

## Public Participation in Urban Planning: from symbolic engagement to citizen control

CARLOS NUNES SILVA<sup>65</sup>

The notion of Public Participation has multiple senses, as has been pointed out by authors such as Arnstein (1969) or Huxley (2013), among others. It means to act in order to promote the interests of an individual or entity, but it can also mean to take part in a social, cultural, or political activity. In a political sense, it is used to refer some form of power equalization within the decision making process. In this paper, Public participation in Urban Planning refers to some form of equalization of power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors in the context of the planning process. If in a planning process one of the parts keeps all the decision power, participation is certainly limited. In other words, there is only full participation if each part engaged in the urban planning decision-making process has power to determine part of the outcomes of that decision, as Sherry R. Arnstein refers in her text 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' (Arnstein, 1969).

In this paper, I examine the different planning acts that have framed public participation in Urban Planning processes in Portugal, comparing each main planning period with the scale of citizen power or capacity to influence and shape the final

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<sup>65</sup> Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon (Portugal).

outcome of the planning process as proposed in the Arnstein (1969) model of the ladder of citizen participation. In the paper I address the following research questions: Which was the role of public participation in each main period in the recent history of urban planning? What factors explain this level of public participation in urban planning in Portugal?

The planning system can be more or less decentralized, according to the degree of autonomy of the different tiers that constitute the system. The more decentralized the system the higher the possibilities for citizen engagement in the planning process and in its decision-making procedures.

The spatial planning system in Portugal during most of the period under analysis in this paper has been highly centralized, with limited room for citizen participation: the first Republic, the period of the dictatorship, and the second Republic after the overthrow of the dictatorship in mid 1970s. As will be shown, the spatial planning culture and the spatial planning system affected the engagement of citizens and other stakeholders in the planning decision-making process in each of the periods considered in the analysis. The findings also show that the level of the ladder of citizen participation achieved in each of these periods in the history of Urban Planning in Portugal has been lower than what the planning acts and the planning system itself would allow in practice. The evidence available seems to support the view that the engagement of citizens, or public participation, in the Governance of Urban Heritage has not been different from the more general pattern of public participation in the urban planning process: more symbolic than real citizen power, or even of non-participation in certain periods. The findings point for the need of further research on the role of citizens in the governance of urban heritage in Portugal in the last decades.

## References

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