Turning it upside down…
Participation as a tool for exclusion in Hungarian city planning

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Structure of the presentation

• **Background** – The foundation of local economic development on the basis of the capability approach

• **Analyzing ”Freedom for agency” in Hungarian city development plans**
  – Theoretical background
  – Methodology
  – Results
The foundation of local economic development on the basis of the capability approach

If we take the human development and capability approach (of Amartya Sen) as a basis:

- **Research question (1):** How can the objective of local economic development be defined?

- **Research question (2):** What sort of informational basis seems to be desirable for local economic development?

- **Research question (3):** What are the outlines of the desirable decision making processes of local economic development?
Empirical research tasks within the research project

- 23 Hungarian cities with county rights
- Qualitative methods
  - Development strategies
  - Qualitative text analysis
  - Stakeholder interviews in 3 cities
- Work in progress
  (2 year have passed out of the 3)
Freedom for agency

- **The aim of the presentation:** to evaluate stakeholder participation (freedom for agency) in urban planning on the basis of the capability approach

- Fits into an emerging stream of literature:
  - Approximates local development & capability approach
  - *Crocker 2007, Biggeri & Ferranini 2014, Bajmócy & Gébert 2014*

- Empirical evidence from a relatively high income county
Theoretical background
The human development and capability approach

Well-being (capabilities):
- Doings and beings that one has a reason to value (subject to public deliberation)
- Freedom to achieve
  - The freedom to *lead* a life one has a good reason to value
Human development and capability approach

(Sen 1979, 1999)

- Importance of decision making processes
- Agency has intrinsic value (regardless of its instrumental value)
- Not simply the lack of restriction (freedom from), but the real opportunity (freedom to)
- Deliberation: value debates & knowledge production

„Participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space, but the right to define and to shape that space”

(Gaventa 2006)
Methodology

- Analysis of local development strategies
- 23 cities with county rights (Budapest excluded)

- Analyzed documents (cca. 7700 pages):
  - (SRP): Stakeholder Reconciliation Plans of the 23 cities (passed in 2013)
  - (UDC): Urban development concepts (passed in 2014)
  - (IUD): Integrated urban development strategies (passed in 2014)
  - Proposals, decisions and minutes of city councils

- Methods:
  - Qualitative content analysis
    - Restructuring the text into categories
    - Framework of analysis based on the capability approach
    - E.g. spaces and forms of participation
  - Narrative analysis
    - Texts have surface and (a hidden) deep structure
    - The deep structure is a coherent story told by the text
    - E.g. what is participation according to these documents
Results 1.

• Defining the space for participation
  – Lack of
    • systematic stakeholder analysis (survival of former routines, interests) and
    • open public debates before passing the SRPs
  – The range of partners is fixed (cannot be broadened or the possibility is restricted, no „claims for participation” are possible)
    ↓
• The freedom to participate does not embrace the right to define or shape the space. Participation occurs in a pre-defined space.
Results 2.

- The participation of the nominated partners
  - Wide range of partners (organizations) are nominated in the SRPs, but do not reappear in the UDCs & IUDSs
  - Informing & consultation without deliberation and guarantees (tokenism)
  - Unidirectional communication (both directions)
  - Special possibilities for the most influential (e.g. regular meetings; the use of hidden space)

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- Participation contributes to sustaining status quo
Results 3.

- Citizen participation
  - The main task is considered to be informing (persuasion, education)
  - Express opinions (BUT: their knowledge is irrelevant)
  - Application of specific techniques (low level of participation, unidirectional communication, lack of deliberation)
  - Lack of participation in the early phases of planning & the plans are shadowy about their role during the implementation
  - Citizens must take efforts to be able to express their views → empowerment is not mentioned: the „voiceless” will apparently be unable to participate

- Participation provides means (?) for those in power not for those without power
The story told…

- Urban planning is the „business” of a pre-defined set of actors dominated by the local government and its invited or hidden partners.

- For these actors public participation is a way to sustain the existing power relations. For this purpose:
  - It is important to talk about participation (must look presentable)
  - They definitely do not want participation to distribute power and to have transformative potential
  - They provide pre-defined spaces: to persuade / to collect ideas with no risk
Summerizing thoughts

• Top-down public participation in city development planning in Hungary
  – Is a top-down necessity for local self-governments
  – From nonparticipation to tokenism
  – Participation as "greenwash" – serving the maintenance of the status quo.

• The concept of participation is turned upside-down (for … reasons)

• However, the necessity of including the principle of participation in planning documents might also open-up spaces for enforced bottom-up participation.
Thank you for your kind attention!

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