asia. In this programme, communities were supposed to secure basic services such as water, power, the paving of streets, the management of solid wastes, immunization, income generation, etc. from existing government agencies through the creation of community structures like neighborhood groups with the help of government-appointed community organizers (Kumar, 1991). This programme was reshaped, renamed and further scaled up over the years as the National Slum Development Programme, and now more recently as Basic Services for the Urban Poor as part of the much publicized Jawahar Lal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM). All these programmes included participation from the community. Most of the community structures created through the Urban Basic Services Programme are nonfunctional. One of the main difficulties with such interventions is that the process required for undertaking such endeavors is highly demanding, as in the case of the Urban Basic Services Programme high social capital was expected to be generated over a short period of time and sustained after government officers have left the field. An evaluation of JnNURM highlighted that out of 213 projects sanctioned, only five were completed by 2011 (Grant Thronton, 2011: 49)

> Both BSUP and IHSDP obviously focus on improvements of physical infrastructure and services and, as such, are not substantially different from the slum improvement and development programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. The difference, however, lies in the mandatory reforms that are expected to ensure the sustainability of efforts, improved efficiency, transparency and accountability in implementing and managing projects, and in the participation and ownership of the citizens, especially the slum communities.

Many of these regulatory changes are consequences of pressure from international aid agencies like the World Bank, IMF and the United Nations. One of the main focus areas pushed by international funding agencies is the reforms of regulatory mechanisms. This is also seen in propagating amendments in planning and development laws in India. In 2003, the USAID, through the Indo-US Financial Institutions Reforms and Expansion Project-Debt Market Component (FIRE-D), prepared a ‘consensus paper’ to simplify building byelaws in Delhi. It was based on

the premise that illegal developments in Delhi were mainly due to inadequate building and planning regulations, which do not match the 'market potential' of the area. These inadequacies were also seen due to a lack of 'local stakeholder participation' in the plan preparation. This consensus paper for more 'flexible planning and building byelaws' recommended an amendment to the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, governing the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). One of the main amendments was the inclusion of a provision to prepare local area plans through participation (Prakash, 2013). The preparation of local level plans through participation was introduced for the first time in the Delhi Master Plan notified in 2007. However, the contours and nature of this participation was unclear. In a pilot project of thirty-three wards in Delhi, most of them were not able to undertake participation beyond discussion at a meeting with the Ward Councilor. One of the chapters in this volume by Bugga traces the history of the introduction of local area plans in Delhi.

The mainstreaming of 'stakeholder consultations' was further done through the requirement of the preparation of City Development Plans as part of JnNURM. City Development Plans were very similar to the City Development Strategies (CDS) promoted by the World Bank and UN Habitat, with strong focus on stakeholder analysis and stakeholder workshops (Grant Thronton, 2011). According to the mission guidelines, the CDP was to be a comprehensive document for an 'urban perspective framework' for twenty to twenty-five years, within which detailed projects were to be prepared. An appraisal undertaken in 2011 of the Mission found many problems with the consultation process and one of the findings of the report was that "the interactions within this section only constitute around 9% of the total category, despite the EWS being one of the prime intended beneficiaries for the Mission" (Grant Thronton, 2011: 40). It also highlighted that this stakeholder consultation process provided no indication of who attended all these consultations. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders are ambiguous and sometimes even at odds with the needs and aspirations of the urban poor, generally speaking, and slum dwellers in particular. Many such mechanisms now substitute legally mandated participatory spaces (old as well as new) and are being used by powerful interests to pursue the neoliberal agenda.

A more recent Smart Cities Mission has introduced the idea of participation through the use of technology in the city-building process. This mission mode programme, to be implemented in 100 cities in the first phase, includes a citizen engagement framework, the contours of which are not

very evident in relation to public participation and inclusive city development. While efforts are being made to include and connect the poor, who do not have access to information-centric technologies, most of these efforts relate to the day-to day-needs of people who would dwell in Smart places. Public participation is hardly becoming inclusive for debating larger issues of the entitlements of the citizens, particularly the poor and excluded.

Participatory processes thus most often remain perfunctory because of the intent of local bodies to only secure the legitimacy of the public. The availability of limited resources and the capacities of people, as well as the capacity of governments to undertake participatory processes, are also a constraining factor. On the other hand, citizens get limited and inadequate information, assistance in articulation of their views, and communication of their requirements, making the usefulness of these processes in planning highly questionable. Many a times this leads to further subversion of statutory processes in planning. There is thus a huge gap between the universally accepted rhetoric of participation and empowerment and unjust practices of participatory government (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). It is also seen as a highly contested concept, since the idea of a singular public interest is a myth and the dynamics of local interests display uneven power dynamics. Individual rationalities, in most cases, are unlikely to produce a collective outcome, which is rational. The answers to the issues of representation and power and the process of decision-making continue to remain elusive in participatory practices.

Engaging in Theory and Practice of Participatory Planning

We argue that planners have been ineffective in exploring the potential of mandated spaces of public participation in planning and thus widening spaces of public participation in planning for radical change. Changing the scope of planning would also contribute to perpetuating, enhancing, deepening and widening participatory spaces. Today the focus of Indian planning theorists and analysts remains on the *invited spaces* created by planning agencies, particularly during the processes of master plan making. Largely we seek to find out the involvement of the public in this process. The first part of this book argues that while the possibilities of widening participatory planning processes exist, we only need to identify such arenas and make them count.

Our engagement with the concept of participation thus stems from both theory and practice. Ashok Kumar has been teaching planning theory for the last two-and-a-half decades. He himself has made several contributions to building collaborative planning theory (see for example Kumar and Paddison, 2000). We are aware that most of these theories advocating participatory planning land up in India from certain specific western contexts. In India, however, planning practice continues to be predominantly driven through the techno-rational model. This book, therefore, is expected to develop an understanding of these theories in the Indian context and in the process of Indian practice. For Indian planning and development practice, race is not a significant element; it is crucially important for city planning and development in the western context. Caste and religion appear to be hugely significant elements for city planning and development in the Indian context. Only religion matters in the western context, as caste is non-existence in the public sphere. However, recent events show that caste is also beginning to become important in the western public sphere, particularly in countries where Indians have immigrated. Gender-based exclusions and discrimination are global phenomenon and critically significant for city planners in India. Culture and participation are inseparable, like planning and culture are.

Public participation through mandated provisions in the form of public objections and suggestions during plan preparation and modifications has always been in existence since the enactment of the Delhi Development Act. Very few people, however, engage in this process and over time the Delhi Development Authority initiated projects without or *post facto* due process. In 2002, a court ordered a stay on a mega housing project called the Sultangarhi Housing Project on account of not having followed the due process of master plan modifications in Delhi (CWP 4978/2002). Later on this led to nearly 1,700 local residents filing objections and suggestions in relation to this project. The court case and subsequent objections and suggestions were advised by a well-known Indian planner, Gita Dewan. She encouraged the co-editor for her involvement in this process from 2002 to 2013. During this period the co-editor of the book has engaged in more than a hundred public notices for plan modification for the change of land use, the Delhi Master Plan for 2021, zonal plans and a review of the master plan. This engagement was as an academic and also in some instances as assistance to citizen groups.

A lack of relevant material and our individual discomfort with idea of participation in theory and practice led to this seminar on ‘Public Participation in Planning in India’. Thus, for us this book would serve the

purpose of developing new ideas and relevant materials for the Indian context. While the project of participation in India already seems co-opted for pursuing neoliberal agendas, we hope to find spaces through such endeavors to bring the focus back on public participation as a process of social change. While we remain hopeful about participatory planning and development, that would lead empowered citizen subjects, our ambivalence is also clear in various chapters. We are aware that critical reflection alone is insufficient for bringing about societal transformations (also see Friedmann, 1987).

There are a number of books written on public participation or citizen participation, but none of them specifically focuses on town and country planning, with the exception of 'Participolis' in which some material deals with urban planning. It has two papers on the Chennai Master Plan and the City Development Plan, focusing on public consultations (Coelho, Kamath and Vijayabaskar, 2013). To some extent this book fills this gap, and it was one of our motivations to convert proceedings of our seminar into a fully-fledged book. The structure of the book reflects this effort to connect theory and practice more effectively in the Indian context. From the many abstracts that were received for the seminar, we selected those papers that were based on specific Indian case studies, particularly focusing on planning in the Indian context We also selected a few papers that provide theoretical insights about the idea of public participation.

The final structure of the book has developed differently from the way the seminar was organized and the initial structure for the book. The seminar was organized around four themes on theory, practice, methods and values. Many of the participants came from practice and were more inclined towards methods. The session on values was an activity-based session for an experiential learning of inequality and identity by the participants. These two sessions, therefore, are not part of the book. The initial proposal for the book was organized around theoretical perspectives, planning and governance. In the final structure the first section remains the same. The other two sections, instead of distinguishing between planning and governance, have made a distinction across scale. It would appear that the nature and level of participation is different at different scales. Some of the concerns that we hope these papers have addressed are discussed in the next few sections.

Purpose and Level of Participation

Public participation is seen as an act of involvement for the purpose of influencing decisions. In addition to better decision-making, the other purposes of participation are the principles of fairness and equity, the right of citizens to be informed and to express their views on governmental decisions, the need to represent the interests of disadvantaged and powerless groups and the need to capture the insights of citizens (Burby, 2003 after Baker, Addams and Davis, 2005: 490). Planners view participation in a very narrow and limited perspective, usually as no more than a legal formality or at the very most to get citizens' views. There is thus a big difference in the perspective of planners and citizens toward participation. For the citizens participation is expected to deliver some tangible outputs (Monno and Khakee, 2012). Is it possible then for planners to view participation from the perspective of its transformative potential?

Most of the development projects are at a scale of a small community or a neighbourhood. As one moves up in scale from a community to city to a region, the magnitude and consequent structures, complexity and power asymmetries and resources needed to undertake participation change significantly (Pickering and Minnery, 2012 : 250). It might also be the case that full citizen control as a desired objective of participation may not be the most appropriate form of participation at certain scales. Experience shows that full citizen control may not be possible, or appropriate. As argued by Fung (2006: 67) 'there may indeed be contexts where public empowerment is highly desirable, but there are certainly others in which a consultative role is more appropriate for members of the public than full 'citizen control''. In planning such differentiation would be useful. It has been found in practice that citizens participate more actively at a local level as they are directly affected by decisions at that level and even at city level, more people participate and the nature of their objections and suggestions is generally about local concerns, rather than expressions about city- or regional-level issues.

Conflict, Power and Identity

Participation as a concept embodies within it the ideas of conflict, power, representation and authentic dialogue. It is messy and hides underneath power struggles, group dynamics and diverse interests. The participatory process is expected to result in shared understanding. This shared

understanding requires the recognition, acceptance and understanding of the conflicting interests of diverse groups. Conflicts can arise due to a difference in values, different perspectives of the same reality, the impacts or outcomes of particular decisions or conflict between individual and group interests. Participation is expected to enhance awareness, involvement and better articulation of one's interests. The process of the resolution of conflict is a key to a meaningful participation process. This process can lead to a shift in positions and power due to the knowledge and perspective of different individuals and groups. It can also enhance or deepen conflict and increase the sense of exclusion depending on how the process of arriving at shared understanding is achieved. Many a times in practice hidden agendas and interests are justified in technical rationalities or are given legitimacy through a participatory process. There is thus a manufactured consensus aimed at legitimizing the planning policies of a development plan. This book thus makes a conscious departure from 'the consensus-oriented public participation' to 'the conflict-resolving public participation' (Kumar, 2016). The case of Kollam, Kerala (Alexander and Bhide, 2016) highlights this manufactured consent in practice by politicians who select members of the committee based on their own networks. The highly political nature of participation is visible in this case. Prakash also through the case of the Delhi Master Plan highlights how the conflicting interests are not even recognized and acknowledged. At a local level, an attempt to resolve issues amongst diverse groups runs into difficulty due to a difference in values and perspectives, as shown in the case of the Resident Welfare Association in a residential area in Delhi.

Empowerment is considered one of the objectives of participatory practices. In the oft-quoted article by Arnstein (1969), participation is about the redistribution of power and resources. Aimed as a 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' addressing the structures of subordination in its present avatar, it has become a packaged development project, depoliticized and delivered to the poor (Miraftab, 2004: 242; Leal, 2010). The objective of empowerment also begs a question as to how much power the people in control are willing to give.

Even at a project level, the heterogeneity of communities and unequal power relations usually take a backseat in the rush to finish funded projects. At a higher level of a ward and a city, normally the level for planning, such power relations become much more pronounced. Business groups, developers, industrialists and low-income residents or street vendors are all competing to influence decisions on the limited resources. To what extent cities can be represented by a single 'public interest' as

arguments based on the Rational Planning Model through to the Collaborative Planning Model would like us to believe is a question we hope to address through this book. Consensus-oriented public participation, we argue, downplays differences of class and social identities of various kinds, which continue to simmer like a wound underneath a presumed moralizing and universalizing consensus built on arbitrarily constructed public interest created erroneously by further assuming that a trained planner is an unbiased professional. "Citizens' voices derived from identities that are not recognized, nor indeed respected, are not likely to be heard. How people perceive themselves as citizens, and how (or indeed, whether) they are recognized by others, is likely to have a significant impact on how they act to claim their citizenship rights in the first place" (Gaventa, 2002: 4).

One of the prevalent participatory practices, particularly like stakeholder consultations, usually invites representatives. These representatives can be office bearers of resident, trader or industrial associations. These can also be non-governmental organisations or experts from the field. The reality of many of these organisations in the manner of election, representation of interests or nature of expertise is also one of the concerns this book hopes to find answers to.

Mandated and Other Spaces of Participation

Many participatory structures have been created through the enactment of laws or as requirement of centrally funded programmes. In planning, the provision for participation has existed in town planning laws in some form. Its practice, though, has been an untidy one (Day, 1997). In the U.S. planning context, Judith Innes has been very critical of such mandated spaces of participation like public reviews and hearings. She has argued that "legally required methods of public participation in government decision-making in the US—public hearings, review and comment procedures in particular—do not work. They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or other decisions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they seldom can be said to improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make; and they do not incorporate a broad spectrum of the public. Worse yet, these methods often antagonize the members of the public who do try to work with them" (Innes, 2004: 419). Much of this criticism is true, even in the Indian context. The Board of Enquiry and Hearing set up for public objections and suggestions, in most of the cases, is guided by the planning

department or the town planning or development authority. In the process these spaces are used to legitimize decisions already made by the central or state government or controversial decisions where public planners prefer these to be articulated by the 'public'.

Most of the times citizens do not get to know about planning decisions or have no way to find out how these decisions affect them. Decisions like changes in development control regulations etc. are orchestrated to appear participatory in nature. Many also argue that these spaces provide opportunities for participation only at the proposal stage where most of the decisions of value have already been made and much effort has already gone in making the proposal. This makes it very difficult to bring in any major changes to the proposal.

The enactment of the Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendment of 1992, proposed local-level participatory structures in the form of ward committees. In the literature, an evaluation of these structures suggests either these have not been created or are not functioning adequately. Two papers on Regional Plan Preparation in Goa and the District Development Plan of Kollam District in Kerala are examples where these participatory structures have been put in place and are used for the purpose of plan preparation. The process and functioning of these structures are the focus of the paper on Kerala. It highlights the inadequacies, limitations and 'elite capture' of these structures.

Many planning and development organisations facing the pressure to be more participatory get tempted to organize and introduce spaces of participation other than the mandated spaces. These could be in the form of 'consultations', 'brainstorming' or inviting public views. The experience of alternate spaces of participation like stakeholder consultations, expert committees and representation through NGOs and RWAs in the Indian context appears to be more prone to manipulation. Indian participatory processes provide no avenues for redressal, unlike mandated spaces of participation in the U.S. These mechanisms have actually in some cases supplanted technical considerations, rather than supplementing existing processes. Such spaces are also riddled with issues of stakeholder identification and representation. This is highlighted in some of the case studies in this volume.

With increasing conflicts due to environmental concerns, deteriorating living conditions and a lack of provision of basic services, there has been an increasing awareness of the existence of mandated provisions for

participation. These spaces, though, continue to be occupied by more educated, informed and articulate communities and still provide citizen participation, rather than alternate spaces usually privileging the representatives. The functioning of these mandated spaces has never been the focus of planning research in India in any systematic manner. There is also no research to know the extent of public participation and whether planning outcomes actually improve through citizen participation.

Conclusions

Despite the increasing focus on participation in plan preparation in India, public participation in town planning in India has not been a focus of academic discussion. In practice, 'stakeholder consultations' have become the norm; the nuances and pitfalls of such methods are either not explicitly known or are usually ignored in the temptation to complete a formality of participation. Many of the issues of participatory practices faced by development practitioners are similar in planning. Planning, however, provides a much greater scope for intervention in larger decision-making processes. It is hoped that through this book a dialogue and more systematic study of participation in planning practice in India will be initiated for a better planning practice.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

THEORIZING PARTICIPATION: FROM DELIBERATIVE CONSENSUS TO AGNOSTIC PLURALISM

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Abstract

This chapter treats planning as a practice of 'politics' within the realm of 'agnostic pluralism'. Public participation is presented through a critical analysis of existing planning theories. It is found that most theories focus on obtaining consensus among diverse stakeholders after some sort of discussions and deliberations. Prominent among these theories is the collaborative planning theory, which assumes that rational consensus is impartial, objective, and a legitimate way to deal with planning concerns of empowerment, justice and equity. In this chapter the author presents 'agnostic pluralism' as an alternative to collaborative planning (deliberative democracy), which shows potential for social transformations by resolving planning conflicts through 'politics', rather than morality and law.

Introduction

Consensus among stakeholders has remained the chief objective of public participation for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. Public participation aims to achieve consensus by involving citizens in the framing of planning policies and projects. The legitimacy of planning activities in the eyes of the citizens was another purpose of public participation. Planning policies framed with the involvement of the public at large was assumed by city planners to closely reflect the actual needs and aspirations of the people. However, over the last two decades, planning theorists have started questioning this heavy reliance on consensus as one of the prime concerns of public participation. Some theorists have even gone so far as to suggest that planning is riddled with

spatial conflicts and that consensus is elusive and illusory (Gresch and Smith, 1985). Others have argued that all cities are contested and uncertainties in achieving consensus among citizens and collectivities remain an improbability (Bollens, 1998, 2000). Gaffikin and Morrissey (2011: 4) argue that the 'apparent neutrality' in the midst of urban conflicts is a delusion.

Three broad themes on public participation emerge. The apparent neutrality of urban planners and their prime concern with the construction of public interest marks the first phase. This phase promoted notional public participation, whereby the public was informed about public policies and projects, and was also nominally consulted to secure their views. Planning agencies did not really bother to provide any feedback to people about their comments, suggestions and objections to drafts of plans. Over a period this model of planning came to be known as the rational planning model, which objectively promoted quantitative analysis and empiricism, in a word the scientization of planning. The failure of rational planners to deliver on their promises and rising inequalities - in particular the exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities from decision making processes in the U.S. - led to a situation where a challenge was mounted to the rational planning model in planning. Therefore in the second part of the first phase conflicts and urban inequalities were recognized by planners, as in advocacy planning theory and equity planning theory, but public participation still remained largely based on instrumental reasoning. Advocacy planners particularly opposed the supposedly neutral position of public planners capable of constructing public interest through their plans and projects. For example, Paul Davidoff and Thomas A. Reiner cogently stated that 'fact and value are closely related. The separation of fact and value in itself requires certain assumptions and possibly violation of the dictates of reason' (Davidoff and Reiner, 1962: 19). Nearly a decade later Thomas A. Reiner again restated his position saying: 'Planning itself is seen as a value-bound activity' (Reiner, 1971: 208). By now the inseparability of values and facts has undermined the hegemony of the rational planning model and with that, the public interest as aggregation of the needs and aspirations of all city dwellers was more or less replaced by the interests of diverse social groups. The second phase started to develop in the 1980s and focused on rational consensus through participatory processes under the ideal speech situation. By the late 1990s the Collaborative Planning Theory was developed by Patsy Healey (1997). In this phase a clear shift from instrumental rationality to communicative rationality could be witnessed (Innes, 2004; Forester, 1999, Sandercock, 1998). The last phase began to develop in the early twenty-first century.

Planning theorists argued that conflicts are endemic to society and cities, and proceeding for consensus without explicitly recognizing conflicts among collectives made up of adversaries is outright evasive and ideological. These theorists focused on ‘agonistic pluralism’, where resolvable conflicts among adversaries as legitimate contenders of competing interests do exist, rather than conflicts among enemies where one would like to eliminate the other (Mouffe, 2000a). The Marxian notion of conflicts among classes is that of the antagonistic variety, where antagonism between classes could be transcended only through revolutionary processes replacing the capitalist relations of production with socialist relations of production. As famously noted: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx and Engels, 1996: 36). Of course Marx and Engels were not talking about participation, which is devoid of empowerment. In this view public participation is meaningful only if it does transform relations of production, whereby the poor have equal chances of creating property capital for themselves.

In this paper, the author pursues three main tasks. First, a critical review of planning theories is carried out in order to show that most of these theories – from the rational planning model to collaborative planning theory - seek public participation to secure consensus among citizens involved in a given planning process. The objectives and methodologies of securing consensus could be different (legitimation of public policy in the case of the rational planning model and collaboratively producing places in the case of collaborative planning), but the overarching aim is to achieve consensus among different stakeholders. Consensus is premised on the notion of public interest, which is universalizing in the sense that all diverse interests could be expressed through selected planning policies (also see Table 1). Second, I highlight the contours of the development of the theory of ‘agonistic pluralism’, which clearly recognizes the prevalence of planning conflicts with the hope that several of these conflicts could be resolved among adversaries, who have legitimate claims to contest for different ways of life. In the concluding part, I make some observations about the future of public participation in planning by pointing out certain benefits of agnostic pluralism for planning theory and practice.