



A framework for evaluating and designing collaborative planning



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 November 2012

Received in revised form 13 March 2013

Accepted 10 April 2013

Keywords:

Green space

Local knowledge

Urban planning

Participatory planning

Public participation

ABSTRACT

Collaborative planning processes have been criticized for inefficiency, but attempts to improve them in planning of urban nature have been limited by lack of usable evaluation methodologies. This paper presents a framework for evaluating and designing collaborative processes in strategic planning of land use and nature areas. A framework with four key perspectives and their success criteria was developed with the help of literature and data from interviews and focus groups in two case areas in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland. Planning organizations can use the framework as a tool and source of inspiration in designing collaborative processes and their evaluation, and in shifting their practices towards the organizations' own specified goals. A conscious design of more efficient and holistic collaborative planning can be achieved with case-specific operationalizing of this framework.

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Introduction

Involving residents and other stakeholders in planning of public land has been considered promising in, for example, achieving better outcomes and increasing adaptability of social-ecological systems (Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 1999; Olsson et al., 2004). In planning of urban nature areas such as meadows, forests, parks and shores, participatory approaches are seen as necessary e.g. because residents' local knowledge is seen to enable better decisions and thereby shaping of better urban environment (Van Herzele et al., 2005). In collaborative or participatory planning, residents and other stakeholders are invited to participate in planning or decision making processes with methods such as questionnaires, web forums, public meetings and field trips, with the idea that participation can influence the content of planning (see Healey, 1997; Innes, 1998; Innes and Booher, 1999). However, in a range of settings in which participatory activities have flourished, they have failed to deliver significant changes in prevailing practices of local governments (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005; Connelly, 2006). Residents are disappointed with the lack of opportunities to really have an influence, while planners can remain uninformed about residents' concerns and experiences (Reed, 2008; Grönholm, 2009). Some planners do not debate the need for or value of residents' participation (Crawford et al., 2008), while others see it as a

burdensome obligation that does not contribute to planning (Puustinen, 2006; Wesselink et al., 2011). Planning of urban nature is not free from these problems (Sipilä and Tyrväinen, 2005; Van Herzele et al., 2005; Janse and Konijnendijk, 2007).

To improve practices, it is necessary to evaluate them taking into account of what constitutes usefulness of collaboration for different parties (e.g. Rowe and Frewer, 2004). Evaluation of collaborative planning processes is necessary also e.g. because it helps to avoid wasting resources of planners, decision-makers, participants and local taxpayers, supports the accountability of administration (Mickwitz, 2006; Abelson and Gauvin, 2006) and enables enhanced learning capacities among various stakeholders (Muñoz-Erickson et al., 2010). The growing literature on evaluating collaboration (Webler and Tuler, 2006) has not yet provided agreed on principles and methods for evaluating collaborative planning (Rowe and Frewer, 2004; Laurian and Shaw, 2009). As contextual factors, such as local social relations and systems of meaning and acting, are influential for applicability of any particular governance approach (Rein and Schön, 1993; Healey, 1997, 2003), it is useful to build evaluation criteria as sensitive to the governance contexts they are aimed to serve. Evaluation frameworks have been developed in fields such as forest planning (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000; McCool and Guthrie, 2001), other environmental planning (Innes and Booher, 1999; Beierle and Cayford, 2002; Mandarano, 2008) and urban planning (Laurian and Shaw, 2009), but to our knowledge not in the context of urban nature in particular. The absence of success criteria complicates not only evaluation but also design of collaborative planning processes in this context.

In this paper, our aim is to contribute to filling this gap by presenting a framework for evaluation and design of

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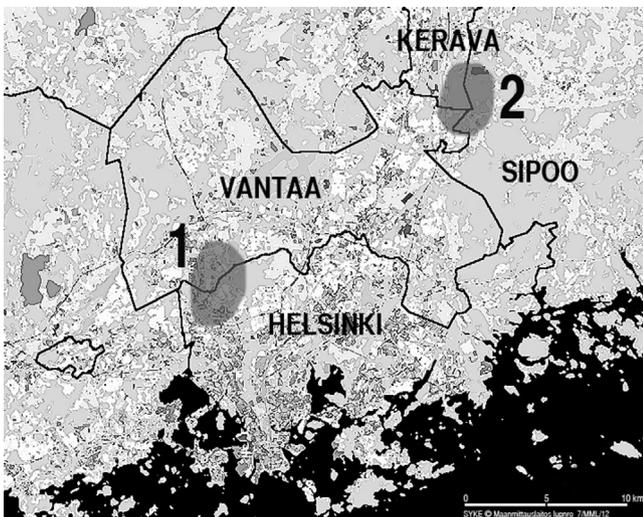


Fig. 1. Location of the case areas: Mätäoja–Mätäjoki (1) and Kerava–Vantaa–Sipoo (2).

collaborative planning for urban nature in the context of strategic planning of land use and nature areas. The strategic phase of planning concretizes the value-based goals set in normative policies and addresses their implementation further in operational planning (Schulman, 1990; Faehnle et al., 2011, p. 49). After describing the methods, we present a framework, including evaluation and design perspectives and their success criteria, and address their use in evaluation and design. We discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and finally present recommendations for future work in developing and using evaluation and design frameworks.

Material and methods

Our study was conducted in Finland, where urban planning processes commonly include resident participation due to the legislation that obliges authorities to guarantee residents the possibility to influence the future of their living environment and defines the process of participation in land use planning. Due to the complexity of collaborative planning for urban nature areas, we designed case studies that would elucidate it from several dimensions. In 2007, we chose two case areas in the Helsinki metropolitan area: Mätäoja–Mätäjoki located in two cities, Helsinki and Vantaa, and a cross-border area between three municipalities, Kerava, Vantaa and Sipoo (Fig. 1). In both of these case study areas, residents use nature areas regardless of municipal borders, but their planning is the responsibility of several authorities, each operating with their own rhythms and practices of public involvement. Both areas had several ongoing and recently finished land use planning and/or nature area planning processes. This complexity around collaborative planning in the areas makes them useful for learning for the purpose of the study (e.g. Stake, 1995). The case areas counterbalance each other in characteristics such as location in the urban form, type of nature areas, type of ongoing planning processes and size of municipalities involved (Table 1).

We first discussed the study plan with some of the planners involved in the local planning processes. They supported the idea of an evaluation framework and raised points that we took into account in the plan for obtaining data. During the research project we developed our understanding of the cases by studying planning material (e.g. official decision-making documents, drafts, background material available for stakeholders, survey summaries, meeting documents, letters from stakeholders), by participating in

public meetings and meetings of the administrative Mätäoja planning group and by following up local newspapers and websites.

An evaluation can be conducted (1) based on criteria derived empirically from people or (2) from theory, or (3) without any stated goals (Chess, 2000). In this study, we combined empirical and theoretical approaches (see e.g. Laurian and Shaw, 2009). In 2007, we interviewed 33 persons with semi-structured expert interviews: 16 public officials (planners, other experts and a consultant), 6 decision-makers and 11 stakeholders (8 active members of resident or nature associations, 3 land property owners). Some of the interviewees had several of these roles. All of the interviewees were or had earlier been involved in at least some of the ongoing planning processes in the case areas. The themes discussed in the interviews included views and experiences of collaborative planning, nature relation, successful collaboration, role of ecological and experiential values in decision-making and learning of participation skills.

The interviews lasted from 30 min to 2 h 15 min. The interview material was transcribed word by word and analysed with the help of the qualitative research software NVivo 7. Based on the empirical data and literature, a draft for an evaluation framework was developed, including criteria for evaluating a collaborative planning and decision-making process. A draft of this framework was sent to the interviewees and they were invited to discuss it in a group meeting. Five focus group meetings were organized, each of which contained 5–7 participants. Thirty of the 33 interviewees joined these discussions. The discussions were recorded and used in further development of the framework.

As planning of urban land use and nature areas is messy, characterized by conflicting values and interests, approaches to quality of participation in it have to be studied multidimensionally (McCool and Guthrie, 2001). To address this complexity, we included in the framework four key perspectives of evaluation. The framework was constructed by combining the interview data and most relevant literature on quality of participation. The literature included empirically oriented studies on cases of collaborative urban and environmental planning and management and transport planning in mainly in European (e.g. Janse and Konijnendijk, 2007; Ernstson et al., 2010) and North American (e.g. McCool and Guthrie, 2001; Halvorsen, 2003) contexts, but also cases in Australia (Human and Davies, 2010) and New Zealand (Scott and Liew, 2012). Moreover, literature on planning practices (Carp, 2004; Laurian and Shaw, 2009) as well as generalized norms and quality aspects for collaborative planning and governance in more theory-oriented literature (e.g. Healey, 1997; Lockwood, 2010) were used. By reading the interview transcripts while going through the literature, we first searched for general similarities in aspects of quality of collaborative planning identified in the interviews and in both types of literature. Four broad themes of these similarities were identified, forming the four main evaluation perspectives used in this study. With these perspectives as a general frame, we applied the suggestion by Stake (1995, p. 79) that the most important data are analysed with pre-established codes, but it is also studied searching for new ones. We analysed the data by identifying topics that mattered to the interviewees as criteria for quality of collaborative planning processes and classified these under the four main categories. This produced 41 criteria. These were combined and simplified with the help of results and recommendation linked to quality of collaboration found in the empirically oriented literature as well as arguments in the theory-oriented literature. This resulted in 13 final criteria, each derived from 1–7 of the criteria in the first criteria set. The literature was also used as a support in formulating a description of each criterion. All the final criteria thus are rooted on both the empirical data and literature. To support design of effective collaborative processes, we also summarized the

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