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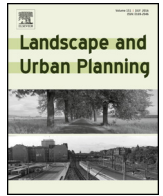
Research paper

Wicked games changing the storyline of urban planning

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We present the concept of wicked games.
- We combine the concept of wicked games with the theory of deliberative democracy.
- We study the collaboration in the wicked games from the citizens' perspective.

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses urban and regional planning as if a wicked game, the framework used to tackle wicked problems. The study explores the obstacles and opportunities revealed in a participatory method in wicked games called the Citizens' Jury. Citizens' Juries represent deliberative practices designed to garner the opinion of a group to serve as microcosm of the whole population affected by the issue in question. We hypothesized that deliberation encourages the creation of a collaborative playing field on which to play the wicked game and changes the storyline of the issue deliberated upon. The analysis was conducted through an evaluative orientation built on the multidimensional evaluation model. The results indicate that Citizens' Juries faced four main obstacles to including citizens in the wicked games arena. In addition, some opportunities were also found.

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1. Introduction

Both urban and regional planning can be compared to playing games (see e.g., Sotarauta, Kosonen, & Viljamaa, 2007). The comparison is apt, but requires more scrutiny. Games, such as chess or soccer, are contests between a specified number of players, on a strictly defined playing field, and players are bound by certain rules. In addition, the game generally ends in a definite result: either a win, a loss, or a tie.

Theoretically, urban planning should be akin to solving tame problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973; see also Conklin, 2006; Raisio, 2009). The normal "storyline" (Hendriks, 2005) involves a limited number of planning experts "playing the game" and, given the requisite training, experience, and specialist knowledge, readily identifying the nature of the problem, and applying standard procedures to complete it. Applying this method should result in urban planning issues being resolved in a linear fashion without involving a large number of stakeholders in the process.

However, we consider the comparison of urban planning to playing games to be a tame version of the parable (see Xiang, 2013). Urban planning is not just any game; it is a *wicked game* (Lundström & Raisio, 2013). Playing a wicked game is the framework applied to tackle the wicked problems that beset urban planning (e.g., Wang, 2002). Thus, as Wang (2002) noted, when facing wicked problems, we are playing a whole new ball game. The storyline (Hendriks, 2005) must then change from that underpinning a tame game.

In this article, we support the argument that the wicked game of urban planning is best played by adopting a communicative approach (see Rittel & Webber, 1973). However, when referring to communication, we specifically mean deliberative communication. We refer to the theory of deliberative democracy and the opportunities it offers for urban planning (e.g., Lundström, 2012). Our assumption is that deliberation permits the creation of a collaborative playing field on which to play the wicked game, and which may ultimately be adopted by a broader stakeholder group. Eventually, this will foster a deeper understanding of wicked urban planning. We see the adoption of deliberative democracy as a new element of a process adjusting the storyline of the system to become

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more collaborative, adaptive, and deliberative than antagonistic and authoritarian. The goal is for a storyline strongly featuring the views of citizens who are experts on their own lives (Raisio, 2010) not only the views of urban planners, civil servants, politicians, and other traditional experts.

This study critically examines four Citizens' Juries within the context of urban planning. A Citizens' Jury is a deliberative practice that aims to assemble a group of citizens to serve as a microcosm of the entire population affected by the issue in question. Participants in Citizens' Juries are provided with information about the issue so that they can discuss it with experts and fellow citizens (Crosby & Nethercut, 2005). Citizens' Juries will be used as a means to analyze the prospects of the kind of urban planning employing adaptive, deliberative, and trans-disciplinary approaches (cf. Xiang, 2013).

In this article, we examine the obstacles faced by the Citizens' Jury in helping citizens become active players in a wicked game. To do so, we define the concept of wicked games and describe the theory of deliberative democracy and the Citizens' Jury. The contribution of the current study lies in combining the literatures of wicked problems and deliberative democracy in the context of urban planning. Most importantly, the article presents an empirical approach to a topic that has largely been scrutinized through a theoretical lens.

We start by summarizing wicked problems and introducing the concept of wicked games as a new storyline. We continue by describing of the theory of deliberative democracy, and in particular, the method called the Citizens' Jury in the context of wicked games. Before proceeding to the results, we present our research methodology and multifaceted data. Finally, we address the research question presented above.

2. The wicked game as a new storyline

2.1. From tame to wicked problems

The seminal paper of Rittel and Webber (1973) distinguished two kinds of problems, the tame and the wicked. Tame problems can be separated, reduced, and solved in objective ways (Mason & Mitroff, 1981). The main point is that the solution to a tame problem can be tested. When the solution is discovered, the problem stops. The word *tame* does not imply that the problem is easily solved, but it is solvable.

Wicked problems are the opposite of tame problems. Wicked problems do not have right or wrong answers. Stakeholders subjectively define the best solutions. No one has the power to decide an answer is right or wrong, because solutions will usually be based on value judgments, such as political or ideological preferences. At best, numerous attempts will be made to solve wicked problems, but because the problem itself is so ambiguous, the proffered solutions will usually only address the symptoms. Wicked problems are unique and are symptoms of another problem, usually a larger-scale one. Typically, such issues are social or political, and subject to what can be termed the non-stopping rule (see Conklin, 2006). Well-known wicked problems include, for example, global climate change and healthcare issues (see Lazarus, 2009; Levin, Cashore, Bernstein, & Auld, 2012; Raisio, 2010; Vartiainen, 2005, 2008a).

2.2. Defining a wicked game

Let us consider a game of chess as a typical example of a tame problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973). It has a set of rules, a defined number of players, a playing field of a certain size, and an end point, and a game ends with a victory for one contestant or a tie. In addition, nearly anyone can learn how to play it, and as a general rule, the more often people play, the better they get. Players

Table 1
The characteristics of tame and wicked games.

	Tame game	Wicked game
Rules	Strictly defined set of rules, known by every player Rules are mechanical	No coherent set of rules, everybody can play the game by their own rules Rules are organic
Players	Limited number of participants recognized by everyone Citizens are pawns	Players change all the time, everyone who is involved in the game is a potential player Citizens should be active players
Playing field	Can be defined precisely	Networked and complex, scale is relative and can vary
Practice	Repetition can help the player to develop skills The more you play the better you get There is often the possibility of a return match	No one can master a wicked game because the game, the rules, and the players change constantly There is no possibility of a return match
Ending point	The game has a clear end point	The game does not end

are often presented with situations that they have already encountered, either in a past game or through instructional material on tactics or strategy.

If planning were a tame game (see Table 1), it would be linear, have an end point, everybody could identify the finite number of players, the playing field would be well defined, and the players could develop their skills.

If we think of one planning-oriented process, zoning, as an example of a tame game, we could view the area subject to zoning as the playing field, the zoning officials and experts as the players, and the outcome as a "victory" when a new residential area is built as planned. There could be some fine tuning of the first plans, but the officials would deal with them. The new neighborhood would look as it was planned to, replete with paved areas, green spaces, and the planned housing mix—a perfect realization of the plans. From a systems point of view, the best metaphor would be a closed system, as the planning process is seen as something largely technical and apolitical, with a starting point, middle part, and an end point.

From the perspective of wicked problems, this is not a very practical analogy. The best way to truly understand planning issues is to acknowledge them as wicked, and from the systems point of view, as dynamic complex systems (Lundström, 2012; Wallin, 2013). What would the situation be like if we consider the example as wicked? Innes and Booher (2010) offered a description of a more familiar scenario from the perspective of wicked problems:

> The usual practice. . would be for public agencies to come up with regulations and rules pertinent to their narrow missions. Interest groups would bring lawsuits and legislators would look for "fixes" or reorganize, perhaps setting up a "czar" whose job would be to "solve" the problem. All would be able to claim credit for doing something, but the fundamental problem would not be addressed, and conflict and paralysis would become endemic (p. 2).

The reality is different from these two ideal types. Often the situation is that the game is seen to be wicked, but is played according to the rules of a tame game, as planners often recognize the wickedness but do not want to play the game or do not have sufficient resources to do so (Raisio, 2009).

The idea of using game terminology in planning related research is not new. For example, Sotarauta et al. (2007) compared regional development to a game, and Innes and Booher (2010) talked about players in the context of collaborative policy. Head and Alford (2013, p. 17) reminded us that conflicting interests can increase gaming behavior in the context of wicked problems, which could be part of the wicked problem itself. Leino (2012, p. 1) stated that