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Urban planning as ‘great dialogue’? Developing polyphonic planning practices in a process of hybrid participation, case Viiskorpi, Espoo, Finland

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into participatory urban planning practices through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony. We explore how polyphonic planning, which requires multiple voices in a dialogue and representations revealing various perspectives, can be achieved in a hybrid participatory planning process. Our action research, conducted as part of an actual planning process, reveals that while hybrid participation can foster dialogue and increase polyphony, it requires participatory knowledge sharing, public assessment of planners’ interpretations, and a clear definition of concepts. We also suggest improving the vertical dialogue between planning levels.

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Public participation; urban planning; hybrid methods; polyphony; dialogue; polyphonic planning

1. Introduction

Polyphony is a term introduced by the Russian societal thinker and literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) to describe reality’s intersubjective and dialogical nature and representation. Applying polyphony in urban planning is seen as advancing planning processes and increasing planning’s legitimacy (Antadze, 2018; Wallin *et al.*, 2018), limiting path dependency and revealing complexities underlying planning solutions (Ameel *et al.*, 2023; see also Shearer & Xiang, 2009), and helping urban planners to integrate participants’ attachments to place into their plans (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Wallin *et al.*, 2018; see also Decandia, 2014). Bakhtin’s key concepts have also provided an understanding of the dialogical construction of public urban spaces and landscapes (Folch-Serra, 1990; Holloway & Kneale, 2000; Kenniff, 2018). Although Bakhtin’s ideas have influenced theoretical approaches to planning (e.g. Smith, 1998; Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Hirschkop, 2004; Kenniff, 2018; Antedze, 2018; Ameel, 2021), the application of polyphony in the context of urban planning research and practice remains limited. This article’s contribution lies in applying the theory of polyphony in practice-oriented empirical research.

More than reaching the diversity of participants is required to make planning polyphonic. Nino Antadze (2018) has argued polyphonic planning requiring a

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participatory process, creating a space where multiple voices (ambivalence) interact (dialogue) without merging to form a consensus. However, the literature on planning as storytelling suggests planning interweaves the future-oriented abstract representations of planners with local stories of lived space, aiming for a shared vision and planning outputs that express different perspectives (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Wallin *et al.*, 2018; Ameel, 2021). By combining these approaches, polyphonic planning requires 1) participation of multiple voices to achieve ambivalence, 2) dialogue building reality and envisioning future, and 3) representations revealing various points of view.

Mapping ambivalence is increasingly feasible, courtesy of digital methods making collecting data from large numbers of participants comparatively easy (e.g. Ameel, 2021; Ameel *et al.*, 2023). Hybrid methods, e.g. combining digital and face-to-face methods or enabling participation at different times and locations, make participation accessible to participants with different abilities and resources (Pantić *et al.*, 2021; Thoneick, 2021; Aguilar, 2022). However, hybrid participation produces fragmented participatory information. Moreover, the interaction between different and divergent voices, i.e. dialogic co-existence, is challenging to organize. Consequently, planners and participants find it difficult to understand the reality or envision the future constructed from different perspectives.

This article asks: How can a hybrid participatory planning process achieve polyphony? We collected our data in an action research case study conducted in Viiskorpi, Espoo, Finland, in 2022 as part of an actual planning process. The starting point for our research is the normative idea that planning should be more polyphonic. In contrast, our approach to developing participatory planning practices enhancing polyphony through action research is pragmatic.

The study’s theoretical framework (Table 1) is presented below based on Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony. In the second section, we will discuss the context of our research, including participatory planning practices and the case description. A section on specific research questions, methods, and data will follow this. The research results are presented in section four. Subsequently, we will discuss the formation of polyphony and dialogue in the hybrid process. In conclusion, we will recommend participatory planning practices to achieve polyphony.

Table 1. A framework for polyphony in urban planning built on Bakhtin’s theory.

Ambivalence	Dialogue	Representation
Various points of view: Time-space positions (chronotopes) Modes of expression and meanings (heteroglossia)	Situations where various perspectives interact (different forms of dialogue) A lived reality and an envisioned future formed through a dialogue between different perspectives	Presenting different perspectives in representations of reality and the future The power and responsibility of the authors to promote a variety of perspectives
Polyphony in Planning		
Various points of view, achieved e.g. through participation in the planning process	Planning stages where various perspectives interact e.g. discussion situations	Planning outputs with dialogically formed perceptions of reality and the future, e.g. descriptions of starting points and plans. Representations in which even conflicting perspectives are brought to the fore, e.g. as alternatives

1.1. *The theory of polyphony*

Bakhtin used the term polyphony to describe narrative, in which the author gives a status of 'I' to his characters, relinquishing his authority in describing the perspective of the story (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 6, 71–74; Holquist, 2002, p. 34). Bakhtin saw such art as an attempt to describe the complexity of life and the construction of reality in a dialogical interaction between different perspectives, which monologic representations, founded on rationalism and totalitarianism, could not do (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 64; Holquist, 2002, p. 34). Therefore, the dialogical co-existence of ambivalent voices is at the core of Bakhtin's theory (e.g. Antadze, 2018). The multiplicity of perspectives builds on the idea that 'perception can only be achieved from a unique point in the spectrum of possible perspectives' (Holquist, 2002, p. 164), making it impossible to put oneself in someone else's position. However, we can get closer to each other through dialogue.

In Bakhtin's thinking, dialogue is a concept transcending all levels of life, describing the constant mutuality of differences taking place 'between words in language, people in society, organisms in ecosystems, and even between processes in the natural world' (Holquist, 2002, p. 41). Thus, dialogue occurs in countless contexts requiring, at minimum, utterance, response, and, most importantly, the relationship between them (Holquist, 2002, p. 38). Essential in dialogue is the interaction between ideas from different perspectives and, thus, the possibility of exchanging meanings.

Consequently, interaction can be viewed in the different contexts in which dialogue occurs (Holloway & Kneale, 2000) and through the positioning of the participants in the dialogue (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Holquist, 2002, p. 21). The most apparent form of dialogue is the conversational situation between participants (Folch-Serra, 1990; Kenniff, 2018). Bakhtin considered these everyday speech situations as primary genres in which different points of view co-exist without the author's interpretations (Smith, 1998; Holquist, 2002, pp. 71–72). Much more complex dialogic context arises from the interconnectedness of each utterance, whereby dialogue can be hidden or internal. Hidden dialogue refers to expressions with different perspectives on the expressions' structure, ideas, and attitudes (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 197–199). Internal dialogue occurs when an individual engages in internal reflection, which consists of struggles between different perspectives that influence thinking (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 74). These 'micro-dialogues' form a 'great dialogue' consisting of interactions between the author, the participants, and even the reader (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 71).

However, spatial and temporal positionings and different meanings of language and words challenge interaction, preventing us from getting closer to each other. In Bakhtin's theory, individuals have both unifying (social) and separating (subjective) forces between them, whose proximity and distance create the space and conditions for dialogue (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981, pp. 271–273; Holloway & Kneale, 2000; Kenniff, 2018). For example, even if we speak the same language, we may not understand the meanings of expressions in the same way. Such richness of language is what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981, pp. 263, 271–272; Folch-Serra, 1990). However, alongside subjective meanings, a shared holistic language must bring us closer together and set some limits to the chaos of different modes of expression (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981).

Another central concept describing the positioning of participants is 'chronotope' meaning the different temporal and spatial perspectives from which participants in a

dialogue, including the author, view events (Folch-Serra, 1990; Sandywell, 1998; Holquist, 2002, p. 21). For example, participants may perceive events from inside or outside (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981, pp. 132–133) within the same period but influenced by their personal history (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981, pp. 120–121). The encounter of such different notions of time in space is typical in urban planning, dealing with different perceptions of the present and imagined future (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003, p. 28). The differentiated chronotopes in the dialogue challenge the interaction again as the semiotic repertoires (e.g. language) necessary for communication become more complex (Sandywell, 1998, p. 207). However, a one-sided definition of time is a monologuing practice leading to an abstract and only partial description of reality (Sandywell, 1998, pp. 206–207).

Notably, Bakhtin refers to a carnivalesque notion of space and time in which everyone can participate and where cultural and social hierarchies disappear (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 175–176; Holloway & Kneale, 2000). Thus, the carnival is an opportunity to challenge societal processes, circles of power, and fixed practices, creating conditions for change (Burkitt, 1998, p. 177). Planning ideas also form within professional and institutional networks, shaping planners' thinking, which is why attention must be paid to who is involved in the planning processes (Throgmorton, 2007; see also, Burkitt, 1998). For example, according to James Throgmorton (2007), local stories should be told and heard more, especially in regional planning. In addition to planners' perceptions, communities' understanding of the need for change could widen.

As urban planning produces representations combining discourses, the theory is relevant for presenting different perspectives in a single text (Ameel, 2021; Ameel *et al.*, 2023). In a polyphonic narrative, the author develops, deepens, and confirms various incomplete and contradictory ideas not only as a resonant and argumentative background for their own opinions but also as a confirmation of ideas that differ from the author's (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 68–71). In Bakhtin's thinking, power and the exercise of power are related to the author's authority, that is, how they treat other subjects (Holquist, 2002, p. 33).

Planning can be considered a future-building storytelling process in which participants should be both characters in the story and joint authors (Throgmorton, 1996; Sandercock, 2003a). Therefore, Bakhtin's notion of the author's vantage point with alternative perspectives and privilege (Holquist, 2002, p. 33) parallels the power of planners or planning organizations to determine and regulate how different perspectives are expressed in planning documents (Ameel, 2021; Ameel *et al.*, 2023). Plans ignoring the local stories yet represented as objective descriptions based on the technical expertise of planners or the narratives of political, cultural, and economic elites represent a monologuing representation (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003, pp. 65–70, 153).

2. The context of the research

2.1. Participatory planning process and practices

Participatory planning is an approach based on communicative planning, 'in which individuals or groups, assisted by a set of tools, take part in varying degrees at the overlapping phases of the planning and decision-making cycle that may bring forth

outcomes congruent with the participants' needs and interests' (Horelli, 2002). Participatory planning practices aim to provide adequate information and opportunities for participation for those affected by the planning (Horelli, 2002) and recognize different ways of communicating knowledge, such as storytelling (Healey, 1997; Forester, 1999; Sandercock, 2003b).

However, planners and decision-makers often question participatory information's validity as a justification for planning decisions, leading to low effectiveness (Innes & Booher, 2010). Conversely, for planning to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders, the influence of participation is essential, and planners should communicate the implications to those involved (Horelli, 2002). Additional challenges of participatory planning relate, among other things, to access to planning arenas, representativeness, and selecting methods and tools (Horelli, 2002).

Finnish urban planning aims to enable participation and influence for all those affected by the planning process (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2023). However, planning practices involve a combination of comprehensive rationality and participatory practices (Bäklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). The influence of participation remains weak as strategic objectives are set at higher levels of planning (e.g. regional and master plans), where participation is weaker than at the local level (e.g. detailed planning) (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2023). Furthermore, monologuing practices and representations lead to distrust in planners' willingness to consider the participants' meanings and values (Wallin *et al.*, 2018).

Our case study in Viiskorpi used a planning model (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a, 2020b) seeking to address the challenges described above. The model's planning process consists of three stages, each opening with broad participation and diverging information and closing through information-converging collaboration. Each stage has a clear objective for a jointly shared outcome: shared goals, a vision, and finally, a plan (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a).

The model represents participatory and collaborative planning, aiming for inclusive processes and outcomes addressing the needs of various participants (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a). Underlying is identifying and bringing into dialogue different types of knowledge, such as expert and experiential knowledge (Friedmann, 1973), on a set of arenas in which knowledge is collaboratively created and tested (Rydin, 2007). Therefore, the model sets a requirement for openness in planning: on the one hand, planning must be open to different types of knowledge, and on the other hand, participatory planning information must be available to all actors involved in the process (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a).

2.2. Planning of Viiskorpi

Viiskorpi is a sparsely populated area with around 360 inhabitants on outskirts of Espoo, Finland's second-largest city (Figure 1). The master plan guides strong growth in Viiskorpi by designating a new center, 8,000 inhabitants, and efficient public transport by 2050 (City of Espoo, 2022). However, the master plan is a locally controversial starting point for further planning. The plan raised objections among residents, who questioned, among other things, the adequacy of participation in the process (Salomaa, 2023, pp. 30–31).

Our study focuses on the practices of the Viiskorpi district plan process. District plans refine master plans and provide a spatial framework for more detailed plans (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2023; Figure 2). District planning represents 'soft planning'

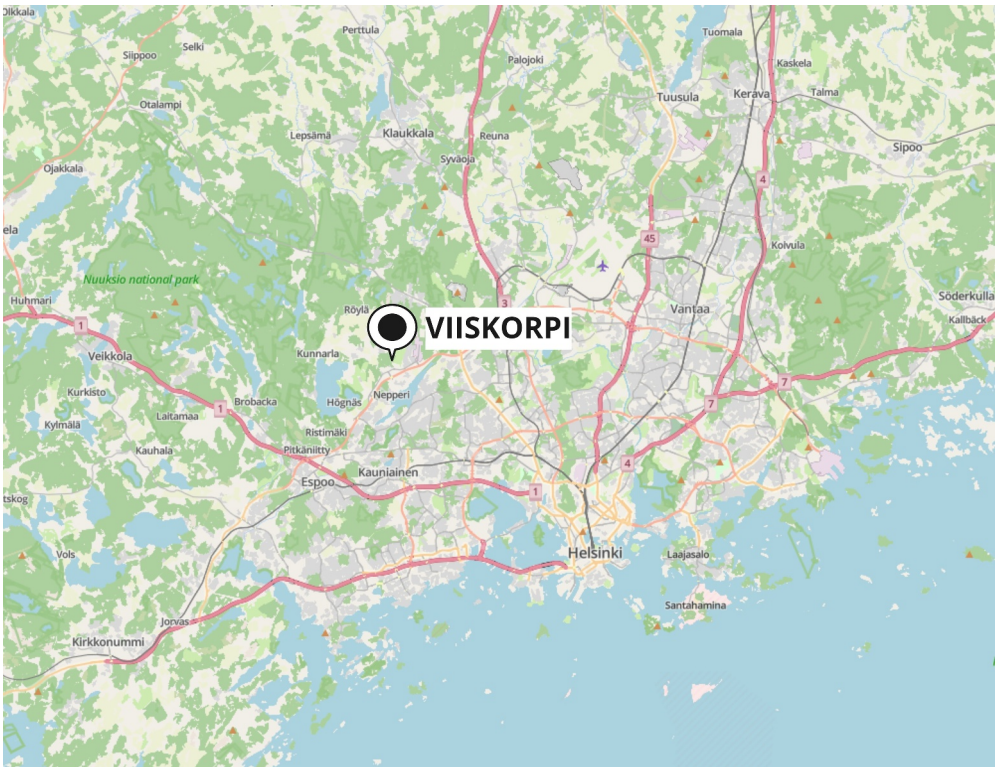


Figure 1. The location of Viiskorpi in the capital region of Finland (Copyright: Map background: OpenStreetMap contains data from the National Land Survey of Finland Topographic Database 04/2024, available under Open Database License at openstreetmap.org).

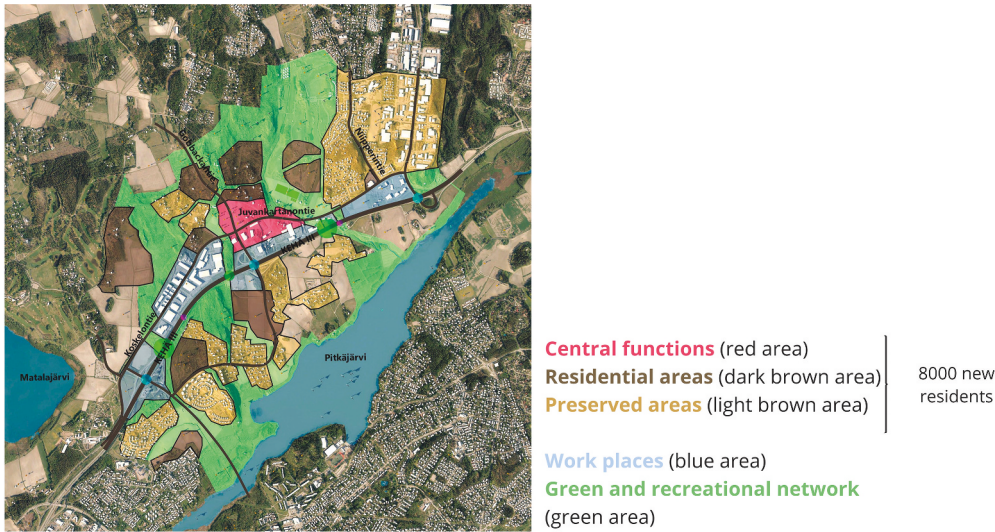


Figure 2. District plan outlines for Viiskorpi had already been sketched out when our research process began (Source of the plan map City of Espoo).

outside the statutory planning; hence, participation is not mandatory. However, complaints about the master plan were the reason for the emphasis on participation in Viiskorpi district planning (Salomaa, 2023, p. 31).

The participation in Viiskorpi aimed to a continuum of participation, where each planning stage builds on the participatory knowledge generated in the previous one (Salomaa, 2023, pp. 18–19). This research started at a stage where residents, with city planners, had already outlined local goals for planning through the current values and future aspirations of Viiskorpi (Figure 4, Stage 0). Residents hoped that Viiskorpi would develop into a close-to-nature and self-sufficient urban village where the possibility of townhouses would be explored (City of Espoo, 2022).

The case provided an opportunity to explore hybrid participation across two planning stages (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a; Figure 4). In both stages, planners and researchers conducted workshops and parallel online map surveys (Figure 3). The aim was to enable participation in the same planning questions regardless of time and place¹ (Nummi *et al.*, 2023).

The workshops were organized in Espoo in Aalto University's workshop space called Cave, a physical space designed for interactive and collaborative urban planning (Eräranta & Kauppi, 2017). The space integrates extensive IT, a powerful computer, and stereoscopic 3D projectors with a triple-sided widescreen display, enabling immersive visualizations and simulations in 3D. For the online map survey, we used the Public Participation GIS (PPGIS) tool, Maptionnaire, which was originally developed at Aalto University (e.g. Kahila-Tani, 2015).

Using hybrid methods produced several participatory data sets, which were combined and analyzed by planners and researchers in analysis workshops in both stages (9 participants in stage 1, 7 participants in stage 2). Analysis workshops aimed not to produce final analytical results but to understand the different data sets, preliminary

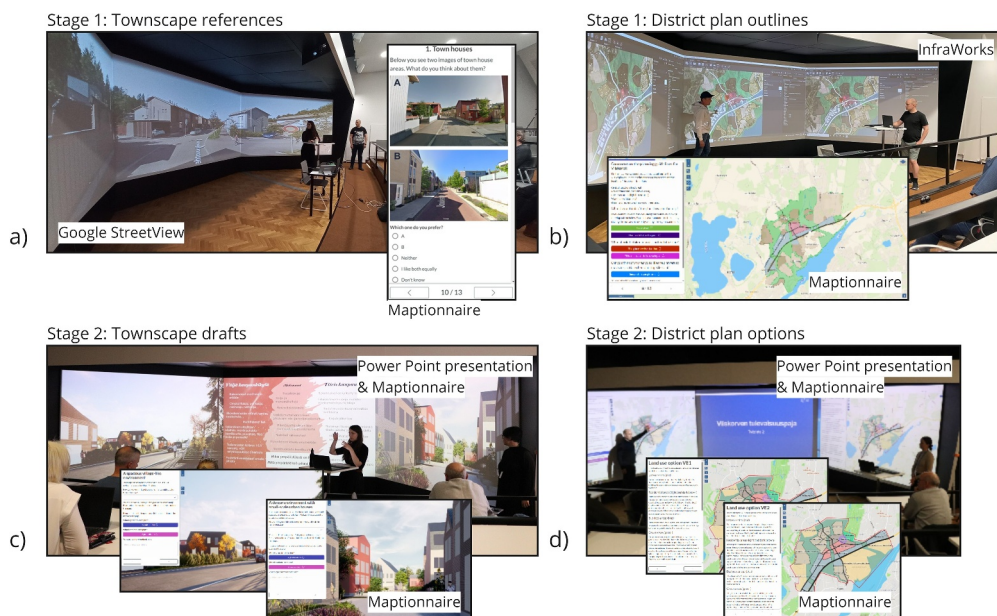
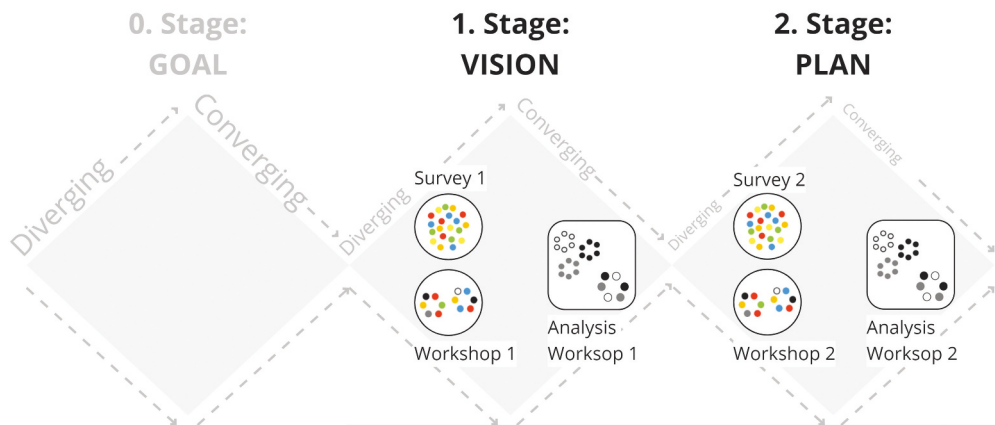


Figure 3. Participation in the same planning questions was implemented via workshops and surveys.

A. Participatory process and methods



B. Action research

Developing and testing methods Analyzing and interpreting results Developing and testing methods Analyzing and interpreting results

< Reflecting the process >

C. Data

<p>Planning outputs</p> <p>Viiskorpi-Kalajärvi land use review (City of Espoo, 2022)</p> <p>Invitation to Cave workshop 1 (City of Espoo, 2022)</p> <p>Cave workshop 1 plan</p> <p>Instructions for participants of Cave workshop 1</p> <p>Welcome to Viiskorpi</p> <p>Cave workshop 1 presentation</p> <p>Townscape workshop presentation in Google Street View (Krista Pihlava, 2022)</p> <p>Slido survey for Cave workshop participants</p> <p>Maptionnaire survey 1</p> <p>Participation results</p> <p>Discussion notes ($n = 2$) from Cave workshop 1</p> <p>Results of Slido survey 1</p> <p>Results of Maptionnaire survey 1 (spatial and excel data)</p> <p>Reflection material</p> <p>Notes from preparatory ($n = 2$) and advisory ($n = 6$) group meetings</p>	<p>Planning outputs</p> <p>Presentation materials for Cave workshop 2</p> <p>District plan options</p> <p>Townscape typology drafts</p> <p>Participation results</p> <p>Analysis workshop 1 documentation (Miro-board)</p> <p>Reflection material</p> <p>Notes from preparatory ($n = 4$) group meetings</p>	<p>Planning outputs</p> <p>Presentations for Cave 2 workshop on Participatory experience, District plan, Townscape, and Green spaces</p> <p>Maptionnaire survey 2</p> <p>Participation results</p> <p>Cave workshop 2 plan</p> <p>Maptionnaire survey 2 plan</p> <p>Discussion notes ($n = 4$) from Cave workshop 2</p> <p>Maptionnaire survey 2 results, workshop participants</p> <p>Maptionnaire survey 2 results, online survey</p> <p>Reflection material</p> <p>Notes from feedback discussion with planners (Miro board)</p> <p>Notes from preparatory ($n = 1$) group meeting</p>	<p>Planning outputs</p> <p>Presentations of project results to Espoo city planning staff on Participation experience and Townscape planning</p> <p>Participation results</p> <p>Analysis workshop 2 documentation</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of Maptionnaire 2 and Cave 2 data (City of Espoo, 2022)</p> <p>Reflection material</p> <p>Results of feedback survey for planners</p> <p>Notes from preparatory ($n = 1$) and advisory ($n = 1$) group meetings</p>
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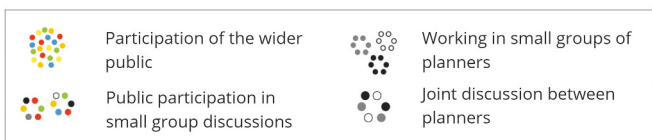


Figure 4. Data gathering in the action research process based on the participatory planning model by Staffans *et al.* (2020a).

findings, and guidelines for further data analysis. Before analysis workshops, the researchers took the participatory data to the Miro platform and sorted them by planning tasks. In the analysis workshops, planners representing various disciplines (landscape, interaction, land use) and planning levels (detailed and master plan) formed groups with the researchers according to the planning tasks. In the end of the workshop, the groups came together and shared an overview of the data, findings, and recommendations for further work.

3. Research questions, methods, and data

This article asks how a hybrid participatory planning process can achieve polyphony. We analyze the outputs and interaction of the Viiskorpi planning process through the framework for polyphony (Table 1). Therefore, we pose the following specific research questions (and codes for analysis):

- How were different points of view and voices (ambivalence, heteroglossia) expressed through different methods?
- How did different points of view and voices encounter, interact, and shape each other (dialogue between participants, dialogue between planners and participants)?
- Which time-space positionings (chronotopes) underlie the different perspectives (planners' and participants' relationships to the planning process and Viiskorpi)?
- Are the different perspectives and their impact reflected in the planning outputs (monologue/polyphonic presentation)?

In this study, we applied the action research approach to generate new scientific knowledge and practical solutions in collaboration with the social entity under study (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). A case study using action research provides a good basis for studying new planning practices. Firstly, action research cases provide windows to 'what could be rather than what is' (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). Furthermore, action research is suitable for studying processes related to planning practices, whereby the planner, along with the experiences, becomes the object of the study and the research participant (Rydin, 2007).

The data generated at different process stages (Figure 4) consists of planning outcomes: texts, maps, participation results, presentations, and surveys. Reflection on the results during the cyclical process is essential in action research (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). In this case, the planners and researchers reflected on the process and the results in preparatory and advisory group meetings (15 meetings in total), a feedback discussion (6 participants), and a survey (6 respondents).

For the analysis, we exported the data to the Miro platform, which allowed both image and text documents to be explored and coded in a single view. We analyzed the data using documentary analysis. The data was reviewed, identifying different perspectives, voices, and meanings (ambivalence, heteroglossia) and mutual exchanges (dialogue) at different process stages. Furthermore, attempts to present these different perspectives and their impact on the plans were identified in the planning outputs, or, on the other hand, the tendency towards a monologue and the absence or vagueness of impact. The positioning of stakeholders and planners was examined separately through qualitative content analysis and quantitative

analysis of survey responses (Maptionnaire, feedback survey), workshop, and feedback discussion notes.

4. Results

4.1. *Usefulness of methods for conveying ambivalence*

The workshops and surveys brought various participant perspectives to the process. The workshops proved to be an arena for residents who had previously participated in urban planning. Meanwhile, the surveys reached especially nearby residents and first-time participants.²

Unlike the surveys, the workshops were conversational situations where various participant perceptions and planning discourses encountered shaping participants' views and enabling the identification of individual differences, e.g. in defining concepts. The views converged on some issues, making reconciling them with planning solutions possible. For example, one group accepted the role of apartment buildings as noise abatement, even though most participants explicitly opposed apartment buildings. Nevertheless, the shared ideas were limited to the workshop group: an idea developed by one group in the first workshop did not gain support in the second workshop, where the participants were only partly the same.

The survey responses and the workshop discussions allowed participants to express themselves in their own words. However, the participants found expressing aspects vital to them easier in workshops than surveys (Nummi *et al.*, 2023). Conversely, in the workshop discussion notes, the documenters' styles varied widely, and summarizing documentation provided little opportunity to understand the diversity of views and the interactivity of the situation afterward.

Different perspectives could be expressed and tested as planning solutions through alternatives (e.g. plan options, Figure 3(d) or urban typologies, Figure 3(a)). The alternatives that the participants themselves had influenced generated many discussions and opinions, as well as criticism of the interpretations of the participatory aspects. Conversely, if the options were too consistent or unpleasant, the planners needed to activate the debate, and conclusions were less clear.

4.2. *Positioning of the participants in the dialogue*

The participants' place relationship influenced their perspectives. For example, residents mainly supported (e.g. vast green areas, bigger plots, a smaller town center) and opposed certain plans' features (e.g. apartment buildings) regardless of how they participated. However, those with the same spatial relationship also introduced different views on planning. For example, as participants introduced themselves in the second workshop, additionally to the place relationship, different views for and against planning, concerns, desires, values, and needs arose. As with residents, one resident owned a family farm in Viiskorpi and thus represented the historical continuity of the area; another dreamed of a car-free life, and a third described the quality of his living environment through the nature values.

The participants' place relationship seems to influence the quality of the information they present. The closer the relationship with Viiskorpi (e.g. resident or landowner), the

more detailed and place-specific the information is. For example, while the resident's arguments refer to present features of the place (e.g. nature observations or the current building pattern), the non-residents viewed Viiskorpi from a non-site-specific perspective, and the arguments given were general. Furthermore, residents living in different parts of Viiskorpi have different perceptions of place values, for example, regarding the location of recreational areas. Similarly, residents in nearby areas have detailed information and opinions on the edges and accessibility of Viiskorpi.

Further, planning influences and evokes emotions differently for participants from different backgrounds as feelings reflect the importance and plan's impact on the expresser's daily life and future (cf. Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003, p. 69). In Viiskorpi, residents expressed anxiety, sadness, and frustration with the planning, feeling that the city does not see people and the values of their living environment. Conversely, the complexity and slowness of the process irritated participants wanting rapid and large-scale development. They were largely non-existing residents, for example, living nearby or wanting to move to the area.

However, the planners questioned whether the participants' place relationship should influence the validity of the participatory information. Initially, planners identified the key stakeholders to engage as those most affected by the planning, such as residents, local entrepreneurs, and youth. Towards the end of the process, they considered that the majority opinion mattered most for the plan's acceptability and the opinions of land-owners for feasibility. Moreover, the planners stressed the importance of future residents, as reflected by this planner:

Future residents are the most important participants. There is not enough information about their views because existing residents mainly participated in the workshops, and existing residents have chosen the area based on preferences different from future residents because the area is changing so radically. (author's translation)

The attitude towards future residents reveals the different time-space positioning of planners and participants well. For some planners, the change brought about by the plan, with its details (e.g. architecture), is already there, so they seem to think of the place in terms of the future that the plan creates. In the end, most planners felt they didn't learn anything relevant about the planning area from the participants.

As we know from other studies, planners' plans find new residents whose preferences match the planners' imaginations (Schmidt-Thomé *et al.*, 2013). Also, in Viiskorpi, the few participants who said they were potential future residents welcomed the planners' plans, which, on the other hand, would radically change the place from what it is now. Conversely, the current residents questioned the importance of future residents as opinion leaders. They stressed the importance of existing residents as experts on their neighborhood, as illustrated by the comment of this workshop participant:

New residents make the choice, but the old residents have chosen the current environment. (Resident, author's translation)

The future and future residents also emerge in some residents' comments, mainly through their preferences or the impact on their children (e.g. climate change). For example, this resident's aspirations were related both to the preservation of the peacefulness of the area and the possibility for his children to establish a home there:

I have lived in Viiskorpi for 20 years. My children must move away if I hold on to my 4,000 sqm plot. Therefore, the availability of plots in the area must be guaranteed. (Resident, author's translation)

4.3. Bringing together the different voices

While the workshops allowed some participants to familiarize themselves and discuss each other's views, all participants' views were combined only in the analysis workshops. Hence, all the separate perspectives were only visible to the planners and researchers.

The analysis workshops demonstrated that individual planners make different observations, pay attention to different contents, and are influenced by different results. One may take a holistic view of the materials, personal discussions with participants may influence another, and the third may prefer to explore map responses. Therefore, co-analysis is even more critical in avoiding interpretation from the perspective of a single planner.

Furthermore, utilizing diverse participant information seems problematic due to planners' analyzing skills and attitudes. Some planners consider planning a creative and intuitive process where 'scientific analysis' is inappropriate. Conversely, the planners also identified the risk of selecting participatory views supporting their plan from the data.

Examining the different participation datasets in parallel helped planners see the diversity of participants' opinions and partly changed their perception of participants' attitudes toward planning. From the planners' perspectives, the map survey data provided the most easily analyzable and approachable material. The planners explained that it was easier to identify and understand the participants' perceptions from the survey responses than from the discussion notes. For example, it seemed natural for planners to categorize the map responses for the district plan according to different land use types. Meanwhile, the analysis of discussion documents and open-ended responses not linked to the map remained more unstructured.

4.4. Representation of different perspectives and influence on planning

Doubts regarding the influence of participation appeared in participant feedback from the first stage onwards. The current planning practice is to report on the impact of participation and respond to feedback rather than publish participants' feedback. This project adopted the practice of summarizing the feedback and highlighting the conflicting views (Figure 5(a)). However, participants did not consider these summaries adequate, and many still suspected that the planners had manipulated the results. Participants who doubted the impact of participation suggested publishing the feedback as a solution. From the planners' point of view, during the hectic planning process, combining data, removing personal information, and other technical work seemed insignificant to the workload. Instead, they felt the summaries were an adequate and appropriate practice.

In the second stage, participants assessed the plans, as we wanted to know whether the planners had correctly interpreted the participants' comments as planning solutions (Figure 5(b,c)). Many participants suspected planners did not understand them and raised the need to define a common language and concepts. For example, the concepts

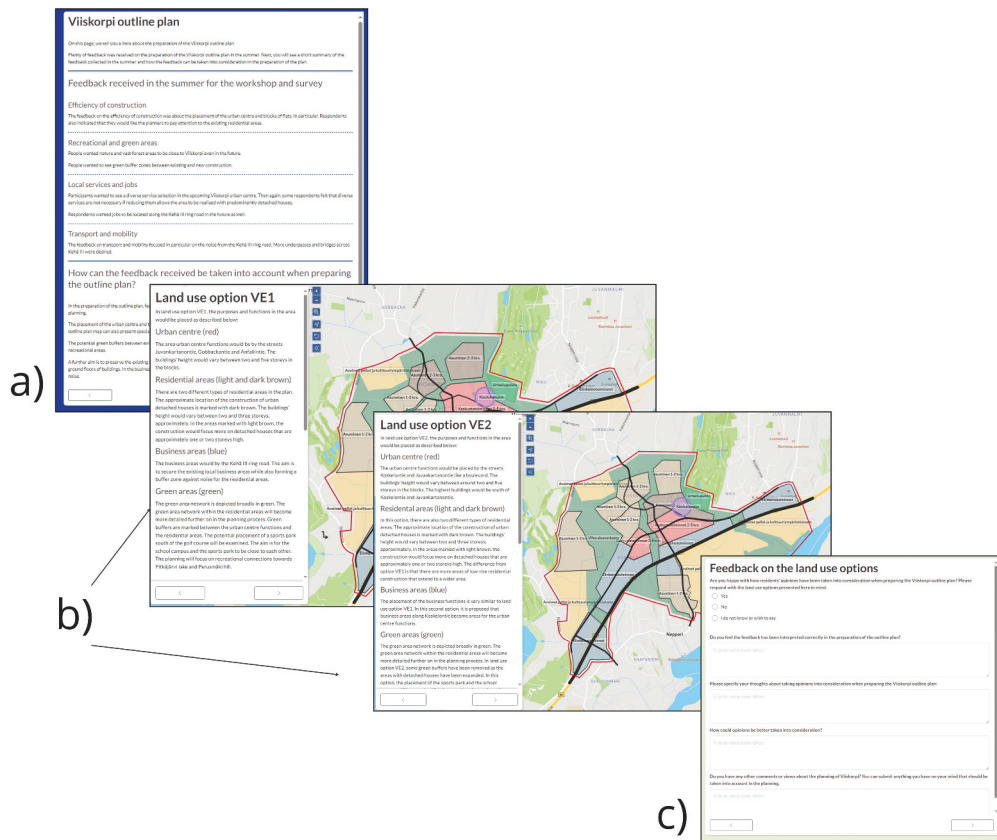


Figure 5. Promoting dialogue in the survey: (a) presenting different perspectives as a summary of participatory information, (b) presenting and commenting on plan alternatives developed based on the feedback, and (c) asking for feedback on the planners' interpretations of the participatory information.

of 'urban village' and 'townhouse' seemed to solve both the city's quantitative objectives and the participants' desires. However, the planning solutions disappointed the participants. Leading them to doubt that the concepts were understood in very different ways, as is evident from these responses to the second survey:

It seems that planners have a different idea of townhouses than we do. We, current residents, think that a townhouse is a low two-story terraced house where everyone also has a small garden. (Resident, author's translation)

A village is not a dense suburb but a looser settlement with more space. (Nearby resident, author's translation)

Furthermore, participants suggested methodological and technical solutions to improve the dialogue. The respondents saw particular potential in methods that do not require meetings, such as surveys. Workshop participants would like to see more discussions and encounters in a virtual format, for example, setting up a local discussion forum. Moreover, respondents would also like to be involved in preparing plans but would

prefer a tool such as a virtual model where alternatives could be published and assessed publicly.

Planners' views on the impact of participatory information varied. For others, the process encouraged unconventional solutions to reconcile different objectives. For example, in the townscape plan, the planner decided that the area's population should be slightly more moderate to consider the concerns raised by the residents (Pihlava, 2023). Some planners, conversely, did not see the need to consider the views of the participants because of quantitative objectives, as this planner's reasoning suggests:

If the area changes significantly, it may not be worth looking for a compromise for old and new residents. Instead, it may be better for the residents if the planning is done with a clean slate and in a way that maximizes the income that residents receive from their plots, allowing them to move to an area that still meets their preferences. (author's translation)

Here is again the presence of comprehensive-rationalist thinking, where the planner's task is to solve predefined problems and produce efficient land use without caring too much about the opponent's claims (Throgmorton, 1996, pp. 37, 264–265). Participants' opinions contradicting existing planning ideas or objectives were less likely to influence than those consistent with the planners' opinions. Planners emphasized that perspectives that support professional views are the most influential, even when trying to take other opinions into account, such as in this planner's feedback:

I give more weight to those opinions that I already consider important from a professional perspective, and I try to give more weight to those opinions that I consider less important or even harmful from an overall perspective. The use of participatory information is hampered by the fact that it is difficult to internalize and is not fully representative and generalizable. (author's translation)

5. Discussion

Following existing research (Antadze, 2018; Ameen, 2021), the urban planning process requires three things to be polyphonic: 1) The co-existence of many unmerged voices, 2) dialogue between the various perspectives, and 3) planning outcomes publicizing various points of views. Here, hybridity challenges the dialogical co-existence of different voices by dividing social space temporally and spatially.

Our findings reveal that the Viiskorpi process involved direct dialogue between some participants and planners. We also identify dialogues between different practices (events, workshops, and planning outputs, such as plans), where information is combined, planners and participants interact, and participants share and evaluate interpretations. Consequently, the process is a dialogue, where dialogical situations and non-dialogical practices bring new perspectives, and polyphonic information is transferred and shaped between planning and participants. Planning practices are thus like micro-dialogues, combining in different ways into the 'great dialogue' (cf. Bakhtin, 1984) that the planning process should be, which also connects to other discourses around it (Figure 6).

Hybridity increased the representativeness of the participants and brought a more comprehensive range of perspectives to the planning process. However, integrating different perspectives requires solutions that combine technology and encounter, as previous studies have shown (e.g. Thoneick, 2021). In this project, there was no platform

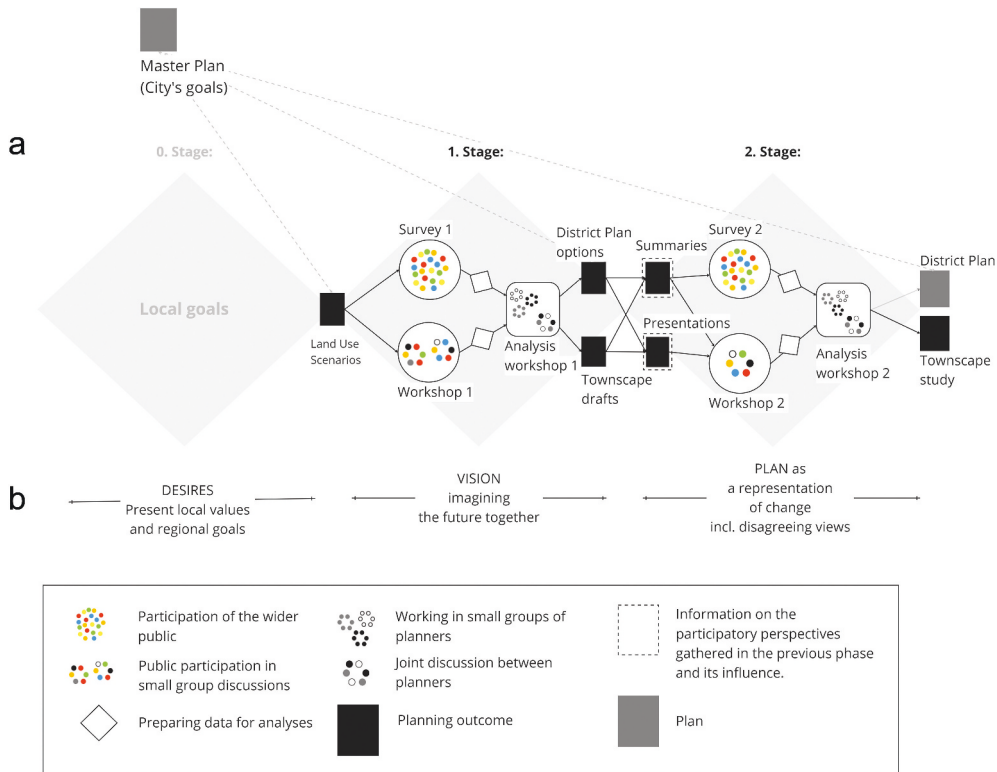


Figure 6. The planning process as a great dialogue: (a) Planning practices as micro-dialogues in Viiskorpi, (b) chronotopes of polyphonic planning in the planning stages.

to share the information generated among all stakeholders, as Staffans *et al.* (2020a) suggested, and participatory information was only visible to the planners. Thus, the planners played the role of storytellers (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003) in defining the needs and objectives of planning and how the participants' perspectives were incorporated into the plans as the process progressed.

Summarizing the participatory information was a step toward a practice of sharing polyphonic information, and thereby, referring to Throgmorton (1996), broadening the community's mutual understanding of the need for change. Although summarizing made sense from the planners' perspective, it still appeared to participants as withholding information, increasing mistrust. Even with good intentions, this is an exercise of power (cf. Holquist, 2002; Ameel, 2021; Ameel *et al.*, 2023), where planners decide on the sharing and relevance of information on behalf of participants. Furthermore, this led to a dialogue between planners and participants based on different information. When the views of other stakeholders are not made visible to participants, planning solutions and the impact of participation are evaluated differently due to ambivalence (cf. Holquist, 2002).

However, the power to regulate the participatory information in the dialogue is only one factor that positions planners differently from the other contributors regarding the planning process. Time-space positioning (e.g. Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Folch-Serra,

1990) reveals more differences between various actors. Planners and participants have varying temporal and spatial perceptions regarding planning and the place under planning. Planners observe the place from the outside and the future created by the plan. Meanwhile, the residents perceive the place from within, from the present, or even from the past (e.g. the historical continuum). For the participants, the plan takes shape and reveals as the process progresses, as the planners reveal planning outputs, and the plans develop to a more concrete level. Moreover, the planning area is perceived differently by those looking at it from different parts of the place, and the place may also be an integral part of the living environment of those living outside it. Thus, considering the representativeness of participants spatially inside and around the planning area can help achieve polyphony and assess planning impacts.

Spatial and temporal positioning also influences how future residents are perceived. For the planners, the future developed place, and therefore the new residents and their preferences, exist, and the planners' plan has met the needs they envisioned. Here, the planners again hold power over the participants to imagine the future of the place and the privilege of deciding whether to include the views of the current residents in the representation of the future (Holquist, 2002; Ameel, 2021; Ameel *et al.*, 2023). Through such a selective narrative (Throgmorton, 2007), replacing residents with others more positive toward development is seen as a relevant solution from a planning perspective rather than a reconciliation of various desires. In terms of polyphony, prioritizing future residents by the planning organization alone represents a monologuing and objectifying narrative lacking the perspectives of the people who, through their actions, i.e. their daily lives, are currently constructing the reality of the place (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; also, Sandywell, 1998).

In addition, the perspective of future residents raises the question of how the preferences of future residents would differ from those of current residents if the place changes more in line with their wishes. Potential future residents, whether they are now planning to move to the area or future generations, again represent unique perspectives on the spectrum of possible perspectives (Holquist, 2002). Thus, future residents may also wish to see the development proposed by current residents. In any case, just as the present situation, constructed only from a selective point of view (Bakhtin, 1993; Holquist, 2002), does not correspond to reality, a future imagined by only a few does not correspond to the polyphonic vision of the future. Since various thoughts about the future may be far apart, it is increasingly important to form an idea of the future through dialogue (cf. Sandywell, 1998). As suggested in the model by Staffans *et al.* (2020a), starting from goals by bringing together the external perspectives known to the planners and the local values, meanings, and desires (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Wallin *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, as the chronotopes of participants and planners can be very different (Sandywell, 1998), it would be necessary to determine from which temporal perspectives the place is viewed at different stages of the participatory planning process: whether the aim is to understand the starting conditions and needs of the planning or to imagine its future (Figure 6(b)).

Providing planners' interpretations and planning solutions for public evaluation is integral to the dialogue between participants and planners. In this planning process, the assessment of interpretations highlighted the need for a common language and conceptual definition between participants and planners. Concepts such as 'close to nature,'

‘urban village,’ ‘townhouses,’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ (City of Espoo, 2022) have specific definitions in professional language but several conflicting meanings for the participants. Unless the language used is positioned considering the participants in the context in which it is used, a seemingly holistic language (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981), such as the expert language used in planning, can create the illusion that everyone shares the same understanding of the meanings of the concepts. In such cases, the solutions are only apparent. The language and meanings of concepts used in the planning process cannot automatically be how the planners define them. On the contrary, for dialogue to work, it is essential to open concepts that lead to different interpretations, understand their heteroglossia, and specify their meanings in the local context (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981). For example, a townhouse, meaning different variations in different places, can thus obtain its Viiskorpi-based meaning.

In turn, planning proposals presented as equal alternatives, unevaluated by the planners, can create a situation for the development of incomplete, unfinished ideas (Bakhtin, 1984). In the second stage, the participants evaluated alternatives, one of which was a bottom-up plan that the participants had come up with in the first workshop. The planners formed the other plan option by developing their idea following residents’ feedback. Consequently, we came closer to the idea of a polyphonic carnival space and period in which power relations are shifting (Bakhtin, 1984; Holloway & Kneale, 2000), differing from the evaluation of alternatives in the first stage, where it was simply a matter of choosing between alternatives selected by the planners.

Nonetheless, district plan options were alternatives in which the participants’ views only influenced the details. In the Viiskorpi process, participants and planners disagreed on the quantitative planning objectives; thus, at no point in the process were the planning goals mutually agreed, as Staffans *et al.* (2020a) suggest. Quantitative goals from the higher planning level, from the contested master plan, met local debates in this planning process. Although the city now invested in participation, the ability of locals to bring their values and desires to the goals guiding planning, let alone to question the city’s goals, was very limited. In this sense, we are far from a carnivalesque space (Bakhtin, 1984; Kenniff, 2018), or involving locals in joint authorship of a place’s story (Throgmorton, 1996).

As already suggested by previous studies, in planning outcomes, polyphonic expression, in which planners also develop ideas that differ from their opinions and express contradictions, could foster dialogue (Ameel *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, more people could recognize themselves and their voice in the planning outcomes (Decandia, 2014; Wallin *et al.*, 2018), improving the experience of being heard and taken seriously. Furthermore, it would be a concrete demonstration that planning is open to local knowledge and perspectives (Staffans *et al.*, 2020a) and counter-arguing and testing different claims (Rydin, 2007).

6. Conclusions

This study examined what practices are needed in a planning process using hybrid participation to achieve polyphony, especially dialogical co-existence. Our action research collected data on planning outcomes as part of an actual planning process and used participant feedback to develop new practices with planners. In the Finnish planning

context, our case study represented a typical situation where, despite extensive participatory rights, top-down quantitative goals, and low impact of participation in local planning has led to distrust of institutional planning. To conclude, we suggest adopting the following practices to promote polyphony in participatory planning processes:

Firstly, hybrid methods can increase the polyphony in planning by involving more participants with varying positions towards planning and the place planned. Alongside hybrid participation methods, there is a need for practices and tools that combine different datasets and bring different viewpoints to interact. Rather than being a single situation or method, this may involve a series of activities and a period in which information is combined and co-analyzed, and the public evaluates the interpretations made. In this way, a dialogue evolves between actors participating and positioning themselves in different ways in planning.

Secondly, participants need to know what others are thinking, and therefore, especially in a hybrid process, participatory information needs to be shared as openly as possible before evaluating interpretations and planning solutions. Thus, different stakeholders would engage in dialogue with the same information from the various perspectives of the participants. Sharing information is also a concrete practice to increase the transparency of planning processes, which is a prerequisite for a multi-method and multi-stage planning work to function as a public space and for planners to be credible mediators of dialogue.

Thirdly, communication between diverse participants and planners requires a common language and defining key concepts. Planners should also be aware of the impact of their positioning on how they perceive and use participatory information. Planners need to recognize their privilege as story authors and their responsibility: leaving out perspectives gives an incomplete representation of reality and thus eats away at impartiality.

Fourthly, communicating the influence and interpretations of participation is part of the dialogue between participants and planners. In turn, the participants must be able to assess the planners' interpretations and analysis of participatory information. Communicating can be done through presentations, for example, in workshops and through digital methods such as surveys, adding informative pages on participants' perspectives and their impact on planning. In addition, surveys enable feedback questions, linking participants' evaluations to their other responses and background information.

Finally, identifying local values and debates and considering them when setting objectives for planning requires bringing together discussions at different planning levels. The planning levels, such as regional and local master planning, defining the guiding objectives, need to recognize the local discussions. Otherwise, participants remain with a role in tweaking the details. Therefore, in addition to the horizontal dialogue of the planning process, dialogue should also be examined vertically across planning levels, bringing the local and general conversations at different levels into interaction.

Notes

1. A detailed description of the tools used, by stage and by planning topic, is available in the supplementary material.
2. More detailed descriptions of the number of participants and their background information can be found in the supplementary material.

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