

LEARNING TO GIVE POWER TO THE PEOPLE: COMPETENCES FOR STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS*

Jeroen de Vries, Frans van den Goorbergh

1. Public Participation in Planning Projects

Public participation in the Netherlands is a crucial issue because the public is becoming more aware of their right to influence policies, design, management and maintenance. Furthermore the national and local governments have a policy to stimulate public participation to enhance maintenance and development of urban open space. In the aftermath of the credit crunch local authorities and project developers are more depending on the initiative of stakeholders, because they lack funding for new projects.

Teaching students how to organise participation is a challenge. In our programme students learn by making professional products like designs, construction plans, planting- and management plans that really can relate to the professional context. It is, however, a challenge to create learning environments similar to situations in practice, because of the complexity of the participation process and the various factors and actors influencing the situation.

Our landscape department carried out assignments within the context of various Interreg projects and is now involved in the Lively Cities - project. Within the framework of these projects we create a context for student to learn how to organize participation and to apply methods for involving the public in design and management of public open space.

2. Teaching Participation

One of the core competencies of the Landscape programme at VHL is “Management of outdoor spaces”, relating to defining goals of participation and target groups for participation.

From the beginning of the course students learn to apply principles of public participation in concrete study tasks. In the first and second study year simulated tasks are given to students, based on a context that is given by the teachers, thus theoretically orientated. In the first year students select their own study area. One of the main questions to address is why a park attracts people. Students draw conclusions on the basis of a comparative study and one of the main goals is acquire awareness of the social aspect. The teacher gives a lecture on place making

methods, along with a further study tasks to organise a participation process for this park. Students can interact and discuss ideas and proposals.

In the second year the focus is on the methods to conduct a survey in order to analyse how people experience a site. Students prepare a survey based on the theoretical background and conduct the survey in practice, linking the theoretical information to practical situations.

From the third year landscape students can opt for the specialization course “Management of outdoor space”, focusing on the practice, with the role of external advisor in practical cases, by means of place-making. Place-making is the process by which people transform the locations they inhabit into the places they live. The activities of the students involve a stakeholder analysis, the organization of a place evaluation workshop and a place making workshop with a consultation of the public. Students make use of different techniques (methods) that are part of a “toolkit” for involving the public in planning processes. The place-making methods used to structure, organise and carry out participation processes (PPS, 2011) include: spatial arts, mindscaping, debating, working together in a practical way, development of educational routes, guerrilla gardening and the concept of using video and multimedia techniques to invite young people to participate (meet my street).

Tool	Guerrilla Gardening
Theme	Community: Awareness Capture: Information from the community and youth
Use	Provide citizens with a tree or plants and invite them to plant it somewhere they prefer within the park or green structure.
Effect	– Contact with community and youth enhanced. – Creative approach – Point of interest to engage in further conversation, analyse interests and needs – Kick off of public participation process – Instant intervention – Community have direct influence on the park – Social capital building
Tool	Meet my Street
Theme	Community: Awareness Capture: get information from young people
Use	Artists work with citizens in their own neighbourhood. They give citizens a short course in film making in order to be able to make their own video. Website: http://www.meetmystreet.nl/framesets/indexfotofilm.aspx

Effect	– Contact with young people – Point of interaction – Capture values through various perspectives – Connect spaces to new social media – Kick off to public campaign
--------	---

Table 1. Examples of the toolkit of Lively Cities

In year four, the final year of the programme, students can add a personal profile for participation during the minor semester and the final project.

Study year	Teaching goals:
1.	Students: a. have knowledge of methods for socio-spatial analysis and development of spaces (model for park analysis of TU-Delft, place making Project for public spaces). b. have knowledge of key concepts of participation of the public. c. are able to carry out a socio-spatial analysis of a pre-defined project area. d. are able to draw up a plan for participation for a limited project area on the basis of their own vision
2.	e. are able to carry out a socio-spatial analysis for an urban park within the context of broader analysis of the area. f. are able to prepare, carry out and interpret a survey/set of interviews among stakeholders for a socio-spatial issue.
3.	g. are able to act as an external advisor in concrete professional situations in order to develop, organise and carry out participation processes making use of the place making method.

Table 2. Teaching goals of the 4-year bachelor programme for the theme of public participation

The approach of the VHL course enable students understand and define the expected effects of participation and current trends in society. They are aware of the overall objectives of the government to involve the public, to enhance social cohesion, to make the public more responsible for the quality of urban open space and to improve the relationship between government and citizens. They can also build upon the motivation of residents and make use of different tool kits for participation. Parts of the education programme are: organising the creative process, developing imagination and structuring and presenting the outcomes within a given framework.

**This text is an abstract from article, published in Environment and Innovation. Proceedings from ENTER Study Days 2014*