



Viewpoint

Behavioural model of collaborative urban management: extending the concept of Arnstein's ladder



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present a behavioural model of collaborative urban management. It draws on the discussion about the public engagement in urban management processes. We have been inspired by Sherry Arnstein's participation ladder, and we are using her categories of non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. However, in the course of our research, we came to the conclusion that our model should be extended to include the categories of disorder, awakening, radicalisation, civil disobedience and rebel action. The appearance of this new categories is triggered by recent changes in the socio-political conditions, associate with the fall of communism, decline of civil rights and deeper social changes connected with the ongoing globalization. The first stage of model-building involves distinguishing three basic collaboration actors: the inhabitants, urban movements and local authorities. The second stage is the construction of the scales of activity of the three actors. Finally, at the third stage, we established a coincidence of their behaviour patterns and categorised them into those of disorder, non-participation, tokenism, awakening, citizen power, radicalisation, civil disobedience and rebel action. We also present selected results of empirical research conducted in Poznan.

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1. Introduction

We shall start by briefly describing two situations we experienced in the course of our scientific peregrinations.

Poznan, Poland

Some time ago (in 2012, to be exact), we phoned one of the departments of the Poznan City Hall in search of data concerning urban consultations. Our expectations were high because we contacted the Social Relations Office itself (now defunct). We asked for fairly basic information about the turnout at consultations organised by the city. Someone representing the self-government administration told us we were the second team that year investigating citizen participation in urban management. To our astonishment, the tone of voice in which those words were spoken was that of reproach and antipathy. Next, we were asked if we had no other, presumably more interesting, research topics to explore. The conversation ended at that point.

Portland, Oregon, USA

Two years later, we visited the City Office in Portland, in the American state of Oregon. We received an exhaustive answer to our e-

mail request for a meeting with City Office representatives, an invitation to the meeting, and the names of two people who would be our guides. On the day of our arrival, they told us about the planning system in the city and their specific tasks, and answered all our questions about participation in planning. At the end of our visit, they assured us they would be happy to answer any other questions we might have, via e-mail. This could have been the effect of the 'guests from overseas' syndrome, or perhaps of the different participation cultures.

The stories presented above can have various implications. They can be told as a situational joke or even a sarcastic story, but they can also encourage a study on interpersonal communication styles, being good examples of different approaches to territorial marketing and promotion. They can also be an introduction to some reflections on collaborative action¹ in urban management. In our opinion, those two stories exemplify distinct 'participation cultures' functioning in two different social systems: Polish and American.

To identify and understand the concept of 'participation culture', researchers and practitioners have formulated many more or less general models. One of the common metaphors of participation found in the literature on the subject is the ladder, the most popular among them being Arnstein's participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969). However, such an

¹ In the article, we use the terms 'collaborative urban management' and 'collaborative action' interchangeably. What we understand by them is common partnership actions based on a compromise and a search for the best solutions for the community in the process of urban management.

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approach is usually highly general, allowing no exploration at the level of individual actors of collaborative urban management and offering no insight into the causative mechanisms generating a variety of consequences. At this point, the reader may ask two questions: why are we inspired by Arnstein's ladder and why is the model described as behavioural? In attempt to clarify this, we may say that Arnstein's ladder remains a valuable and interesting concept, useful in the discussion about participation. What is more, it is often used by theoreticians and practitioners. We believe however, that the socio-political conditions in many places around the world have changed since Arnstein's ladder was formulated. On the one hand there were democratic transformations in the Western world, on the other hand deepening social polarization and globalization had adverse impact on some of the regions of Asia and Africa. It is an incomplete model for areas of citizens' rights decline (e.g. North Korea, China, Turkmenistan or Sudan), awakenings (fall of the communism in the East and Central Europe) and rising of civil disobedience (Colour Revolution as well LGBT rights in the Western world). We could directly observe some of the above processes in the last half century in Polish cities. Without a doubt it influenced our research of participation and inspired us to create the more general behavioural model of collaborative action. This inspiration, together with our first-hand experiences are the reasons that we are showing the case of Poznan as an "illustration" or "mirror" of our theoretical concept. The behavioural approach prioritises the behaviours of the key actors and enables us to understand what coincidence of individual attitudes leads up the subsequent rungs of the ladder. This type of analysis has not been conducted before.

Based on this observation, we decided to propose a behavioural perspective and seek answers to the following questions:

- Is it possible to formulate a conceptual algorithm allowing the identification of the type of collaborative urban management in various cities, in global, possibly universal, terms? Of course, we realize that we are asking this question from the point of view of researchers studying Polish cities. At the same time, we are convinced that small urban laboratories make it possible to observe various processes more closely and discover certain mechanisms, and the Polish perspective becomes a valuable addition to the British, Italian, American or Japanese standpoint in the discussion.
- Can Arnstein's widely quoted participation ladder be extended beyond its final rungs, and what coincidence of the actors' behaviours leads to the subsequent levels of participation that we proposed?

The value of the model which we present to the readers is the following:

- it has the ex-ante structure and is a construct provoking researchers to undertake empirical studies and further conceptual discussions concerning the scale of collaborative actions and participatory ways of managing the city;
- it has a potentially diagnostic character and is addressed at the scientific milieu and researchers rather than practitioners; the model is supported with observations and studies of the participation of local communities in city management, which have been conducted by one of the authors for over 20 years, mostly in Polish cities. The research also includes observing and investigating the process of building a democratic Polish society, as well as the various "twists and turns" related to it. The past quarter of a century, thus, has been a huge laboratory of social behaviours, discussed in this paper.

2. Theoretical background

Researchers investigating collaborative action observe that participation in urban management is one of the most popular issues undertaken in both academic and practical discussions. In the literature, the term is even called a 'popular buzzword' (Leal, 2007; Silver, Scott, &

Kazepov, 2010), although in various regions of the world, and in various cities, it has been or will be discussed with varying intensity, at different times, and in different contexts. On the participation map, we can easily find cities open to and for inhabitants. They are highly advanced as regards collaborative urban management. It is not by accident that we started this paper by describing our experience in Portland (Oregon). It is one of those cities that can be an example to follow with respect to participation processes, not only on this continent (Hagerman, 2008; Peterson, 2012). However, this imaginary map of 'participation cultures' includes many cities where forms of citizen involvement in urban management are not only just basic, but are in fact absent or avoided (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). There are also cities like Poznan (perhaps they are in the majority) which are trying to climb this ladder of citizen involvement, with varying degrees of success (Kotus, 2013; Mergler, Wudarski, & Pobłocki, 2013).

It is probably due to the global universality of this phenomenon that it never loses its relevance. Planning and management are inextricably linked with the dilemma whether to include or exclude the local community from urban management and, more broadly, from the democratisation of life. Space is a particularly valuable commodity; hence the management of urban space offers a particularly attractive and valuable kind of power, whose manifestation reflects democratic processes. However, can we say that the greater social participation is, the more democratic and more open local authorities become? Perhaps their openness derives from their wish to manipulate and control social activities (Merrifield, 2014; Miessen, 2011). Participation is certainly a widespread development, but not, as some authors claim, one that has only got two forms: passive and active, or statutory and non-statutory (Kaczmarek & Wójcicki, 2016). Participation, or more broadly, collaborative actions in urban management, including physical planning, are much more complex and, in our opinion, often driven by hidden behavioural mechanisms and motives of individual actors.

Researchers studying the "meanders of participation" emphasise that it can be the authorities' neo-liberal excuse to take certain steps (top-down initiatives), but also a valuable, truly causative procedure (bottom-up actions) (Mutz, 2006; Silver et al., 2010). There is no doubt that when discussing participation we address highly practical and operational issues. However, in spite of its substantial practical significance, collaborative action needs a theory (Innes & Booher, 2010), which will allow the social life in the aspect presented herein to be understood and developed.

Theoreticians' deliberations, the construction and comparison of collaborative action models, as well as the use of various scientific paradigms and approaches in the discussion about social activities make it possible, also for practitioners, to describe and understand participation, as well as to make better choices. Sherry Arnstein shared her intellectual observations concerning this matter with readers almost 50 years ago when she formulated her participation model, widely known today. On her ladder, the opposite of an open society of cooperation is the manipulation of citizens. The author said that "her typology was designed to be provocative and focused on the redistribution of power as an essential element in meaningful citizen participation" (Connor, 1988: 249). In our opinion, this perspective allowed Arnstein to create an interesting and inspiring typology, featuring two implicit entities: the power holders and the society. As Arnstein intended, her ladder of participation has become a conception motivating the community to further intellectual and operational discussion.

One of the authors who engaged in the discussion was Desmond M. Connor. He distinguished two categories on the social ladder: the leaders and the general public, as well as including the entity implied by Arnstein, i.e. the authorities. Another follower of Arnstein's conception is Potapchuk (1991), who proposed a more operational model of various decision-making situations, as regards participation. When proposing a new solution in the discussion about participation, he stressed that the starting point for his reflections were the questions: 'who decides?' and 'who supports the outcome?'

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