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Communicative Capacity:

How Public Encounters Affect
the Quality of Participatory Democracy

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Abstract

The main goal of this thesis is to explore how the encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy. Participatory democracy was introduced as a radical alternative to representative democracy, but has often not lived up to its promises. Among the great variety of factors that have been found to matter, questions have arisen about the added value of public encounters: are problems and failures of participation because of or despite public professionals and citizens coming together? Despite a growing body of research on this subject, public encounters have so far not been adequately understood on their own terms. Building on recent contributions to the communicative turn in participatory democracy, this thesis develops a relational, situated, performative approach to analyze the communicative “in-between” of public professionals and citizens. In order to examine their communicative practices, a narrative analysis has been conducted of the stories public professionals and citizens tell about their daily experiences. Through a grounded theory process of analyzing 59 intensive interviews conducted in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna, the research formulated a theory of communicative capacity.

The research shows that when public professionals and citizens meet, they develop and sustain dominant patterns of communication that limit their ability to solve local problems. Each case was characterized by a distinct communicative pattern, because local actors focused more on the substantive issues at hand rather than on the way they communicated about these. This was difficult to change because three inherent processes of participatory practice were drawing public professionals and citizens into dominant communicative patterns. Therefore, the thesis argues that the quality of participatory democracy depends on the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens to recognize and break through these dominant patterns by constantly adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations to the situation at hand. The main contribution of this thesis is that it provides a more grounded and rounded understanding of the nature and importance of the communicative “in-between” (interaction or encounter) of public professionals and citizens for the quality of participatory democracy.

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Preface

Behind the research narrative of this thesis is a personal narrative about how I arrived at the document in front of you. Over the past few years, I have discovered much more than rich empirical data and enlightening theories that helped me to answer the research question: I discovered what the question, argument, and contribution of my research actually were. When I started with the research, I only had a set of broad questions and dilemmas around a real world problem: the apparently intrinsically problematic encounters of public professionals and citizens in participatory democracy. After a year of preparing the fieldwork, I commenced with a quite open-ended research of the everyday practices of local actors in three cities. The inductive research process helped me to gradually develop a better understanding of what was going on in the data. But it was only halfway through the chapter writing process that I finally managed to understand what the research was actually about: the role of communication in participatory democracy. At this point, I could at last formulate the main questions, argument, and contribution of the research, but I also faced a complicated dilemma: should I present my research in the way it had developed at the risk of confusing the reader and downplaying the argument, or from the insights I had arrived at with the risk of creating the impression that I had been studying the role of communication in participatory democracy from the start?

This dilemma was inherent to the nature of my research. In the first year, for example, I also faced dilemmas between open-endedness and focus, as I needed to (1) formulate a research question which provided guidance but was not too narrowly focused; (2) justify the case selection without any strict criteria; and (3) be familiar with relevant literature but without being influenced by any particular theory. But over the last years I also learned that every research is full of twists and turns and faces dilemmas of its own. Therefore, rather than giving the false impression that research is a fully neutral, objective, and undistorted activity, we should openly acknowledge the “push and pull” through which we have tinkered with our research projects. By explicating the process of going back and forth between pre-held ideas, empirical data, and existing theories we do not only provide a more fair portrayal of the actual practices that doing research comes down to, but also enhance our ability to learn and improve the quality of the research as well as practice. Thus, I hope this thesis is as much instructive on the process as on the content of the research.

Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation creates many debts, I once read. I wholeheartedly agree, but would like to add that it actually does something else as well: writing a dissertation builds relationships. There is no way I can ever fully repay those who have devoted so much of their energy, time, and kindness to helping me in producing this piece of work. But what I can do is honor my relationships with them in the same kind of heartfelt manner that they showed me. It is in this sense, far more than in terms of intellectual development, that this dissertation is not an end but merely the beginning.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Barry O'Toole for being a patient, wise, and supportive mentor during my first steps in the academic world. Deep gratitude goes to Annette Hastings and Kelly Kollman for stepping up as supervisors during the last year and guiding me carefully and effectively towards completion. Working through massive amounts of material, often in short time periods, they always provided comments that went right to the heart of the matter. More broadly, I would like to thank all the members of the Department of Politics for the warm and supportive climate in which I was allowed to work. Special thanks to Alasdair Young and my fellow PhDs for productive seminars, cheerful drinks, and a great atmosphere. Thanks to my office mates Sam Robertshaw, Karen Siegel, Senia Febrica, Don Kim, and Dan Hammond for chats, cookies, and office volleyball.

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Finally, I have only managed to arrive at this point because of the unconditional support of my friends and family. I need not to mention any names for them to know who I am talking about. One person does deserve to be put in the spotlight: my girlfriend Noemi Mantovan. I could never have completed the thesis without her relentless help, love, and devotion. Without her spending hours to check emails and interview transcripts, the research in Italy would simply not have been possible. But most of all, she kept me sane throughout the process in a way that made me learn much more about life than any research could ever do. At last, fully humbled by the much harder endeavors my dear brother and friend Mark and my parents Hetty and Bart went through over the last years, I dedicate this thesis to them. Hold on, hold tight.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Abbreviations

AW	–	<i>Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak</i> (Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach)
BUP	–	<i>Buurtuitvoeringsplan</i> (Quarter Implementation Plan)
CRG	–	Community Reference Group
ENC	–	Engagement Network Coordinator
GCPP	–	Glasgow Community Planning Partnership
LCPP	–	Local Community Planning Partnership
NHS	–	National Health Service
POC	–	<i>Piano Operativo Comunale</i> (Operational Municipal Plan)
PS&C	–	Pollokshields & Southside Central
PSC	–	<i>Piano Strutturale Comunale</i> (Strategic Municipal Plan)
SIP	–	Social Inclusion Partnership
SOA	–	Single Outcome Agreement

To my brother Mark and my parents, Hetty and Bart

Hou vol hou vast

1 Introduction: Participatory Democracy, Public Encounters, and Communicative Capacity

While most of the people most of the time do not achieve excellence ... most of us recognize and admire excellence in others when we see it performed. Capacities for communicating in situations of social difference and conflict can be developed and deepened and a public is always better if more of its members have more developed capacities than fewer ~ Iris Marion Young (2000, p. 80)

So then I'm in a meeting, there's twenty folk there, maybe a wee bit less, maybe fifteen folk, I'm the only normal person, I'm the only resident. Everybody else sitting at that table has qualifications like you wouldn't believe, has senior jobs within Glasgow City Council, ... hundreds and hundreds of other agencies. And then there's me, ... mom of two, um, wife of one... That's incredibly intimidating. And lots of people, and I don't know that they necessarily do it deliberately, but they make it much harder for you, because they talk to each other in the language that they understand, ... the language of, you know, community development. And they talk to each other using terminology that is exclusive to their jobs. When you're a community resident, you don't know what they're talking about. It's very, very difficult. I kind a work in the sense that I'll just stop the meeting and I'll say 'Excuse me, what do you actually mean?'. Because if they actually want me to participate, they need to explain to me what they're talking about. It's not because I'm stupid, it's simply because I don't work in their environment and I'm not used to the terminology that they use. I shouldn't be put in that position, where I'm having to say 'Go ahead and change your language so that I can understand you'. And then, nine times out of ten, for the rest of that meeting it will be toned down. But the next time you come in... *Respondent G7 – Resident Glasgow*

At the first meeting ... there was a lady in the first row who said 'I want to see the architect who made this rubbish!'. And I wasn't that architect, but it was the guy sitting there next to me. And he became small, small like this [makes himself small] and he didn't say anything. The lady rose to her feet and said 'If I get him, I slit his throat and kill him'. And so... there was really violent feedback to this project... When the participative workshops started, um, ... the new renovations were explained and the citizens were asked what they thought about them. And they all immediately asked whether this meant that this [controversial] wall would be gone... From this point on we got, um, collaboration. They understood that this new [project] in the end did this... And for all the participative workshops this lady has been present, and I don't know if she has ever understood that the people who made the first project were also the people who made the second one... Because now and then ... she continued saying that the first project was made by assassins and that this [second] project ... was made by persons who knew their business. And that while she ... was always facing me or the others. And so, this is something that has struck me greatly, um, the image at the beginning ... that it was made by an evil architect. *Respondent B11 – Public professional Bologna*

And then there was a meeting here and those [belligerent] boys also came there. Well that was *so* emotional... At a certain moment those boys started to yell at the alderman

[and others] and then I said ‘Stop there, now I stand up, now all be quiet, shut up, now I’m going to tell you what I did for you all those years... and that I was busy creating your own [youth] base for you, I was working on that with the City District. And out of appreciation you smash my windows. I still wonder why’... And then those guys started talking and the whole story came out, because I stopped saying hello to them... I said ‘How would you feel if your windows had been smashed, and then still greet you guys? I don’t think so’... Well, then we held a break... I was [outside] and the alderman comes up to me and says ‘You did really great, there’ll be a follow up’. So we go back in the room and then one ... guy stands up and then he says ‘I want to make our apologies..., because we didn’t know about all that you did in the area for us. And now we really would like, I hope you will be willing to greet us again’. And then the whole story came out. And I say ... ‘Apologies accepted... But I don’t want any trouble any more, also not in front of my door’... I never had any problems anymore, never. So they still say hi to me and I got a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates from them, they paid for it among themselves. So, that was nicely solved. And from that time it just got a bit better. *Respondent A16 – Resident Amsterdam*

It might seem peculiar to start with three ostensibly random and idiosyncratic stories of participatory practice without any background information or measure to evaluate what is being told here. However, there is more than meets the eye: these stories are rich narratives about what happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory democracy. In the first story, a resident of one of Glasgow’s most deprived areas expresses her frustration about the obscure language professionals use at meetings and explains how she acts assertively to be part of the conversation. The second story offers a look at the other side of the table, where an architect from Bologna is confronted with a radical change in the way residents articulate their feelings about his regeneration project. Finally, the third story takes us to a resident meeting in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Amsterdam, where the personal conflict between the narrator, a proactive pensioner, and a group of youngsters came to an emotional boiling point, and was resolved after everyone spoke their mind. In their own particular ways, then, the stories convey the main message of this thesis: *the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens is imperative to the quality of participatory democracy.*

The local actors in these stories demonstrate communicative capacity: respondent G7 makes public professionals change their language to include her in the conversation; respondent B11 acknowledges how one thorny issue completely changed the tone of his encounters with residents; and respondent A16 stood up to express her feelings when the meeting was turning into a fight. Each of these local actors has an ability to recognize and change the course of the conversation. But, as the precariousness of these experiences indicates, we are dealing with

something more than good individual communicative skills: communicative capacity resides “in between” people implicated in concrete situations. *Communicative capacity*, then, refers to the ability of public professionals and citizens *to recognize and break through dominant patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations to the needs of the situation at hand*. Based on evidence from three case studies, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the quality of participatory democracy depends not just on the ability of public professionals and citizens to manage the substance, but, more fundamentally, the *process* of their communication. By examining the ongoing, dynamic, and relational processes that form the communicative “in-between” –interaction, encounter, or *I-Thou* (Buber, 1970)– of public professionals and citizens, the research casts a different light on several timely issues with participatory democracy.

Of course, communicative capacity is not the only element that matters for the quality of participatory democracy. Many political, social, legal, and economical factors are in play and combine in complex, dynamic, and often unforeseen ways, muddling the waters of everyday participatory practice. Public professionals and citizens are entangled in webs of organizations, rules, budgets, and political powers, which shape their everyday practices and communicative exchanges. Research on participatory democracy found that local actors continuously face a wide range of contingent institutional constraints and practical dilemmas in, for instance, dealing with power inequalities and antagonism, designing inclusive and effective institutions, and facilitating collaborative knowledge-sharing and implementation (Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Hoppe, 2011). But rather than focusing on these structuring forces *per se*, this thesis examines how local actors act upon them in response to the practical face of concrete situations. Communicative capacity draws attention to the meaning of the everyday communicative practices with which public professionals and citizens navigate the complex interplay of factors in participatory practice.

This focus on the contextual meaning of communicative practices also has implications for the normative side of communicative capacity. Indeed, the thesis not only explores the nature and role of communicative capacity, but also argues that local actors *should* cultivate their ability for constructive and productive communication. But the aim here is not to present an abstract normative ideal. As Iris Marion Young indicates in the opening quote of this chapter, we can only recognize and appreciate the quality of communicative acts when we see them performed

in a concrete situation. Their actual meaning would be lost or changed when we abstract away from the actual context in which the communicative acts are performed. Of course we could generalize from the three stories above: if we want to enhance the quality of participatory democracy, then we need to use clear language, be respectful, and express emotions. But that would do little to illuminate the communicative capacity needed to find the right words to address someone in an ambiguous situation or to move the conversation forward after serious mistakes and grief. This, as the thesis will show, is a fine-grained activity that requires an intimate familiarity with the “push and pull” of participatory practice.

After this preliminary introduction of communicative capacity, many questions still remain unanswered. Where did the concept of communicative capacity come from? How does it add to what we already know about participatory democracy? What does communicative capacity actually look like? What makes communication in participatory democracy so difficult? How can that be changed? To provide a first, brief answer these questions, the next section explains the main goals and questions of the research, the approach used to answer these, and the relevance of doing so. The subsequent section then turns to the main findings, argument, and contribution of the research. The chapter ends by outlining the plan of the thesis.

Research Questions and Focus

Communicative capacity emerged from the research in answer to the main research question: *how do the (public) encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?* Before going into a discussion of what motivated this question and how an answer was formulated, we first need to define participatory democracy, quality, and public encounters. *Participatory democracy* has arisen over the last decades as a challenge to the traditional notion of democracy, which rested on the primacy of politics to take binding public decisions and the authority of bureaucratic government to enact these decisions. Within participatory democracy, the influence of non-elected individuals and organizations on public decision making and implementation is the norm for democracy, rather than a deviation from it. Although participatory democracy has certainly not replaced representative democracy in all walks of life, collaboration between public agencies and other stakeholders in networks and direct involvement of citizens in governance processes have become unshakable norms and

widespread practices in Western societies (OECD, 2001). However, participatory democracy has often not lived up to its promises (see e.g., Burton et al., 2004; Hoppe, 2011). Why?

Recently, public debate opened up about the effectiveness and durability of participation. With huge pressure for financial savings and reform, some governments started to question the benefits of several decades of participatory democracy. The Big Society plan of the incumbent British government is probably the best example here: government should “roll back” and “empower” citizens to solve local problems by themselves (Cabinet Office, 2010). But also in the Netherlands the current participation policy emphasizes the need for citizens to have ample “room to develop initiatives ... and take responsibility” without “interference” of public professionals (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 2009, p. 1). It is crucial to note that these policies do not question the system of participatory democracy or the value of participation itself, but rather *the added value of citizens and public professionals coming together*.

Therefore, this thesis concentrates on public encounters as a crucial element of participatory democracy. *Public encounters* embody the face-to-face contact between citizens and public professionals –i.e., non-elected officials working for the government or any other agency with public authority (Goodsell, 1981). Initially, public encounters mainly served the purpose of administrative tasks: service delivery, information provision, and regulation. In this context, face-to-face contact between citizens and public professionals was considered to be inherently problematic because it allowed for unequal treatment, arbitrary judgments, and corruption. In contrast, in participatory democracy, public encounters came to be seen as valuable for the quality of public decision making, service delivery, and implementation. Especially in local governance, public professionals and citizens now have regular face-to-face contact about problems that affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. But as making this work proved to be exceedingly difficult, the question arose if problems and failures occur *because of*, or *despite* their face-to-face contact. As a “key test of the quality and capability of any society in the twenty-first century will lie in its ability to manage ... coexistence” (Healey, 2006, p. 321), it is important to ask: *how do public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy?*

Quality is understood pragmatically as the *meaning* for participants and the *added value* for solving problems. The goal of the research is neither to measure public encounters against pre-set standards or norms, nor to develop a benchmark from standards that emerged from the

research. An interpretative approach is taken that looks at participatory democracy in terms of its quality, or qualities, not by analyzing quantifiable characteristics, such as how many people participated in a project or how much unemployment and poverty percentages dropped as a result, but rather qualitative characteristics, i.e. *the meaning of participatory democracy to public professionals and citizens*: How have they come to see participation? What role does participation play in their lives? How do they value the potential of participation for solving local problems? Do citizens and public professionals create something meaningful when they meet? These questions rest on a social constructivist perspective that does not only focus on the substantive content of meaning by asking “what does a policy mean?”, but rather on the various ways policies convey their meaning within a social context in which people go about in making sense of them by asking “how does a policy mean?” (Yanow, 1996). Accordingly, we can ask *how do public encounters in participatory democracy mean?*

How public encounters mean turned out to depend on how public professionals and citizens communicate with each other. Communicative capacity is an end result rather than a starting point of the research. It did not start out with the concept and did not go looking for it in any particular way. From the outset, there were no tightly specified research questions, hypotheses, case selection criteria, or theoretical frameworks. Rather, the research focused on a specific topic: participatory democracy had become a standard element of local governance, requiring public professionals and citizens to encounter each other on a more regular, widespread, and intense basis than before. The theories, values, and expectations driving this process differed radically from traditional notions about their encounters: no longer were public professionals expected to treat citizens *without regard for the person*, based on their professional expertise and legal authority (Weber, 1922/1978), but instead citizens needed to be empowered to take decisions together based on civic expertise and collaborative relationships (Habermas, 1984b). Had there been a “shift” in the nature of public encounters? Or were the traditional and the participatory approach equally present, clashing around concrete issues and leading to all kinds of practical dilemmas? Or was the traditional approach still firmly in the driver’s seat? Given this dilemma, the initial research question was: *what actually happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory practice?*

A puzzle accompanied this question. The burgeoning literature on participatory democracy did not really point in one direction: an overwhelming number of factors had been identified to

influence public encounters, but making participatory democracy work in practice nevertheless remained exceedingly difficult. So, how could it be that there was so much knowledge on this topic and still so many problems? As an explicit goal of interpretative policy analysis is to provide usable knowledge (Wagenaar, 2011), the research aimed at helping local actors in making participatory democracy work better by asking: *how can the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy be enhanced?* One of my hunches was that part of the problem was that existing research was not sufficiently sensitive to the everyday practice of participation. I felt that an inductive, open-ended approach might lead to novel insights about participatory democracy. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) offered a suitable approach as it is not a fixed methodological program, but, rather, a collection of heuristic strategies to develop theoretical insights from empirical data through a dialogue between pre-held ideas, empirical data, and existing theories (Wagenaar, 2011, chap. 9). In this way, the research also set out to develop a reflexive approach: *what does all of this imply for the relationship between research and practice of participatory democracy?*

By conducting a grounded theory analysis of three community participation cases, I gradually developed an understanding of the nature, role, and importance of communicative capacity. The process was not straightforward; I went back and forth between data and theories and was constantly reworking my argument and questions. My respondents had not just told me that communication was important. I conducted 59 intensive interviews and their analysis led to 25 memos, over 30 codes, and three emergent themes. These were useful to order and make sense of the data, but did not yet form a full-fledged theory. While writing feedback reports for the cases, it transpired that several communicative barriers inhibited public professionals and citizens in solving local problems, and that improving the quality of communication could enhance the added value of their encounters. Afterwards, I wrote several theoretical memos and chapter drafts. Going back and forth between my findings and existing theories of participatory democracy and communication, I discovered what my findings were actually telling me: we can think of the added value of public encounters in terms of communicative capacity as a continuously reshaped, emergent property of the relational and situated processes through which public professionals and citizens encounter each other in participatory practice.

Before further discussing the contribution of the research, this section ends with an overview of the questions that emerged from the research process.

Main research question	
<i>How do the public encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?</i>	
Sub questions	
1)	What happens when public professionals and residents meet in participatory democracy?
2)	How do public encounters in participatory democracy mean?
3)	How can the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy be enhanced?
4)	What does all of this imply for the relationship between research and practice of participatory democracy?

Table 1.1 Main research question and sub-questions

Contribution and Approach

In brief, this thesis argues that communicative capacity is a missing link in the debate on participatory democracy and deserves more serious consideration. My research demonstrates that the quality of participatory democracy in large part depends on the capacity of public professionals and citizens to recognize and break through dominant communicative patterns. By comparing public encounters in three different socio-political contexts, the research shows that local actors tend to sustain dominant communicative patterns, none of which works well in every situation. Instead, public professionals and citizens need the communicative capacity to recognize what type of talk is required in specific situations. That is not to say that the *substance* of their encounters (the immediate issues at hand) does not matter. Rather, the thesis suggests that local actors currently waste a lot of time, money, and energy by not paying sufficient attention to the *process* through which they communicate (their in-between). The research reveals that participatory practice comes down to ongoing processes which draw the communication between public professionals and citizens into dominant patterns and limit their ability to adapt to the needs of the situation at hand and solve public problems.

By demonstrating the nature and importance of communicative capacity, this thesis makes a timely contribution to the debate on participatory democracy. This debate is currently facing difficulties in closing the gap between theory and practice. Even though the literature is now starting to get saturated with factors that determine success and failure, it remains disputed what the added value is of public professionals and citizens coming together. Following Bevir

(2010), we can explain this situation by capturing the debate in a historical narrative that reveals the presence of particular knowledge claims, assumptions, questions and approaches. The narrative of participatory democracy started as a strong story of fundamental reforms to the system of representative democracy and bureaucratic government. Encounters of public professionals and citizens no longer featured as inherently problematic phenomena, but were portrayed as key ingredient for a strong democracy. However, participatory democracy often appeared in a much weaker version in practice than initially proposed. This led to a mixed account of public encounters: were they of added value or still inherently problematic for the quality of public decision making, service delivery, and problem solving? Despite a growing body of literature on public encounters, up to now, the encounter itself, i.e., that what happens “in-between” public professionals and citizens, has not yet been adequately understood. Capturing this relational process of “knowing-in-interaction” can help to grapple with the quality of participatory democracy.

The main contribution of this thesis is to refine our empirical and theoretical understandings of Iris Marion Young’s (2000) normative ideal of communicative democracy “as a process of communication among citizens and public officials” (p. 52). Building on the key contributions to the communicative turn in participatory democracy of Habermas (1984a), Forester (1993a), Healey (1997), and Innes & Booher (2010), the thesis considers the real-world consequences communication has for fairness, effectiveness, inclusiveness, etc., or in a word, the quality of participatory democracy. But in contrast to the more traditional approach, it does not aim to identify the contingent factors that distort the exchange of rational arguments among free and equal individuals to achieve mutual understanding and consensus. Following Young (1996, 2000), communication is not seen as a neutral medium for the transmission of knowledge and exchange of political arguments, but as a fine-grained and multifaceted *process* that exists “in between” people and has distinct properties and implications. What public professionals and citizens are able to do and achieve is an emergent product of the relational, situated process through which they interact with each other (Campbell Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011; Stout & Staton, 2011) and the “push and pull” of concrete situations at hand (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). Therefore, the thesis captures the multifaceted, situated, relational communicative practices of public professionals and citizens, and the capacity that transpires through their “interweaving” (Follett, 1919) with each other and the situation at hand.

More specifically, the contribution of this thesis is threefold. First, it presents public encounters as a useful focus for grappling with the quality of participatory democracy by conceptualizing them as the “in-between” of public professionals and citizens and developing a novel approach to examine their communicative practices. This approach integrates recent developments in communicative democracy, relational ontology, process philosophy, dialogical meaning, and narrative analysis. Second, the thesis provides original empirical material in the form of fine-grained accounts of communicative practices in diverging European local contexts. Third, this material is developed into a theory of communicative capacity which helps to understand (1) how public professionals and citizens develop and sustain dominant communicative patterns, (2) how processes of participatory practice enable and inhibit them in sustaining constructive and productive patterns of communication, (3) how they can recognize and break through their dominant patterns of communication by adapting the conversation to the needs of the situation at hand, and (4) how a reflexive research-practice relationship could cultivate communicative capacity. Taken together, the thesis contributes to our ability to grasp the meaning and added value of public encounters on the analytical, empirical, and theoretical level.

Again, developing our understanding of communicative practices was not the initial goal of the research. The notion of communicative capacity emerged from an interpretative, inductive research process that followed the principle of “practice illuminating theory” (Hummel, 1998): open-ended exploration of a phenomenon in practice to enrich our theoretical understandings. To empirically study public encounters in participatory democracy, research was conducted in three European cases of community participation: Glasgow (United Kingdom), Amsterdam (the Netherlands), and Bologna (Italy). The research concentrated on community participation—the institutions and practices through which residents and public professionals are involved in activities and decisions at the neighborhood level—because policies are usually wide-ranging and ambitious while the actual possibilities for living up to these are heavily dependent on the local socio-political context and everyday practices. The three cases were selected because of the similarities between their policy ambitions, as well as the differences in their local contexts and the ways in which their policy ambitions were translated into practice. The fieldwork was conducted in deprived and demographically diverse areas, where conditions for community participation were challenging. All of this served to maximize the variation between the cases and, as such, the scope for “practice illuminating theory”.

To avoid testing pre-existing theories, no *a priori* hypotheses or selection criteria were used apart from the variation between these cases. In Glasgow, the research was conducted in the area Pollokshields Southside Central. This area was one of the most important targets of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP), as it included some of the most deprived neighborhoods in Scotland, which doubled or sometimes even tripled national averages of ethnic minorities, unemployment, hospital admissions for alcohol and drug abuse, and crime. In Amsterdam, the Bos & Lommer area was a key target of the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*), as one of its six quarters had been labeled the “worst area in the Netherlands”. The situation in the quarters provided a complicated picture, because of great variation in the nature and extent of local problems such as unemployment, schooling, safety, and housing. The neighborhood Bolognina, finally, was subject to the most comprehensive participative projects of Bologna’s Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*). Over the last decade, the area had changed from a tightly knit factory worker community to a socially and ethnically diverse area troubled by grave problems such as criminality, vandalism, prostitution, and drug dealing.

Narrative analysis was used to examine the encounters of public professionals and residents in these challenging conditions. Studying communication is complicated, as the possibilities for directly observing face-to-face contact are practically limited. However, *narratives*, the stories local actors tell about their everyday experiences, work as windows on the meanings they attach to their personal experiences, the ways in which they communicate these to each other, and the resulting misunderstandings, tensions, and patterns. Narrative analysis helps to grasp how local actors grapple with the complex, ambiguous, value-laden, and open-ended nature of everyday practice. Local actors often do not speak and act in logical, systematic, instrumental, or coherent ways; instead, they frame their experiences in detailed stories about concrete situations and characters in order to give a moral and emotional account for their actions. By analyzing how local actors employ plotlines, causal beliefs, or characters in their narratives, we can tease out the work that a story does for the storytellers, their audience, and their context (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 210-219).

The narratives of local actors were analyzed through a grounded theory process of coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling aimed at mapping the architecture of communication. That is, uncovering how narrative elements structure the ways in which actors interpret and

communicate their experiences. This was done in three analytical steps: (1) identifying and assessing the everyday thoughts, choices, and actions of the local actors, (2) relating their individual narratives to each other and the local context to formulate a meta-narrative about the nature, patterns, and tensions of the case, and, (3) developing these meta-narratives into a theoretical narrative grounded in the empirical details. In each of the three cases, individual narratives were collected through intensive interviews with 20 local public professionals and residents. Participant observation at participation meetings and document analysis of relevant policy documents were used as additional methods to check the reliability of the individual narratives and the meta-narratives. After the fieldwork, local actors were given feedback about their communicative practices through research reports and interactive workshops.

Main Findings and Argument

The research found that when public professionals and residents meet, they tend to develop and sustain dominant patterns of communication. Each case was characterized by a distinct dominant pattern of communication. In the Glasgow case, the dominant pattern was *making it work*, which refers to the inclination of local actors to engage in explicit and implicit strife about the question of whether “it was working” or not. Public professionals and residents often got stuck between opposing viewpoints and constrained the time for figuring out how to actually solve local problems. These opposing viewpoints were based on what I identified as two underlying belief systems: *Community and Planning*. *Planning* refers to the belief that participation works best if everybody adheres to the same structures, plans, and ideas, while *Community* denotes the belief that participation works best if local actors act in spontaneous, flexible, and creative ways in the absence of a system in which plans, rules, structures, and roles are strictly specified. The comparison with the other two cases revealed that *Community* and *Planning* are in an irresolvable tension with each other.

In the Amsterdam case, public professionals and residents were entangled in a communicative pattern of *being in touch*: they had a lot of personal contact focused on gradually creating more mutual understanding, trust, and adaptation to solve concrete local problems. Although local actors did manage to keep their conversations going in this *Community* approach, their communicative capacity for generating decisive actions and large scale results from this was often limited. In contrast, public professionals and residents in the Bologna case had been

canalizing attention and energy from a conflictual situation to concrete joint decisions. In this communicative pattern of *Planning*, local actors adhered to the goals, rules, and roles of newly established participatory institutions. While this enabled them to formulate new regeneration plans for the neighborhood, the capacity to talk in a flexible, autonomous, and spontaneous way about local problems was restricted. Thus, each communicative pattern puts a different emphasis on *Community* and *Planning*, but none is optimal in every situation. What public professionals and residents need, then, is the capacity to recognize the presence and impact of communicative patterns and to adapt the nature, tone, and conditions of the conversation to the situation at hand.

However, exercising communicative capacity is extremely difficult. The research revealed that public professionals and residents were drawn into dominant patterns of communication by three processes of participatory practice: the setting in which they meet, the content of their conversations, and the relationships that support them. These “processes” are not static entities but dynamic forces. First, the setting in which public professionals and residents meet is a complex, ambiguous, and changing *work in progress*. This limits their ability to discuss what has changed, what appears to be affecting what, and what might be the most sensible way of going forward. Second, the content of their conversations is a continuous *struggling* with how to integrate many bits and pieces of information, knowledge, and experiences. This tempers their communicative capacity to acknowledge the nature and value of various types of expertise. Third, maintaining the relationships between local actors comes down to constantly *making connections* between people, problems, and policies. This drains energy from their capacity to communicate about the practical possibilities and constraints to actually empower their encounters. As such, public professionals and residents tended to focus on substantive issues with the setting, content, and relationships of their encounters instead of the ways in which they communicated about these processes of participatory practice.

Table 1.2 (next page) makes clear how communicative patterns and processes of participatory practice are related. A vertical reading shows that, for example, local actors in Amsterdam sustained a pattern of *being in touch* by immersing themselves in the nitty-gritty of the local problems that were part of the setting, focusing the content of their conversations on recognition of the value of multiple perspectives, and shaping their relationships by pragmatically converging and clashing. A horizontal reading points out that, for instance, the

meaning of their relationships depended on the inclination of local actors to focus on others' beliefs, pragmatically converge and clash, or stick to formal rules and roles. Combining both readings helps to draw out the benefits and limitations of specific contingent practices in navigating participatory practice, as well as the ways in which dominant communicative patterns limited the added value of public encounters. That is, by neglecting the mode of communication through which they engaged with the setting, content, and relationships of their encounters, local actors failed to consider how all kinds of underlying assumptions, contextual constraints, and personal feelings limited their conversations. For instance, public professionals and residents in the Glasgow case were so fixated on the conflict between their beliefs about what constituted optimal institutions, that they disregarded a tacit shared commitment to solving local problems.

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna
Communicative Pattern	<i>Making it work</i>	<i>Being in touch</i>	<i>Canalizing</i>
Setting	Contesting what are optimal institutions	Immersing in the nitty-gritty of problems	Setting up a safe and insulated space
Content	Defending own view against others	Recognizing the value of multiple perspectives	Circumscribing what is relevant knowledge
Relationships	Focusing on others' beliefs	Pragmatic converging and clashing	Sticking to formal rules and roles

Table 1.2 Communicative patterns and processes of participatory practice

Looking under the surface of the narratives of public professionals and citizens reveals opportunities for overcoming communicative patterns. The analysis demonstrates that failing to do so greatly increases the likelihood that public encounters will run astray and bring about failing projects, waste of resources, and frustration. But how can local actors change habitual communicative patterns if the main problem lies in their lack of capacity to recognize and change such patterns? Based on this research, the most promising avenue for both the research and practice of participatory democracy seems to commit to facilitating local actors in jointly and routinely reflecting on the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations. That would mean for researchers to actively assist local actors in improving their communicative capacity and demonstrate that doing so enhances their ability to solve local problems. In turn, for public professionals and citizens it would mean stopping to see joint reflection as a “waste of time” or “only words” and appreciate the impact of communication on the added value of their encounters and the quality of participatory democracy. In other words, the thesis reveals the importance of treating the in-between as a distinct phenomenon both in research and practice.

Plan of the thesis

The thesis examines how public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy in eight chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the development of the debate on participatory democracy to show that the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens has up to now been insufficiently explored. The chapter explains how examining their relational and situated communicative performances in participatory practice can help to get a better understanding of the meaning and added value of public encounters for the quality of participatory democracy. Chapter 3 explains why and how narrative analysis was used to examine the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens. The chapter clarifies how narratives were collected and analyzed through a grounded theory process as well as how this process can be understood as an attempt at theorizing “knowing-in-interaction”.

In the next four chapters, the findings of the three cases are thematically presented. Rather than discussing the cases in separate chapters, each chapter draws out the differences between the three cases on four elements of communicative capacity. First, chapter 4 presents the meta-narratives of the cases to show that each case was characterized by a distinct dominant pattern of communication. This leads to a preliminary understanding of the nature and importance of communicative capacity for recognizing and breaking through these dominant patterns. The next three chapters explore in more detail why doing so is inherently troublesome and what local actors nevertheless did, or could do, to cultivate constructive and productive patterns of communication. Each chapter concentrates on one particular process of participatory practice by demonstrating how public professionals and residents communicated about, respectively, the *work in progress* of the setting in which they meet, *struggling* with the content of their conversations, and *making connections* to maintain their relationships.

Finally, chapter 8 integrates the findings of the preceding four chapters into the conclusions and recommendations of this research. The chapter formulates an answer to the main research questions by summarizing the findings, argument, and contribution of the research; defining the theory of communicative capacity; considering the implications of this research for each of the three cases; and reflecting on the limitations of this research and fruitful venues for future research.

As such, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate on participatory democracy by focusing on the fine-grained and dynamic ways in which communicative practices and processes affect what happens. Sceptics might object that communicative capacity remains an elusive concept, that it does little more than stating the obvious that good communication is important, or that it invokes a chicken-and-egg dilemma in situations troubled by deep communicative distortions. However, this thesis demonstrates that the quality of participatory democracy is intimately bound up with the communicative dynamics occurring “in between” public professionals and citizens when they encounter each other in participatory practice. This is to draw attention to the concrete ways in which public professionals and citizens can, paraphrasing the opening quote by Iris Marion Young, ‘develop and deepen their capacities for communicating’. Indeed, as ‘most of the people most of the time will not achieve excellence in their communication’, this thesis hopefully enables us to better ‘recognize and admire excellence in others when we see it performed’.

2 Public Encounters in Participatory Democracy: The Added Value of Face-to-Face Communication

All actual life is encounter ~
Martin Buber (1937/1970, p. 62)

The goal of this chapter is to explain the relevance of the main research question (*how do public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy?*) and the approach this thesis takes to formulate an answer. A review of the literature in the first section reveals that public encounters were initially considered a vital element of participatory democracy, while recently questions emerged about the added value of public professionals and citizens coming together. The discussion of community participation in the second section further clarifies why concerns about a widening gap between theory and practice for an important part revolve around what happens when public professionals and citizens meet. The final two sections argue that despite a growing body of research on this subject, public encounters have so far not been adequately understood on their own terms. Building on recent contributions to the communicative turn in participatory democracy, a relational, situated, performative approach is developed to analyze the “communicative in-between” of public professionals and citizens. This approach can help to widen and deepen our understandings of the meaning and added value of public encounters for the quality of participatory democracy.

Participatory Democracy: A Narrative of Public Encounters

At the moment, the added value of public encounters is a central question in the debate on participatory democracy. The main goal of this section is to uncover the developments through which the debate arrived at this point. According to Bevir (2010, see esp. pp. 10-11), we can represent debates as historical narratives resting on acceptance of particular knowledge claims about the current and desired nature of a social phenomenon as well as broader assumptions about social reality and knowledge. Critical examination of the storyline underlying narratives can help to reveal such generally taken-for-granted lenses and to identify alternative venues for generating new insights on the social phenomenon in question. In this section, I define participatory democracy and trace the emergence and development of its narrative through three generations of debate. A storyline is detected in which public encounters were first portrayed as a key ingredient for the development of strong democracy, but, as participatory

democracy in practice often turned into a much weaker version than originally intended, their added value started to be questioned within the large number of contextual factors that have been found to matter for the quality of participatory democracy. The section concludes that a better understanding of the added value of public encounters is important to the quality of participatory democracy.

The narrative of participatory democracy embodies a rich collection of ideas and practices that have their roots in many centuries of democratic thought and practice (Held, 1996). However, what we now understand as participatory democracy, *the direct participation of (semi-)public agencies, non-governmental organizations, civic associations, and citizens in decision making and implementation of public policies that affect them* (Fung & Wright, 2003), is something relatively recent. Public participation has gradually become an accepted element of Western societies throughout the twentieth century. For example, the British Ministry of Housing and Local Government launched Community Development Projects in 1969 to regenerate deprived urban areas and involve excluded, disadvantaged groups in the process (Gyford, 1991). At the same time, many Italian municipalities adopted neighborhood councils as links between the local population and the City Council (Dente & Regonini, 1980). And in the Netherlands a similar kind of institution was granted legal status in the Municipal Law of 1964, while citizen participation became an official requirement for spatial planning (1985) and for local policy (1994) (Coenen et al., 2001). Although these innovations cannot be counted as manifestations of participatory democracy, their often disappointing outcomes did stimulate its emergence.

Many studies found that public authorities and private stakeholders used participation in instrumental or symbolic ways to facilitate their own interests (Hain, 1980; Boaden et al., 1982; Tops, 1998; Edelenbos & Monnikhof, 2001). In other words, failures were not ascribed to participation itself, but rather to undemocratic tendencies deeply embedded in the system of representative democracy. Participatory democracy, then, was developed as an antithesis to the masquerade that was passing for democracy (Barber, 1984). Thin democracy, in which the mere aggregation of preferences through indirect representation and voting sustained an individualistic and detached society ruled by power hungry elites, needed to be replaced by *strong democracy*, in which individual preferences were to be transformed in consensual and fair decisions through a process of free and equal deliberation between all those affected by the issue at hand. Democracy would only come to its full potential when the realization of this

participatory ideal would have supplanted the representative system as the dominant model of democracy (Pateman, 1975; Mansbridge, 1980; Habermas, 1984b).

Thus, a fundamental change in the meaning of democracy was at stake here. Although policy-making in complex networks of agencies and some degree of citizen participation in decision making had already been part of modern government for decades (Rhodes, 1988), that system ultimately still relied on the primacy of politics. Now, however, democracy had come to mean something else: i.e., the influence of non-elected individuals and agencies was no longer seen as undemocratic but rather as key requirement for democracy (Hoppe, 2011, pp. 167-168). As such, public encounters became a key ingredient for public decision making on all levels of government and in areas as diverse as water management, environmental policy, health care, food regulation, and spatial planning. At the same time, empirical research often finds that in practice public professionals and citizens do not manage to reach the full potential of coming together. In contrast to the *strong version* of the narrative of participatory democracy, in which it completely redefines and replaces representative democracy, a *weak version* often becomes manifest in which it forms an add-on to traditional government at best. As a result, the added value of public professionals and citizens coming together has become a central question.

A useful way to capture this development of the debate is Elstub's (2010) distinction between three generations of debate. The *first generation* was, as explained above, mainly concerned with establishing participatory democracy as a radical alternative to representative democracy. Next to the direct participation of citizens and other stakeholders in public policy processes (Pateman, 1975; Barber, 1984), a second ideal developed in this generation was deliberation, i.e. rational exchange of ideas, information, and arguments among free and equal citizens (Bohman, 1996). According to Habermas (1984a), the quality of democracy should be evaluated by analyzing the speech acts through which individuals communicate their preferences, judgments, and justifications in relation to the conditions under which this happens and should happen. The main argument here is that decision making about public, or collective, affairs can only be truly legitimate if it is based on deliberation. A great number of scholars has joined in this deliberative turn (Dryzek, 2000) and actually identify their field as

deliberative, rather than participatory, democracy (Bohman, 1998; Elster, 1998; Fishkin & Laslett, 2003; Goodin, 2008)¹.

The *second generation* of participatory democracy broadened and deepened the participatory ideals that should be achieved. Having accepted the primacy of participatory democracy over representative democracy, the debate focused on “the problem of how this ideal would be approximated in societies characterized by deep disagreements, social problems of enormous complexity and the blunt instruments of available institutions” (Bohman, 1998, p. 401). Which ideals could guarantee the resolution of intractable problems in a world defined by difference (Mouffe, 1992; Benhabib, 1996)? Two basic views initially dominated this normative debate (Bohman, 1998). On the one hand, the *procedural view* held that participatory democracy required ideal procedures that enabled fair public reasoning and collective choice. On the other hand, advocates of a more *substantive view* argued that deliberative principles alone did not suffice for diverse people to accept the decision making process and outcomes. Instead, values such as inclusion, equality, and liberty needed to guarantee that, besides the procedures for reason-giving, also the substance of the decisions were deemed legitimate and fair. However, advocates of the procedural view replied that without prior procedures it would be difficult to come to an agreement about the exact substance of these guiding values (Cohen, 1996, pp. 101-102).

In response to the debate between the procedural and substantive view, several alternative normative ideals were developed which found these initial interpretations of participatory democracy too narrow to buttress strong democracy in practice. The basic starting point of these critiques is value pluralism: modern society is defined by differences, often negotiated across deep divides (Benhabib, 1996), between “competing languages, discourses, worldviews and truths” (Escobar, 2010, p. 49). A “thicker” definition of participatory democracy should better accommodate pluralism and overcome divisions by taking difference as starting point rather than assuming or striving for shared understandings and unity. Dealing with differences should not reduce difference but bridge it. This process is an ineradicably political struggle; the quality of which can nevertheless be enhanced. Different standards have been set for doing

¹ Nevertheless, in this thesis I refer to participatory democracy rather than deliberative democracy, defining participation as any form of involvement in the decision making and implementation of services, projects, and initiatives by public authorities or civic actors, and deliberation as a particular mode of communication within these processes.

so. Mouffe's (2000) theory of radical pluralism asserts that contestation and power inequality cannot be avoided, but antagonism between actors can, and should, be turned into "agonism" by recognizing each other as legitimate adversaries. Young (1996, 2000) puts the emphasis on inclusion by aspiring a communicative democracy in which actors acknowledge differences in modes of expression and learn to listen to those differently situated.

Although this normative debate still continues today, around the 2000s a *third generation* of participatory democracy emerged. A massive increase in the number of participatory policies and initiatives (see e.g., Stoker, 1997; Lowndes et al., 2001a) caused the emphasis to shift from the normative to the empirical level. Western countries introduced a vast number of new participatory policies with more far-reaching ambitions and a more widespread reach than ever before (Denters & Rose, 2005). To illustrate, the then incumbent New Labour government developed a new governance philosophy in which participation was a central element (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 2000; cf. Newman, 2001) and launched a great number of policies aimed at a "joined up" approach to democratic renewal, public participation, neighborhood regeneration, social cohesion and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic competitiveness². In the Netherlands, citizen participation and partnership also became key elements of the proposed "integral approach" to social cohesion and inclusion, economic competitiveness, and physical regeneration (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2004), and were top priorities for the in 2007 instituted Ministry of Living, Neighborhoods, and Integration. In Italy, finally, a set of reforms enabled the emergence of a collaborative discourse and mushrooming of local participatory projects (Gualini, 2001; Cagnetti & Cottino, 2003).

In this third generation, researchers started to enquire "how to achieve ... deliberative theory in practice" (Elstub, 2010, p. 291) by exploring the practical feasibility of the participatory ideals introduced in the first and second generation. As a result, we now have a burgeoning empirical literature at our disposal from which a great deal has become clear about the contextual conditions under which participatory democracy is introduced, the institutions, attitudes, and practices through which it operates, and the many factors contributing to success or failure. Empirical research on deliberative polls (Fishkin, 1997), participatory budgeting (Baiocchi, 2003), citizen juries (Carson, 2006), neighborhood councils (Fung, 2004), and online forums (Janssen & Kies, 2005) demonstrated that deliberation enables higher quality decisions and

² An overview of these policies stretches over the length of seven pages (see Imrie & Raco, 2003a).

mutual understanding, and that participation aids in harnessing intricate problems traditional institutions were unable to solve. Sophisticated theories and models have been developed that go far beyond preliminary frameworks (Fung, 2006) in explaining, for example, the intricacies of levelling the socio-economic inequality of participants (Lowndes et al., 2001b; Barnes et al., 2007), the professional skills needed to deal with citizens (Hastings, 2002; Wagenaar, 2007), and the dilemmas of designing and managing complex policy networks (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2004; Edelenbos & Klijn, 2005).

Despite this progress, the literature is far from conclusive about how participatory democracy works in different contexts, as case studies typically report “a story of struggles with mixed results” (Spiegel & Perlman, 1983, p. 125). Evaluations often display disappointment with participatory dynamics and outcomes (e.g., Carley et al., 2000; Beaumont, 2003; Edelenbos, 2005). Participation usually runs into a set of recurring problems (Hoppe, 2011, pp. 174-180), largely similar to those faced in earlier forms of participation, and is only modestly effective in dealing with these (Lowndes et al., 2001a; Hastings, 2002; Sinclair, 2008). In table 2.1, based on my own review of the British, Dutch, and Italian literature, I have assembled a list of 36 factors that influence the success or failure of participation. I highlighted several recurrent cross-contextual factors: structural political and legal power inequality (Ellis, 2000; Cento Bull & Jones, 2006; De Vries, 2008), the representativeness of citizens (Lowndes et al., 2001b; Skidmore et al., 2006; Barnes et al., 2007), intra-organizational processes, professional skills, and inter-organizational coordination (Hastings, 2002; Beresford & Hoban, 2005; Edelenbos & Klijn, 2005; Maguire & Truscott, 2006; Healey, 2007; Ray et al., 2008), and the design of projects with adequate political mandate, funding, and timelines (Cognetti & Cottino, 2003; Dente et al., 2005; Bifulco & Centemeri, 2008).

Legal rights & responsibilities	Physical setting	Embedded routines & expectations
Distribution of financial resources	Timelines	Representativeness of citizens
Institutional design	Degree of discretion	Nature and intricacy of problems
Urban policy context	Attitudes to government	On the spot improvisation
Administrative traditions	Willingness to participate	Sudden events
Number & nature of local quangos	Composition of community	Degree of problem solving
Central gov. control mechanisms	Administrative categorization	Leadership
General policy criteria	Social conflicts	Organizational culture
Funding process and power	Identities and perceptions	Individual values and preferences
Professional expertise	Social exclusion	Inter-agency coordination
Professional networks	Local elites	Communicative skills
Formal rules, structures, and SOPs	Socio-economic inequality	Pre-existing agendas

Table 2.1 Factors that influence the success or failure of participation (my overview)

The difficulties involved with closing the gap between theory and practice have led to worries about the dominance of the *weak version* of participatory democracy: “listening to citizens’ and administrators’ stories ... there are serious concerns about an emerging gap between the rhetoric of hoped-for or taken-for-granted benefits and their materialisation in reality” (Hoppe, 2011, p. 163). The literature is starting to get saturated with relevant factors, but still struggles to provide more than “partial and mixed answers” (Burton et al., 2004, p. 43) to what public professionals and citizens should do in concrete cases. Comprehensive reviews conclude that the quality of participatory democracy is highly contingent on case-specific conditions (Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Thompson, 2008). It therefore remains disputed if potential benefits (e.g., heightened civic engagement, better responsiveness to citizens’ problems, greater legitimacy) outweigh structural problems and dilemmas (e.g., lack of representativeness, time and resource intensiveness, difficulty of producing concrete, tangible outcomes) (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Hoppe, 2011). Power inequalities are deeply embedded in political, economical, and organizational systems and continue to constrain the added value of public professionals and citizen coming together (Kweit & Kweit, 1981; Peters & Pierre, 2000; Roberts, 2004; Skidmore et al., 2006; Stout, 2010a). Therefore, the question has arisen what is the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy.

In sum, the narrative of participatory democracy started as a clear story of strong participatory ideals that needed to replace representative democracy. But when this was applied in practice, it turned into a complicated story of mixed results, with success and failure depending on many contingent factors. This storyline of participatory democracy developing from a strong version into a weak(ened) version revolves to a large degree around the added value of public encounters. Whereas the interaction between all the non-elected individuals, groups, and organizations affected by a policy or problem was at the heart of the initial redefinition of the meaning of democracy, it is now questioned what the added value of public professionals and citizen coming together is within the large number of contextual factors that have been found to matter. The next section further clarifies why public encounters form such a crucial element of participatory democracy by arguing that the nature and added value of community participation (the locus of this research) hinges on what happens when public professionals and residents meet. The final two sections explain in more detail what public encounters are, why their added value continues to be problematic, and how understanding them more on their own terms can benefit the quality of participatory democracy.

Community Participation: Where Public Professionals and Residents Meet

Community participation offers great opportunities for examining the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy. A great number of policies and projects are currently drafted or implemented in many European and Northern American countries with the ambition to structurally involve citizens in decision making and initiatives in their direct living environment (OECD, 2001; Denters & Rose, 2005). Although there is a lot of variation both between and within countries in terms of spatial scale, policy goals and areas, and modes of engagement, the overall tendency is to involve citizens on a community or neighborhood level rather than a generic political level (e.g., in electoral campaigning, council meetings, debate evenings, public rallies, or petitions). It is now conventional wisdom that the widespread promotion of structural face-to-face contact between public professionals and residents forms a window of opportunity for participatory democracy to thrive at the local level (Hoppe, 2011). But, at the same time, community participation is troubled by a serious discrepancy between theory and practice.

The very nature of community participation involves clear risks for it to turn into mere window dressing. Community participation is only broadly defined and therefore embodies a wide variety of institutions and practices that cannot be measured against clear standards. Its language and rhetoric might be adapted to fit local or national purposes as a “spray-on solution” (Taylor, 2003, p. 2) without sorting any real effects. The flexibility of the term runs the danger of meaning everything to everybody and thereby ending up meaning nothing. For example, the British national government and local authorities developed the so-called *New Urban Agenda* based on the principle that local communities are to be included in the decision making processes of partnerships that promote democratic renewal and social inclusion together with economic growth, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. Research is critical of the degree to which this discourse, in which “seemingly oppositional values are magically resolved” (Newman, 2001, p. 45), has made good of its promises (Foley & Martin, 2000; Imrie & Raco, 2003b; Johnstone & Whitehead, 2004b; Buck et al., 2005). Therefore, the meaning and added value of community participation seems to fundamentally depend on what happens when public professionals and residents meet.

Using the term *community participation* might create more confusion than clarity. In the fields of community building in developing countries, architecture, and planning, it comprises a set of technical tools and methods to draft plans for local projects (Sanoff, 2000; Wates, 2000). In local governance and public policy, it commonly refers to the ambition for “some transfer of power or influence” to recipients of public services or planning decisions about service delivery or regeneration plans (McGregor et al., 1992; Hastings, 2002; Skidmore et al., 2006). On the conceptual level, it is easily confused with adjacent terms such as public participation (Renn et al., 1993; Barnes et al., 2003; Innes & Booher, 2004), community involvement (European Commission, 1997; Ray et al., 2008), citizen engagement (Delli Carpini et al., 2004), citizen participation (Barnes et al., 2003; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Roberts, 2004), stakeholder involvement (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2005), collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2007), collaborative policy making (Innes & Booher, 2003a), or democratic governance (Sørensen, 2006). In the cases of my research, the terms in use were citizen participation (*partecipazione dei cittadini* – Bologna), community engagement (Glasgow), and resident participation (*bewonersparticipatie* – Amsterdam).

However, community participation does refer to a distinct phenomenon: residents taking part in public decisions and activities that affect the quality of their lives *in their direct living environment* (area, neighborhood, or community), and doing so through regular contact with local public professionals working in that area (Fung & Wright, 2003). It differs from the types of local civic conduct captured by theories of social movements or community activism: in community participation, residents –either on their own initiative or, more commonly, as a result of explicit efforts by local professionals– make decisions, make use of budgets, or carry out initiatives *as part of a public collaborative scheme*. This scheme is a manifest component of local governance policies and is buttressed by multiple local public agencies. Depending on the nature of this scheme and the participating organizations, community participation can involve any issue relevant to the daily lives of the residents, be it in the built environment (e.g., housing, infrastructure, greenery), social dynamics (e.g., safety, integration, festivities), economic sphere (e.g., poverty, entrepreneurial activity, unemployment), and ecological domain (e.g., litter, cleanliness, sustainability). Its concrete forms always strongly depend on local conditions and interpretations, and this translation from theory to practice reveals a great deal about the *meaning* of community participation to local actors.

The geographical setting is a crucial constitutive element for the nature of public encounters. Public professionals interact with *residents* rather than with clients, consumers, or citizens. Residents are usually highly diverse in their backgrounds and needs, and, while there might be all kinds of social contacts and networks existing between them, even in the absence of these, the common denominator is that they are *neighbors*. Their motivations for, expectations of, and roles in community participation are related to a specific place and space which they experience on a daily basis in relation to a broad variety of issues. For the public professionals, this area of daily life constitutes the area of daily work. While they might be residents of the area as well, these professionals hold a particular official position, with a set of more or less delineated responsibilities for particular public tasks or problems, for which they have some competency or expertise based on professional training, and receive formal payment through publicly generated money (Dijkstra & Van der Meer, 2003; Roberts, 2004, p. 320). Local politicians are not included in this definition: although they are public officials who also take part in community participation, the main innovation and thrust of this form of participatory democracy is the regular contact between residents and *non-elected* public professionals.

Encouraging high levels of local civic engagement is not completely new (Hoorn, 1975; Dente & Regonini, 1980; Hain, 1980; Susskind & Elliot, 1983). Still, the regular contact that residents and non-elected public professionals now have is more far-reaching than ever before. Community participation nowadays refers to the deliberative development and joint enactment of solutions to specific, tangible problems by “ordinary people affected by these problems and officials close to them” (Fung & Wright, 2003, p. 15) on a structural basis. The conventional wisdom is to see residents as “an *integral* part of the governance process and their active involvement is considered *essential* in the substantive decisions facing a community” (Roberts, 2004, p. 322; emphases added). While local citizens and politicians already have a history of common demeanor, residents and professionals are now encountering each other for longer time periods and with greater intensity than before (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2004). This requires them to develop new skills, behavior, organizational formats, and mind-sets about what to say and do. This social conduct does not fit into our understandings of ordinary political participation, technical bureaucratic decision making, or adversarial civic activism (Fung & Wright, 2003; Cooper et al., 2006).

The main driver behind this more far-reaching conceptualization of participation is the adjective *community*, which refers to participation *in* a certain geographical location, or to the participation *by* a collection of people with some kind of shared cultural heritage, social ties, interests, or experiences. In both senses, this modern usage is a particular, historically bound and influenced, normative view on what a community is, was, and should be (Delanty, 2003). The main source of inspiration is communitarianism, a philosophical stream which “sees the community as the site of moral norms and obligations, of responsibilities as well as rights” (Taylor, 2003, p. 39) and believes it to be a superior alternative, or “Third Way”, to the state and the market for solving modern public problems (Etzioni, 1995; Giddens, 2000). The communitarian perspective has been criticized theoretically and empirically for its unrealistic and overly optimistic depictions and expectations of “communities” (e.g., Little, 2002; Amin, 2005). Nevertheless, the communitarian perspective has inspired conventional thinking about urban governance in two ways: 1) communities as neighborhoods and 2) communities as networks.

First, community participation upholds the idea that “neighborhoods”, especially deprived ones, are spatially bordered “communities” which have local and exceptional problems that can be solved through temporary policies targeted at engaging “the community”. Despite the weak empirical basis of the relationships between area effects and socio-economic deprivation (Atkinson et al., 2005), and the theoretical objections to the glorification of closely-knit communities in our modern globalized and fragmented society (Delanty, 2003; Taylor, 2003), community participation policies generally support the ambiguous assumptions that: (1) communities have been “lost” and need to be “restored”, (2) communities are unitary agents with dense social ties and shared values capable of acting, and (3) with the right kind of interventions it is possible to craft more communal decision making systems (Pierre & Peters, 2000, pp. 137-159; Taylor, 2003; Amin, 2005).

Second, the collaborative networks of urban governance organizations are supposed to form “communities” (see Pierre & Peters, 2000). Community participation does not just require residents to be more engaged with each other, public professionals, and the problems around them; it presumes the same of public professionals. As representatives of their agencies in local areas, public professionals are supposed to share a belief in the intrinsic value of collaboration for effective and democratic problem solving (Torfing, 2005; Sørensen, 2006).

Their commitment to collaboration in policy formulation and implementation not only implies deliberative *coordination*, but more fundamentally *integration* of individual goals, interests, structures, and practices into one collective whole (Perri 6, 2005). Public professionals are expected to uphold good social relationships to sustain a close-knit policy making community. Although also these communitarian theoretical aspirations outweigh empirical occurrence, collaborative action is seen as more than a mutually beneficial bargain or a hard-won negotiation; it should be a carefully drafted consensus brought about by enquiring into each other's perceptions and maintaining social bonds (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Stout, 2010c).

Thus, community participation may have become a fact of life in Western urban governance, its actual forms and effects are all but certain. The question is which forms and meanings *community* takes in the encounters of public professionals and residents. There is little in the nature of community participation that provides any clear predictions for the meaning and added value of public encounters. Based on their analysis of the San Diego Water Forum, Innes & Booher suggest that three conditions need to be present for successful collaboration (Innes & Booher, 2003a, p. 46, 50). First, a spatially and time bound problem, incident, or conflict that triggers local actors to come together in an ad-hoc arrangement and generate sufficient resources to support it. Second, all relevant stakeholders are involved based on the principles of interdependence, equality, and expertise. That is, each local actor needs to have a particular stake in the problem and expertise of it, has to be unable to resolve it separately, and cannot have the power to control others, take the lead, or set the agenda. Third, a talented broker is present who enables local actors to develop new relationships through which they generate creative solutions and expand their ability to collaborate.

On the one hand, then, community participation could provide a conducive setting for the communication between public professionals and residents. Being personally faced with the seriousness and complexity of the problems in their local area on a day-to-day basis, public professionals and residents can be expected to have strong motivations to improve the quality of life in their community and appreciate their interdependence and the importance of positive, workable relationships. Moreover, there are always some public professionals playing a brokerage role to encourage such dynamics. On the other hand, community participation is a structural, government induced policy scheme rather than an ad-hoc arrangement. Public

authorities usually take the initiative, set the agenda, and control what gets spent and done. Stakeholders are involved based on established role patterns rather than complete equality, which will not readily change as they often spend only a part of their daily activities on community participation. Furthermore, community participation is supposed to confront *all* pressing local problems rather than one specific issue bound in time and place. The amplitude of this agenda, as well as of the geographical area, implies that it is impossible to involve all public organizations and residents. Those who are involved might have such a broad variety of different motivations that making them aware of their interdependencies is inherently difficult. Finally, more often than not, brokers are usually local stakeholders with particular skills and roles rather than professionally trained third-party facilitators or mediators.

To conclude, community participation refers to a set of policy ambitions, institutions, and practices, which, supported by communitarian theories, are aimed at structural face-to-face communication between public professionals and residents about problems that affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. This creates more opportunities for public professionals and residents to engage in face-to-face communication, but also forms a challenging setting for them to actually have productive conversations. As many contextual factors complicate policy ambitions for sustaining productive relational dynamics (Healey, 2007; see also table 2.1, p. 35), community participation is a valuable locus for examining the nature and added value of public encounters in concrete contexts. The next sections explain how we might meaningfully study public encounters.

Public Encounters: The Value of Face-to-Face Communication for Democracy

The concept of public encounters was first coined by Charles Goodsell (1981) in the edited volume *The Public Encounter: Where State and Citizen Meet*, which signaled the pervasive influence of encounters with public professionals on the daily lives of citizens. Whether it is for the purpose of information, services, or regulation, and whether it is through telephone, written, online, or face-to-face contact, citizens interact with public professionals in numerous areas. For instance, citizens meet with police officers for law enforcement, doctors and nurses for health care, administrators for revenue collection, and social workers for social welfare. Public encounters have been a subject of scholarly interest in public administration, political science, psychology, sociology, and public policy, but never developed into a subject area of

its own to the same extent that, for example, implementation, networks, or bureaucracy have. This section carves out the approach and contribution of this thesis by showing that despite the development from considering face-to-face communication between public professionals and citizens as an inherently problematic element of democracy to seeing them as an added value, public encounters are still not sufficiently understood as a distinct phenomenon that shapes the quality of participatory democracy.

Representative Democracy: Public Encounters as Inherently Problematic

Traditionally, public encounters were seen as an inherently problematic, and yet inevitable, aspect of representative democracy. The encounters between public professionals and citizens across the organizational boundaries of bureaucracy were regulated by formal responsibilities and moral obligations for safeguarding democratic government (Weber, 1922/1978; Finer, 1931). Public professionals were to uphold an impartial attitude towards citizens and make decisions based on their professional expertise, formal responsibilities, written rules and procedures, and political mandate. This bureaucratic organization of state-society relationships served to prevent the corruption, unequal treatment, and economic volatility inherent to pre-modern, or patrimonial, societies (Delany, 1962). The goal was not to eliminate, but rather to limit, or democratically control, discretion, to ensure that public professionals directed their behaviour at the *public* interest instead of private gain and power accumulation. Bureaucracy offers a formal structure to withdraw from social relationships and concomitant feelings of reciprocity and social duty, as it “segregates official activity from the sphere of private life”, “does not establish a relationship to a person”, and “would not constitute a realm of *free*, arbitrary action and discretion, of *personally* motivated favor and valuation” (Weber, 1922/1978, pp. 957, 959; emphases in original).

Max Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy is the main point of reference for this perspective on public encounters. Weber constructed this ideal type to signal the increasing need for bureaucratic experts in our (increasingly) complex modern society (Weber, 1922/1978, p. 975) and to facilitate empirical study of the actual manifestations and variations of this trend. The main concern of the ideal type is with identifying the influence of formal organization on individual freedom in a democratic society (Bartels, 2009). Bureaucratic organizations have the potential to support individual freedom as well as “imprison” individuals in their policies,

structures, rules, and procedures. On the one hand, bureaucrats have to make decisions based on clearly stipulated procedures and political mandate as to guarantee expertise, equality, and reliability over arbitrariness, power abuse, and personal whims. On the other hand, bureaucrats can be constrained or forced to act in contrast to their ideas or will because of the “iron cage” that forms around them, or can enforce a straitjacket on the free motion of thoughts and actions in society (Weber, 1922/1978; Albrow, 1980; Du Gay, 2000).

Initially, therefore, public encounters were studied as part of a broader research agenda that focused on the consequences of bureaucratization for (representative) democracy. The debate focused on the question how well democracy was served by the concentration of power in large-scale public organizations, depersonalization of communication and decisions, and restriction of discretionary decision making powers (Katz & Danet, 1973). These themes have in particular been taken up in the field of organization studies, where empirical research has assessed the formal structures of bureaucratic organizations and the ways in which these can have functional or dysfunctional effects on their social environments (e.g., Friedrich, 1952; Merton, 1952; Mouzelis, 1967). More recently, a similar approach has been taken to examine the effects of ICT systems and innovations on the discretion inherent to “digital encounters” (Zuurmond, 1994; Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Jorna & Wagenaar, 2007). In anthropology and political science, the role of public encounters in processes of bureaucratization has primarily been studied in terms of corruption (Heidenheimer, 1970; De Zwart, 1994; Miller et al., 2001).

Several alternative models have been proposed for public encounters as part of broader research agendas attacking “the traditional model of bureaucracy”. Neoliberal approaches, for example, criticized bureaucracy for being inefficient and overregulated and argued in favor of “running government like a business” (Niskanen, 1971; Ostrom & Ostrom, 1971; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). In this view, public encounters are supposed to resemble market exchanges: citizens should be able to choose between suppliers of public goods in a competitive system and demand better services, while public professionals should be committed to consumer satisfaction and performance targets. Postmodern approaches, alternatively, have condemned bureaucracy for creating self-referential, inhumane, and unreflective administrators (Hummel, 1994; Fox & Miller, 1995; Farmer, 2005). From this perspective, public professionals should be more moral, responsible, and deliberative in their contact with citizens. Both approaches

have challenged assumptions about the purposes and forms of public encounters, but did not evoke debate on public encounters *per se*.

Public encounters only really came to the forefront of scholarly attention as a result of Lipsky's (1980) seminal study of street level bureaucracy. This research is the source of current conventional wisdom that street level bureaucrats such as administrators, policemen, and social workers possess great discretion to translate often vague or contradictory policies into practice. Policy "is actually made in the ... *daily encounters* of street level workers" with their clients (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii; emphasis added). Street level bureaucrats have to find ways to make a policy work for concrete situations and problems, while having disposition of scarce time, energy, financial resources, and information. In response, Lipsky showed, they develop coping mechanisms, i.e. mental shortcuts like stereotypes, catchwords, and principled beliefs that categorize clients and often sustain unequal treatment. Therefore, "the reality of the work of street level bureaucrats could hardly be farther from the bureaucratic ideal of impersonal detachment in decision making" (Lipsky, 1980, p. 9).

These conclusions became the hallmark of many empirical analyses of the actual conduct of "front line" public professionals in the delivery of public services (e.g. Katz et al., 1975; Kahn et al., 1976; Nelson, 1980; Brown, 1981; Hasenfeld & Steinmetz, 1981). This research expanded our understanding of the factors that determine the variation, scope, nature, and dynamics of public encounters, such as socio-cultural norms, technology, organizational type, professional autonomy, individual personality, staff relations, clients' background, and the situational setting (Katz & Danet, 1973; Goodsell, 1981). More substantially, research has established that public encounters in service delivery play a key role in sustaining the socio-economic inequality of minority groups or deprived neighborhoods (Lipsky, 1971; Rice, 1981; Hastings, 2009b, 2009a). Thus, the common view that results from this research is that public encounters form an inherently problematic element of representative democracy.

This view of public encounters fed into a lively and ongoing debate about whether discretion is effective and desirable, and, if so, in which forms. Does democracy thrive by top-down control and strict regulation of public professionals (Finer, 1941) or by placing trust in their creative exercise of discretion to solve complex problems (Friedrich, 1940)? The more traditional approach to this dilemma is to identify the discrepancy between political decisions

and public professionals' practices in a particular area, and to look for the organizational structures, managerial tools, and policy regulations that can promote effective and accountable exercise of discretion (see Lynn, 1996). This approach was criticized for upholding an ambiguous and unfeasible basis for discretion, because it tried to reconcile the incongruous principles of hierarchical obedience and accountability on the one hand with personal freedom and responsibility on the other (Harmon, 1995). Therefore, several authors stopped seeing discretion as a problem of democratic control, and started to consider it as an asset for creative, deliberative, and informed judgment (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004). The legitimate exercise of discretion, then, comes down to successfully balancing contradictory values and producing desirable outcomes for citizens in practice. This view opened the door to seeing public encounters as added value to democracy.

Participatory Democracy: Public Encounters as Added Value

The positive view of discretion inspired analyses of the *narratives* of front line professionals (Vinzant & Crothers, 1996, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Sandfort, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Proudfoot & McCann, 2008; Durose, 2009). By examining their personal accounts of encounters with citizens, the goal of these studies is to reveal how front line professionals make sense of their daily work situations and how they account for their decisions. The result has been a much richer understanding of the underlying beliefs, emotions, and know-how that informs the judgments of public professionals. In their encounters with citizens, Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003) explain, front line professionals do not simply apply formal rules, but “are constantly attentive to who their clients are, acting on their assessments of people’s character and identity” and make judgments that arise “from the sustained tensions between legal mandates and [their] beliefs about what is fair or the right thing to do” (p. 13). This view does not mean to glorify public professionals as infallible moral beings, but rather seeks to explicate the psychological, social, and communicative dynamics of public encounters.

In this way, public encounters are valuable rather than inherently problematic phenomena. No longer are public encounters a mere matter of service delivery, i.e., of citizens who desire certain public services from public professionals, who, in turn, have the legal power to make authoritative decisions about these services. Instead, public encounters are a vital element of a

thriving system of democratic governance. According to Vinzant & Crothers (1998), citizens should not see public professionals as

outsiders who impose a bureaucracy's abstract ideals on some community. Rather, they are *members of that community* who play an important role in governance by balancing community values, legal and organizational constraints, and a variety of other factors in a manner that can be legitimized relative to a particular situation... [R]ather than resisting or avoiding workers when they enter communities, citizens ... may approach those workers, provide them with needed information and perspectives, and *establish continuing relationships* (p. 151; emphases added).

In this view, public encounters are about nurturing personal relationships and constructive communication in order to better solve public problems. In fact, the quality of participatory democracy “depends upon sustained and deep cooperation between diverse parties such as police officers and minority residents, parents and educators, workers and managers, and environmentalists and developers” (Fung & Wright, 2003, p. 282).

The literature on participatory democracy describes and prescribes how public encounters currently occur and should occur for different motives than before, as well as in different places, over different time periods, in different roles, and based on different structures. The argument goes that the system of representative democracy and bureaucratic government, with its emphasis on hierarchical power, professional expertise, and impartiality, alienated citizens from their government and disconnected public professionals from society (King & Stivers, 1998; Fung & Wright, 2003). This reduced the ability of democracy to solve problems (De Souza-Briggs, 2008), because crucial information is often overlooked or not communicated, goals are displaced in favor of powerful elites, and discussion is prone to polarization rather than consensus (see Pierre & Peters, 2000, pp. 137-159). Participatory democrats therefore endeavour to safeguard the quality of democracy by challenging the traditional institutions, discourses, and practices through which public professionals and citizens meet (Dryzek, 1993, 2000).

Whereas public professionals traditionally have a set of legal rules and political mandate to take authoritative decisions for citizens, in participatory democracy, public encounters can only be productive when all are equally empowered to take decisions and action (Fung, 2004; Roberts, 2004). Traditional political and bureaucratic institutions have to be reformed to allow for “multi-way interactions” in which common meanings and shared solutions can emerge

(Innes & Booher, 2004, p. 429), as well as for empowered decision making, and mutual accountability (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003; Hill & Hupe, 2007). But institutional reform alone is said not to be enough; public professionals and citizens alike need to change their traditional attitudes towards each other and commit to a process of “authentic participation” (King et al., 1998). This means a creating process in which professional and civic knowledge are equally valued and used to gain better understandings of complex local problems (Hummel & Stivers, 1998; Wagenaar, 2007), and relationships are based on respect, honesty, and transparency (Innes & Booher, 2003a; Elias, 2010; Stout, 2010c; Community Links, 2011).

However, the degree to which public encounters actually have added value has been found to depend on many factors. Statistical analyses of surveys that measure the attitudes of public professionals and/or citizens towards each other and participation identified the influence of, for example, organizational culture, the rigidity of pre-existing agendas and structures, power struggles, professionals’ perceptions of who counts as a valuable participant, and citizens’ (dis)trust of government (Weissert, 1994; Lowndes et al., 2001a, 2001b; Alkadry, 2003; Yang, 2005; Bryer & Cooper, 2007; Yang & Callahan, 2007; Bryer, 2009). Other studies highlight the impact of daily practices in formal meetings as well as personal contact via telephone or email and in office spaces, public meeting spaces, or on the street. The ways in which public meetings are structured and managed shape who gets to say what, when, and how (Hajer, 2005; Gastil & Kelshaw, 2007; Kelshaw & Gastil, 2008; Black et al., 2009). Beyond the meeting room, public encounters occur on a daily basis in less structured forms via telephone, email, and personal meetings in office spaces, public meeting spaces, or on the street. Here, personal know-how and communicative skills for addressing each other, dealing with tacit barriers, and solving small yet significant problems are vital to sustain commitment, remain open to change, and keep the process going (Beresford & Hoban, 2005; Maguire & Truscott, 2006; Wagenaar, 2007; Ray et al., 2008; Campbell, 2010; Elias, 2010; Durose, 2011).

Despite this growing body of research, surprisingly enough, no recent study actually uses the concept of public encounters. Rather, face-to-face communication is conceptualized relatively narrowly in terms of attitudinal positions, institutional arrangements and reforms, or the narratives of either public professionals or citizens. There seems in particular to be a bias to concentrate on the ways in which public professionals and their organizations facilitate or

inhibit citizen participation (e.g., Durose, 2009; Fischer, 2009) rather than *the encounter itself*. These understandings of public encounters seems to be locked into an individualist ontology in which people are seen as separate beings and “public professional” and “citizen” form fixed social positions (Stout & Staton, 2011). In the alternative, *relational* ontology people are intrinsically connected in ongoing interactional processes in which they constantly and inescapably “interweave” into something different by the very *process* of meeting (Follett, 1919, 1924). This renders it futile to look at an encounter in terms of “I” and “you”; it is the “I-Thou” (Buber, 1970), encounter (Anderson et al., 2004), or “in-between”, that we need to grapple with.

In this relational approach, what public professionals and citizens are able to do is the product of the *quality* of the ongoing interactional process through which they encounter each other (Stout & Staton, 2011). It implies attending to public encounters as

a particular qualitative *process* or way of talking and interacting with others... It is concerned ... with the particular *texture* of contextual interaction or contact and a kind of mutual learning through activity and interaction that such contact provides... [which] exists as a relational possibility in concrete settings (Campbell Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011, p. 51; emphases in original).

In other words, examining public encounters as a distinct phenomenon requires paying less attention to *what* is said and more to *how* it is said. The next section explains that this can be done by exploring the fine-grained communicative practices and processes that form the in-between of citizens and public professionals. This will not only help to deepen our qualitative understandings of what public encounters *mean* in specific contexts (Young, 2000), but can also reveal ways in which the deep-seated differences, power inequalities, and conflicts that continue to render them inherently problematic can be attended to and overcome (Forester, 1999b, 2009b).

Democracy as Communicative Process: Capturing the “In-Between”

Understanding public encounters as the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens builds on recent developments of the communicative turn in the study of participatory democracy. The communicative turn was one of the major developments in philosophy and social theory in the twentieth century, drawing attention to the fundamental role of language,

argumentation, discourse, and intersubjectivity in shaping people's views of, and actions in the world (Fischer & Forester, 1993). As one of the fundamentals of participatory democracy, the communicative turn inspired enquiry into the possibilities for the public use of practical reason as a route to more legitimate public decision making. Habermas' (1984a, 1984b) notion of communicative action conceptualized how agreement could be reached on common concerns without merely reflecting prevailing power relations or subjective interests. Rational behavior was not just to be narrowly conceived of as individuals choosing the optimal strategy for achieving their goals (instrumental rationality), but also as speech acts for justifying their opinions and reaching an agreement (communicative action). If people deliberate to solve a common concern, they have to come up with more than their individual interests and, instead, appeal to some common standard or transform their initial standpoints. In this view, living together in difference and equality is only possible through intersubjective communication (Healey, 1993; Eriksen & Weigård, 2003).

My goal here is not to engage in a critical analysis of Habermas' extensive and nuanced contribution, but rather to discern two broad approaches to continuing the communicative turn he initiated. First, Habermas inspired scholars of public planning and deliberative democracy to explore conditions under which public institutions, discourses, and practices can be made more democratic, i.e. allow for *undistorted* communication or *sincere* transmission of reasons and intentions (Forester, 1993a; Bohman, 1996; Dryzek, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2003a; Healey, 2006). Especially under influence of his later work (Habermas, 1996), the focus was put on the *ideal speech conditions* under which all individuals have an equal opportunity to freely articulate their ideas and proposals and criticize those of others in order to arrive at consensual decisions by nothing else than the force of the better argument. Even though Habermas did not think such an ideal state could ever be achieved, his theory was still used to discover and reduce the contingent political and socio-economic power differences of specific cases. The goal of this communicative approach is "redressing or circumventing unnecessary structural distortions of communications" (Forester, 1993a, p. 28) such as the use of obscure jargon, exclusion of specific individuals or groups, or withholding of information.

A second group of scholars conceded that Habermas provided "a partial remedy" (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 335) for the ills he sought to cure (Young, 1996; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000). His approach treats public encounters as an instrumental medium for the optimal transmission of

the *content* of speech acts. This individualist ontology of reconciling individual autonomy with intersubjective agreement leads to the imposition of a single ideal of communication on the contingent process of interweaving. More concretely, by privileging deliberation –the “back-and-forth exchange of reasons” (Bohman, 1996, p. 58)– as mode of communication, Habermas neglected that the ability to articulate logical, rational, and reasonable arguments is strongly related to social inequity. Deliberation has exclusionary effects on what gets said and how, because it favors dispassionate and disembodied speech, i.e. orderly, articulate, and moderate arguments. It discounts the views of marginalized groups, who tend to resort to disruptive modes of expression such as protest, emotional outbursts, or personal stories, thereby sustaining social inequality and exclusion. Therefore, analysis of communicative practice has to uncover how people are kept outside forums of public decision making (external exclusion) or how they are ignored, dismissed, or patronized when they are part of the conversation (internal exclusion) (Young, 2000, pp. 53-55). More broadly, a communicative approach has to be sensitive to the many diverse ways in which people actually express themselves and address others.

The approach of this thesis, then, is to consider “democracy as a process of communication among citizens and public officials” (Young, 2000, p. 52). That means seeing what public professionals and citizens are able to do and achieve in participatory settings as a social product of the ongoing, dynamic, evolving process through which they interact (Campbell Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011; Stout & Staton, 2011). The public encounter, or in-between, is not a communicative void for the neutral transmission of information and ideas, but, rather, a distinct phenomenon which has real world consequences. It is a process of interwoven situated performances which structure the interactions between public professionals and citizens in ways that enable or disadvantage them to make claims, influence decisions, and understand each other (Fischer, 1999; Anderson et al., 2004; Pearce & Pearce, 2004; Rosenberg, 2007; Escobar, 2010). By attending to the contingent communicative acts through which public professionals and citizens interact in everyday practice, we can come to an understanding of the meaning and added value of their encounters. Capturing the in-between accordingly rests on three assumptions.

First, communication is relational. It is not just some talk in a certain place and time, but a way of doing that is intimately bound up with the relationships between people, or their way of

being together (Campbell Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011). Individuals are not encapsulated and isolated beings who communicate with each other to further matters of individual or common interest, but fundamentally exist in relationships to others (Stout & Staton, 2011). This means focusing on the process through which people communicate their differences about complex problems rather than substance of their talk (Healey, 2006, 2007; Forester, 2009a; Innes & Booher, 2010). Participatory democracy is about dealing with controversial global issues ranging from multiculturalism, abortion, and biotechnology to local disputes over the positioning of a new asylum seeker centre or a chemical power plant. Such intractable problems “lend themselves to no unambiguous or conclusive formulations and thus have no clear-cut criteria to judge their resolution” (Fischer, 1993, p. 173). In the absence of an Archimedean point about who is right, communication does not only involve the exchange of arguments, but more fundamentally involves a process of

relation-building work through which people learn to communicate with others with very different backgrounds, ways of thinking and ways of valuing. This is inevitably a fine-grained communicative learning activity, in which participants encounter each other as people (Healey, 1996, p. 214).

Communication, then, forms a relationship in a similar sense as friendship (Forester, 1999b) or marriage: just as friend or spouses “have to learn ways of settling their differences without inflicting real damage on each other, so we, as a society, have to find constructive ways of resolving disputes and differences” (Tannen, 1999, p. 6).

Second, communication is a multifaceted, variable, and contingent phenomenon. That asks for understanding the work different forms of communication do in specific situations by identifying “the attitudes with which [actors] approach each other, the ways they talk and act, the consequences of their meeting, and the context within which they meet” (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 64). Three forms are commonly distinguished, each fulfilling distinct, essential, and supplementary functions: debate, deliberation, and dialogue (Fischer, 1999; Yankelovich, 1999; Kelshaw, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2008; Forester, 2009a; Escobar, 2010).

- *Debate* occurs when actors articulate and defend their positions through the use of arguments aimed at winning over other actors (or an audience). Actors try to convince and criticize rather than establish common ground. This mode of communication helps to draw out differences between standpoints and discover weaknesses in each other’s

arguments, but also runs the danger of dramatizing conversations into “ritualized opposition” rather than “genuine disagreement” (Tannen, 1999, p. 4).

- *Deliberation* is reasoned communication aimed at collective exploration of the reasons for different viewpoints and the possibilities for agreement. Actors try to reason and understand to find grounds for compromise. This mode of communication is used to take decisions on future actions within the boundaries of the common concern and the rules of the discussion.
- *Dialogue* refers to a style of communication in which each actor opens up to examine the validity of their own perspective and learning about those of others. Actors try to empathize and reflect to develop respectful relationships. This mode of communication is not about working towards an agreement but, rather, forming a social bond as a basis for thinking and acting together, from which ideas and agreements might follow.

Which specific form of communication is needed to achieve resolution of a problem depends on the situation at hand. For example, for deliberation to be successful, actors have to move from subjective desires to objective claims by formulating clear, logical, and rational reasons for a certain course of action. Dialogue works in the opposite direction: it allows participants to reflect on the undercurrents of their thoughts by inquiring into personal experiences, tacit assumptions, and emotional attitudes. To do so, actors need to create a safe space in which they feel comfortable enough to share deep feelings and thoughts. In contrast, debate is set up in a confrontational manner to prioritize individual viewpoints and winning the argument.

Third, communication is expressed through performative acts that can be understood by being attentive to the details of what is being said and done in a specific context. Communicative utterances and acts express underlying meanings, which can only be understood in reference to their communicative context. This emphasizes the importance of the details of what is being said and done, as well as the ways in which these details are conveyed. Saying something is doing, or accomplishing, something (Austin, 1962). Actors use particular communicative practices to take part in a conversation and to get their message across, or to exclude certain persons or topics from the conversation and discount particular arguments or modes of expression. Therefore, we need to take communicative practices such as greeting, rhetoric, wit, and gossip serious (Goffman, 1972). By greeting each other, for example, actors can engage in ritualized and superficial gestures that do not truly acknowledge the other, or actually address

others in all their particularity to signal openness to their presence and statements. The way people introduce themselves, if they offer a handshake, or whether they look at each other when spoken to makes an enormous difference to their ability to talk about the substance of the issues facing them (Young, 2000, pp. 57-77). Looking at communication as neutral and abstract statements of content purified from their contextual comport implies loss of the meaning of these performative acts.

Thus, the multifaceted, relational performance of communication has real-world consequences for the quality of participatory democracy. This means not just to consider the substance of what is being said, but more fundamentally attend to the nature and meaning of the relational and dynamic process through which actors communicate. Subtle expressions can have a deep impact on the inclusion, effectiveness, fairness, etc. of participatory processes. In other words, communicative practices strongly affect the meaning and added value of public encounters. One way to capture the in-between is *narrative*: actors sharing concrete personal experiences. Narrative is a democratic approach to including those actors who lack the ability to articulate their views in abstract arguments. Storytelling enables us to appreciate subtleties in how actors think and express themselves, thereby discovering the hidden meaning of words and behavior, the practical ways in which different decisions and features manifest themselves in the real world, and the elementary role of practical judgment and emotional struggles (Forester, 1999b; Young, 2000; Schein, 2003; Ryfe, 2006; Petts, 2007). We can arrive at deeper understandings of the meaning of communicative acts, which are often concealed by general statements or discourse, by being attentive to the actual modes of expression and details that make up everyday communication.

In conclusion, this thesis attempts to understand public encounters as a distinct phenomenon by examining the meaning and added value of concrete communicative practices in particular contexts. Public encounters have up to now been too much considered in instrumental terms as a medium for exchanging ideas and preferences about substantive issues rather than in terms of the quality of the communicative process. By exploring the fine-grained practices that make up the *in-between*, the research develops an original approach to answer the main research question: *how do public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy?* Still, several issues need clarification: How can we actually see communication in reality? How can we analyze communication? How do we know when communication is good or bad? Chapter

3 answers several of these questions by discussing how narrative analysis enables grounded theory analysis of everyday communicative practices and helps to make sense of dialogical processes of knowledge-in-interaction.

Final Remarks

The motto of this chapter –*All actual life is encounter*– exemplifies that the main theme in Martin Buber’s work was how each individual is constantly confronted with “Otherness” – other people and all kinds of things and events foreign to him or her– and on such occasions has the choice between subsuming this “Otherness” in his or her own frame of mind or truly opening up to understand it on its own terms. This theme is fundamental to participatory democracy, in which the big question is how we can organize and resolve our differences without imposing one-sided views or giving in to moral nihilism. The development of the debate has brought us up to a point in which we have gathered much knowledge about what enables and inhibits such an ideal system, but we still are uncertain how the getting together of public professionals and citizens can have added value in practice. The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that the encounter, or in-between, of public professionals and citizens is a distinct phenomenon that is of direct influence on their ability to achieve decisions, solve problems, and coexist.

3 Narrative Analysis: Examining the Meaning and Added Value of the Communicative In-Between

apparently innocuous storytelling... can do a great deal of work
~ John Forester (1999, p. 3)

The previous chapter developed a relational, situated, performative approach to explore the meaning and added value of the “communicative in-between” of public professionals and citizens for participatory democracy. This chapter explains how I used narrative analysis to examine their everyday communicative practices and processes by following the principle of “practice illuminating theory”, i.e. that “we can understand the conceptualized from the immersion in a practice that provides content to the concepts” (Hummel 1998, p. 154). The first section explains how narrative analysis helps to make sense of the ways in which the relational meaning of everyday practices emerges in communicative processes. It identifies narrative analysis as a dialogical form of interpretative policy analysis, explains that narratives are stories about everyday experiences which do a specific type of work for actors, and presents the analytical tools used to analyze narratives. The next section explains how the narrative analysis followed a grounded theory process to gradually develop theoretical conclusions from the empirical data. It accounts for the case selection, data collection through intensive interviewing of 59 respondents, and analysis of this data through coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling. The final section clarifies how this approach of “practice illuminating theory” aids in capturing the in-between as a process of *knowing-in-interaction*.

Using Narrative Analysis to Examine Communicative Practices and Processes

A narrative is a *story* a person tells about a real or imagined situation or range of events that wittingly or unwittingly enables this person to pinpoint what happened, make sense of these happenings, and express his/her evaluation. We do it all the time, for example when we tell our friends or family about how our day was. Likewise, as we already saw in chapter 2 (pp. 46, 54), public professionals and citizens make sense of their encounters *narratively*, i.e., by telling stories. The study of narratives stems from the ancient Greek tradition of storytelling to convey wisdom and the religious practice of studying the meaning of sacred texts. As a scientific method, narrative analysis started to develop from the 1960s in the disciplines of history, literary criticism, and psychology, in which personal and social histories, myths, fairy

tales, and novels were seen as primary schemes of sense-making through which we can access contextualized meanings (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Elliot, 2005). More recently, efforts have been made to turn narrative analysis into a distinct method in the social sciences equally accepted as, for example, regression analysis, process tracing, or content analysis (Czarniawska, 2004).

The claim that narratives are a primary source of knowledge has gained wide acceptance in public administration, policy analysis, and political science (Hummel, 1991; White, 1992; Forester, 1993b; Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Fischer, 2003, chap. 8). Narrative analysis means that we can learn a great deal about social behavior and institutions in modern governance by examining the stories policy actors tell to make sense of their personal experiences with the messy, conflict-ridden, and complex nature of everyday practice. A range of studies have exhibited that narratives form a distinct mode of knowing; i.e. a form of linguistic expression – different from logico-deductive or informational statements– through which we can get a grip on the ways in which actors go about in making sense of the social world (Kaplan, 1993; Roe, 1994; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Abma, 1999; Forester, 1999b; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Hendriks, 2005; Hampton, 2009). This section identifies narrative analysis as a dialogical form of interpretative policy analysis and, secondly, explains how I have used it to build a theoretical account of the communicative in-between grounded in stories about public encounters.

Interpretative Policy Analysis and Dialogical Meaning

Narrative analysis is an interpretative approach. Interpretivism is a broad tradition in the social sciences aimed at uncovering the meanings that the activities of actors have within a social context. The basic assumption of interpretivism is that social activities derive from intrinsic intentions which cannot be read off social behavior but need to be actively interpreted against the self-understandings of actors and the functioning of this behavior in the social context. Meaning is not the same as observable behavior, is not a fixed entity that exists independent of actors or observations, and cannot be reduced to individual intentions or aggregate institutions. Rather, we can come to an understanding of meaning by reconstructing the life world of actors in terms of their implicit (conscious and tacit) intentions, the ways in which these are enacted and communicated in processes of social construction, and the social-cultural rules, structures,

and categories within which all of this is situated. The goal is not so much to develop causal relationships and generalized statements, but rather to explicate the contingent meanings of social phenomena (Yanow, 2000; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Wagenaar, 2011).

Since the 1970s, interpretativism has inspired the development of interpretative policy analysis (IPA; Yanow, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Wagenaar, 2011). IPA is now a distinct field of policy analysis that forms a critical alternative to traditional methods such as performance measurement, cost-benefit analysis, or benchmarking, the analytical vocabulary of which fell short in making sense of the changes that were taking place in policy practice. Under the influence of developments such as globalization, immigration, and technological progress, over the last decades we have witnessed considerable changes in the spaces in which policy making takes place, the amount of social and cultural difference in the composition of societies, and the degree of certainty about the effects of decisions. The kind of policy analysis germane to policy making under these circumstances, then, needs to provide methods for making sense of what happens in what Hajer (2003) calls the *institutional void* in which “there are no clear rules and norms according to which politics is to be conducted and policy measures are to be agreed upon” (p. 175).

The basic task of interpretative policy analysis is to scrutinize the language and argumentation through which policy actors go about in bringing policy into being (Majone, 1989; Fischer & Forester, 1993). As policies are always driven by a particular interpretation of what is out there, we cannot consider them entities with objective existence and fixed boundaries. Instead, policies are social constructs that reflect individual beliefs and socio-political configurations (Edelman, 1977), and policy processes are bound up with competing belief systems, power constellations, rhetoric, and ambiguous knowledge claims. Policy problems are always open to multiple and often conflicting interpretations as the social context consists of a multiplicity of values, beliefs, and standards. No indisputable criteria exist for conclusively determining the nature, correctness, or success of policies (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Therefore, the goal of IPA is twofold: *detailed empirical research* of the concrete manifestations and actual implications of policy processes and *critical normative judgment* of the inescapable political, i.e. socially relevant, dimension of this research (Fay, 1975; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003).

Although great internal differences exist between various IPA approaches, in one way or another research always conducts a *grounded analysis of qualitative data* (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 10). That does not mean that interpretative research is equivalent to qualitative research. Both prefer to gather detailed empirical data through small samples, close contact with social actors, and methods that are flexible and sensitive to the context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). But qualitative researchers do not necessarily share the view of interpretivists that meaning is *constitutive* of social phenomena and requires interpretation as it does not exist independently of the minds of social actors or researchers (Yanow, 2003, p. 242). The general logic that IPA approaches follow is “mapping the architecture of meaning”, i.e. explicating how language, objects, and acts function as artifacts (symbols or manifestations) of underlying feelings, values, and beliefs (Geertz, 1973/1993) and to reveal tensions between different associated interpretations as well as take-for-granted discursive institutions (Yanow, 2000). The central question is how and why actors *frame* an issue in specific terms (Goffman, 1986), or, more specifically, the ways in which physical, social, and linguistic artifacts are employed in the communication and interpretation of policy issues.

Apart from this common core, the various IPA approaches display considerable differences in their specific goals, assumptions, and emphases. To appreciate this diversity, Wagenaar (2011) distinguishes between three categories: hermeneutic, discursive, and dialogical approaches. Hermeneutic approaches, first of all, aim to make systems of meaning (traditions, routines, cultures) intelligible by accessing the subjective experiences of ordinary individuals and, from their hidden assumptions, values, and emotions, reconstructing how (a part of) social reality *actually* looks like. Such thick description (Geertz, 1973/1993) of how actors attach meaning to phenomena in their social contexts can be enlightening, but often goes at the cost of a more critical stance towards possible flaws in the self-understanding of social actors, the assumption that meanings exist independent of the observer and can be readily discovered, and the role of overarching structures and power configurations. In response, discursive approaches focus on linguistic structures and power configurations and the ways in which these condition our knowledge and actions. The major benefit of this type of research is how it uncovers that what we consider to be true and possible inevitably depends on the historically contingent, taken-for-granted, and dispersed institutions in which our social categories, everyday relationships, and governance systems are encapsulated. But, as a result, the role of active agency often

remains ambiguously compromised by the pervasive force of overarching discursive structures (see Bevir & Rhodes, 2003).

Dialogical approaches, finally, attempt to strike a balance between the hermeneutic tendency to give thorough accounts of actual practice and the discursive inclination to see meaning in terms of the social configurations surrounding actors. This middle way is found by conceiving of *meaning as relational*; i.e., both social actors and researchers are engaged in “a constantly evolving process of interchange” (Fay, 1996 quoted in Wagenaar, 2011, p. 55) through which they try to come to an understanding of complex, contingent, and changeable situations. These understandings are always partial and tentative, as they depend on the specific physical, social, and temporal ways in which individuals are positioned in the world. Meaning is therefore not fixed in the consciousness of individuals and does also not exclusively reside in overarching institutional arrangements. Instead, Wagenaar (2011, p. 57) explains, meaning emerges from “our interactions with others and with the world”, and can be made insightful by capturing the “give-and-take” that “emerges from the patterned activities we engage in when we grapple with concrete situations that present themselves to us as in need of being resolved”. Although dialogical meaning remains provisional and open to revision, and thus cannot give guarantees against the fallibility of relational understandings, it puts this inevitable human condition at its core rather than just resorting to either (discursive) structure or (hermeneutic) agency.

These three approaches are all valuable parts of IPA and each has its own merits and pitfalls. However, taking a dialogical approach, under which narrative analysis can be classified, seems the most promising way to examine meaning and added value of public encounters in terms of their relational, situated communicative performances. Dialogical approaches, more than the other two, focus on action concepts –“all those terms that are used to describe doings as opposed to happenings” (Fay, 1975, p. 72)– which portray meaning not in terms of concealed cognitive acts or social configurations but, rather, as *practices*, or the performance of acts in a wider context. This means that only through their contextual enactment we can understand what it means that someone is, for example, sumo wrestling as opposed to boxing or fishing. The practice reveals how the rules-in-use are evoked in response to specific situations and what implications this has for the actors and the context. A good way to understanding the meaning and added value of public encounters for participatory democracy, then, is capturing how they are enacted in the communicative processes that make up participatory practice.

This research took a dialogical approach focused on daily *practices*. Practices are the thoughts and actions actors develop in response to the concrete situations they find themselves in. Practices are not merely working routines, habits of mind, standard operating procedures, technical knowledge, or specialized skills (Allison, 1969, pp. 698-707). Instead, practices are fundamentally the result of improvised *practical judgments* about concrete situations (Bordieu, 1972; Forester, 1993a; Wenger, 1998; Wagenaar, 2004; Laws & Hajer, 2006; Healey, 2009). Standardized practices and institutional arrangements of course do influence what actors do. But it is the concrete, practical face of ambiguous and complex social situations that “signals to the actor that certain actions are called for, but also that certain conventions, commitments, physical obstacles, normative beliefs, procedures or rules have to be taken into account” (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003, p. 150). By seeing participatory democracy as consisting of a range of practices, we can appreciate human agency and political-administrative, legal, and socio-economic conditions as these are brought to bear on concrete situations.

Practices come into being as partial and tentative mental constructions of the nature of the problem at hand and the feasibility of possible solutions (Argyris & Schön, 1976; Rein, 1983; Goffman, 1986; Rein & Schön, 1994; Laws & Rein, 2003). Although a great number of rules, structures, and habits provide stability and guidance to actors, each situation consists of a new, unique mixture of complex, ambiguous, and changeable elements. Because actors have limited mental and practical capacities, they resort to cognitive constructs that endow them a certain level of psychological certainty in responding to the situation (Simon, 1945/1997). Upon encountering a concrete situation, actors ask themselves either consciously or tacitly “What is going on here?” or “What just happened there?”. The question is what is included in their answer and what is not, and what implications the resulting practices have.

The genesis of any practice is littered with countless choices of which elements in the original problem situation to emphasize and which to neglect, which elements from earlier practices to incorporate and which to discard..., from which related practices to borrow in the solution of a problem, which consequences to take seriously and which to take for granted, and how in general to define what is relevant (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003, p. 165).

Analyzing practices, then, allows us to capture in detail the shape, content, and implications of different communicative acts for the quality of participatory democracy.

Thus, narrative analysis is a dialogical approach that reveals how actors go about *narratively* in their daily practices. Narratives are particularistic accounts of concrete experiences, which are located in a specific time and place and illuminate the complexity of practical actions and the multiplicity of values, knowledge, and identities inherent to the situation (Wagenaar, 1997; Abma, 1999; Forester, 1999b). The aim of narrative analysis is to tease out how actors structure stories about their experiences to contextualize, order, and legitimize their thoughts and actions. Analyzing many different narratives builds a detailed image of the multifaceted performances through which actors communicate with each other about concrete situations in participatory practice. As such, narrative analysis forms a suitable approach for grappling with the meaning and added value of the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens for the quality of participatory democracy. The next section explains in more detail the specific applications of narrative analysis.

The Work Narratives Do: From Stories to Theories

Narratives do a distinct type of *work* for actors (Forester, 1993b): through storytelling, actors engage in an “active, never-ending activity of sense making in a world of action” (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 219) that enables them to make practical judgments and influence the course of policy processes. By revealing the purposes particular stories fulfill in their policy context, we can uncover how storytellers communicate with their direct and wider audiences. Narratives thus enable, and follow from, everyday communicative practices. A crucial point here is that the added value and meaning of particular communicative practices are not pre-given and do not rest on a rational, objective assessment of their strengths and weaknesses for the situation at hand, but, instead, *derive from the work that narratives do*.

Four characteristics enable doing this work: narratives are open-ended, subjective, value laden, and action oriented (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 210-216). First, the course and meaning of stories are open to change: they are provisional representations of situations that can still take unexpected turns. What appeared to be the closure of a chapter can turn out to be merely a short passage. Second, stories are about the peculiarities of concrete people who face doubts and certainties about everyday issues. The details of the person and situation inevitably invite empathy, side-taking, and judgment. Third, narratives are not just random stories about people and situations, but are intelligible moral constructs of characters operating in a specific setting.

The concrete story represents beliefs and values about bigger underlying issues and how things ought to work. Fourth, narratives function as warrants that justify a particular course of action. The setting and plotting of a story endow actions in an indeterminate and complex context with certainty and legitimacy. Hence, narratives transmit information, emotions, moral values, beliefs, visions, and norms by weaving together these different bits and pieces of everyday human conduct in a meaningful whole.

The work narratives do is distinct from the work that adjacent social constructs such as frames and discourses do. Frames are cognitive definitions of problematical situations which organize thoughts to facilitate, or legitimate, action by linking *events or actions* (what has been done or will be done) to *values* (what should be done) and *causal beliefs* (what has brought about this situation or will bring about a desired situation) (Rein & Schön, 1993). Frame analysis is in particular applied to explain policy controversies in terms of conflicting frames about what has happened and should be done (Laws & Rein, 2003). Discourses are ensembles of linguistic structures, social practices, governing technologies, and substantive knowledge claims. The focus of discourse analysis is mainly on revealing how dispersed systems of micro-processes and argumentative struggles determine the shape policies take (see Fischer, 2003, pp. 73-114). Both these approaches could just as well be used to examine the communicative in-between. However, as the goal of the research is to widen and deepen our understandings of the relational, situated communicative performances of everyday practice, it makes more sense to analyze how actors go about in open-ended, subjective, value laden, and action oriented storytelling, rather than focusing on policy controversies or discursive ensembles.

Having said that, the boundaries between narratives, discourses, and frames are vague and the approaches to studying them varied and overlapping (see Laws & Rein, 2003). For example, Hajer's (1995) discourse analysis of environmental politics relies extensively on the concept of storyline. Narratives can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Depending on the goals of the research and the nature of the data, a narrative analysis will tend towards either a holistic approach, providing detail-heavy descriptions of significant themes of actors' lives, or a categorical approach focused on the identification of linguistic structures (see Chase, 2005; Elliot, 2005, p. 38). Forester's (1999b) approach is characteristic of the former: he provides pages long excerpts from unstructured interviews to illuminate how planners' daily practice is a matter of practical judgment, anticipation, imagination, emotional responsiveness, empathy,

and political sensibility. He then takes these skillfully apart to reveal the work narratives do to enable practices within social, political, and economical constraints. Alternatively, Gold & Hamblett (1999) take the latter approach by uncovering in short quotes how policy actors use linguistic devices such as intensifiers, markers, qualifiers, and metaphors to structure their accounts of situations.

In this study, I used both the holistic and categorical approach in response to the need for a particular kind of analysis that emerged from the data. For instance, when it struck me in the Glasgow case that the respondents were constantly referring to the same ambiguous concepts in many different, and often conflicting, ways, I classified their vocabulary to reveal a source of miscommunication. But I also extracted many long stories from interviews in which the respondents were describing, for example, how they participated in meetings, in order to show through which practices they sustained different modes of communication. I organized such holistic quotes around the codes that emerged from the analysis, a process which I will explain in the next section. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the analytical concepts I used to categorize different types of stories and narrative elements. As the table shows, I have freely borrowed frame concepts, such as causal belief and normative leap, and discursive concepts, such as signifiers and metaphors. The goal was always to reveal the narrative functioning of specific forms of communication rather than their role in policy controversies or their relationships to broader taken-for-granted structures.

Narrative element	Source(s)	Goal
<i>Frame</i> (actions, values, causal beliefs)	(Rein & Schön, 1993; Laws & Rein, 2003)	Reconstruct organization of thoughts
<i>Plot line</i> (e.g., story of decline) <i>Beginnings, middles, and ends</i> <i>Characters</i> (heroes and villains)	(Stone, 1989; Kaplan, 1993; Roe, 1994; Stone, 2002)	Reveal how causal and temporal order is imposed on a range of events
<i>Diagnostic-prescriptive stories</i>	(Rein & Schön, 1994)	Reveal normative leap from description to prescription
<i>Signifiers</i> (empty and floating) <i>Metaphors</i> (e.g. health, tools, war)	(Laclau, 1996; Jeffares, 2007) (Stone, 2002)	Categorize the vocabulary in use

Table 3.2 Categorical narrative elements

Two elements of this table merit further definition. First, *diagnostic-prescriptive stories* are stories that “describe what is wrong with the present situation in such a way as to set the direction for its future transformation” (Rein & Schön, 1994, p. 26). When actors reflect on the current state of affairs, they select and label certain salient features of what is a complex and

ambiguous situation and organize these features in a seemingly compelling and coherent way. This type of stories is akin to the various *causal stories* Stone (1989, 2002) distinguishes, but evolves more around the “normative leap” (Rein & Schön, 1994, p. 26) from description to prescription than around the specific plotlines emphasized by Stone. By using plotlines, actors shape their narratives as, for example, a story of decline to legitimize immediate intervention in a situation to prevent some kind of disaster: “In the beginning, things were pretty good. But they got worse. In fact, right now, they are nearly intolerable. Something must be done” (Stone, 2002, p. 138). In my narrative analysis, I compared conflicting diagnostic-prescriptive stories and plotlines to reveal the deeper tensions of seemingly innocent disagreements, as well as the need to address these communicative tensions rather than keeping the conversation focused on reaching agreement about the substantive issues.

Second, *signifiers* are ambiguous, evocative, and enticing concepts, which provide a common language. Their abstract, broad-brush, evocative, and symbolic nature can have a binding and integrative function, because it creates the impression of equivalent interpretations. But it can also be a source of conflict because misunderstandings, tensions, and conflicts are left implicit (Laclau, 1996; Stone, 2002). For example, signifiers such as “community”, “partnership”, or “engagement” can mean nothing and everything at the same time. We need to distinguish empty signifiers from floating signifiers (Jeffares, 2007). A concept forms a floating signifier when it embodies multiple meanings that actors seek to enforce in a hegemonic discursive struggle. It becomes an empty signifier when critical mass has accumulated for a particular interpretation to represent the “true” meaning of the idea or phenomenon. In each case, I have taken stock of the vocabulary of the respondents by identifying signifiers that were often used, counting how often they used them in the interviews, and comparing the quantitative and qualitative differences in their usage.

By using these analytical instruments, I moved the analysis along four levels of abstraction: first order narratives, second order narratives, meta-narratives, and theoretical narratives. First order narratives are the “bare” stories that the respondents told. I collected this “raw data” by conducting qualitative interviews (explained in the next section). Second order narratives are the analytical reconstructions of first order narratives. Using the analytical instruments listed above, I tried to construct an intelligible account of how the respondents used various narrative elements to render their experiences meaningful to themselves (conveying particular identities,

values, beliefs, feelings, etc.) and to the broader context they were a part of (why a specific audience had to appreciate the unusual or unexpected qualities and causal sequence of these events.) Second order narratives, then, focus on the interplay of the content, structure, and performance of the stories (Elliot, 2005).

Meta-narratives are the overarching stories of cases, covering a set of narratives, which reveal the significance of the situation in time and institutional context as well as how individual intentions and perceptions are related to this context and each other (Kohler Riessman, 2002; Fischer, 2003, chap. 8). Meta-narratives are collections of second order narratives that reveal how the same range of events, activity, or phenomenon is interpreted, acted upon, and valued in different ways, and how actors use specific narrative elements to organize these different interpretations. By comparing different second order narratives, I could make out the broader communicative patterns, tensions, disputes, and opportunities that together characterized the three cases. An important strategy in this process was to identify the “dominant narrative” that supported the most common mode of communication and compare this to the “counter-narrative(s)” that emphasized contrasting or conflicting viewpoints (Roe, 1994). From there, I could develop the theoretical narrative: the overall story of my research which synthesized the empirical results, presented the theoretical framework that had emerged, and clarified the links and contribution to the literature. The next section will further explain this process.

In sum, narrative analysis is a suitable approach for answering the main research question of how public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy. By analyzing the stories public professionals and citizens tell about their encounters in participatory practice, we can develop a detailed image of the relational, situated performative acts of their communicative in-between as well as the associated broader patterns, tensions, and outcomes. As a dialogical form of interpretative policy analysis, narrative analysis focuses on how the relational meaning of communicative practices emerges from participatory processes. Narrative analysis helps to understand the *work* that stories do for creating, modifying, and sustaining communicative practices and processes in concrete situations. Stories harbor different modes and patterns of communication which we can tease out and critically assess through a grounded analysis of qualitative data. As the steps and outcomes of this grounded analysis still need to be explained in more detail, the next section turns to the ways in which I conducted my narrative analysis.

Grounded Theory: A Dialogical Process of Analyzing Narratives

Analyzing narratives is a highly sensitive, subtle, and intricate process. A variety of qualitative and quantitative approaches is available to engage in this process (Abma, 1999; Elliot, 2005; Jones & McBeth, 2010). In this section, I explain why and how I examined the narratives of public professionals and citizens through a grounded theory process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory consists of a set of methods and techniques, or, rather, heuristics, to gather *high quality data* (deep, or thick, descriptions of actors' actual thoughts, experiences and actions) and analyze this data to formulate *original and cogent theories* (abstracted from and illustrated by the data). After having selected three divergent cases to compare, I conducted 59 intensive interviews to gather a wide variety of narratives, which I then analyzed through a grounded theory process of coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 1990, 2002, 2006). Each of these heuristics is characterized by tensions and intricacies, such as how open-ended a researcher can truly be in an inductive process, how detailed the coding process should be, or how far theorizing should go in generalizing (Dey, 1999). Therefore, this section explains in more detail how I tailored the grounded theory process to the analysis of the narratives of local actors in community participation.

Case selection

Selecting cases for my research was a tricky issue. Grounded theory does not provide specific guidelines for case selection³ or any strict rules in general. Instead, its heuristics –sensitizing concepts and strategies of inquiry– guide the researcher in being reflective, systematic, and grounded. Rather than proposing a one-best-way of doing interpretative research, the main concern is to monitor the “quality of qualitative research”. The founders of grounded theory, Glaser & Strauss (1967), found that a lot of research in the social sciences passed under the label *qualitative* while in reality it often forced findings into speculative theoretical categories without being firmly grounded in the empirical material⁴. Although grounded theory proposed to make qualitative research both rigorous and sensitive in analyzing the social world, the original, somewhat polemical, text left several tensions unresolved because of disagreements

³ In fact, interpretative research provides surprisingly few criteria for case selection.

⁴ This concern continues to be relevant today, as I often see researchers presenting findings based on unreflectively conducted interviews and analyses dominated by preconceived theories rather than systematic use of heuristics, leading to analytical gaps between data and theoretical speculation, often filled by normative bias.

between the authors. Strauss took a realist position and stressed the need for logical procedures and systematic comparison to *discover* the external world, while Glaser, from an interpretivist viewpoint, emphasized the need for letting concepts emerge inductively and acknowledge the role of the researcher in constructing these concepts (Charmaz, 2005).

This ambivalence between realism and interpretivism was reflected in the case selection of this research. A realist approach would require the formulation of deductive hypotheses and case selection criteria. A deductive process is aimed at preventing selection bias, overestimation, measurement error, and conceptual stretching in order to make valid generalizations about the empirical relationships between variable factors (Sartori, 1970; Lijphart, 1971; Rose, 1991; King et al., 1994; Collier & Mahony, 1996; Gerring, 2007). In contrast, an interpretative and inductive process cannot define any *a priori* hypotheses and case selection criteria, because in one way or another that would imply testing a pre-existing theoretical framework rather than open-ended exploration of a social phenomenon in order to *arrive at* such a theoretical framework. At the same time, we need some scientific justification for studying specific cases to prevent (suspicions of) randomness.

The realist approach to case selection follows the logic of quantitative and experimental analysis such as Mill's Methods (see e.g., King et al., 1994). The goal is to make solid causal inferences from empirical evidence to determine under which conditions, and with which probability, A causes B. For example, in *Governing the Commons*, Ostrom (1990) tries to find out what institutional arrangements cause success or failure in effectively managing common pool resources by examining in fourteen cases "the combination of situational variables that are most likely to affect individuals' choices of strategies" (p. 38). Interpretative research has different ambitions: cases do not serve as systematic evidence in support of a formal theory that details essential properties, causal connections, and the conditions under which these apply, but, instead, help to draw attention to a new way of seeing or a concept that for the most part has been overlooked. In *Seeing Like a State*, for instance, Scott (1998) asks "why so many well-intended schemes to improve the human condition" (p. 4) have failed and points at the crucial and yet neglected role of practical knowledge and know-how through an exploration of diverse cases such as German forestry, Tanzanian agriculture, and Brazilian urban planning.

In an interpretative approach, then, case selection is relatively open, because the cases

have a range of similarities at various levels of detail but they do not have any one essential property or set of properties in common. We do not master the new concept by discovering a rule that tells us when to apply it... Our grasp of the concept lies in our ability to provide reasons why it applies to one case but not another and our ability to draw analogies with other cases. We recognize the pattern when we can discuss whether or not it is present in other cases (Bevir, 2010, p. 12).

According to Bevir, there is nothing wrong with a rather ad-hoc approach to selecting cases, because the goal of the analysis is to make sense of contingent practices with the help of a general pattern or concept rather than the other way around. As we are not supposed to know at the beginning of an interpretative research process where it will take us (Wagenaar, 2011, chap. 9), any strict criteria for case selection will turn out to be futile. But that does not mean that deciding which cases to study is not guided by any logic; it is just that this is a logic of interpretative inquiry rather than of formal methods⁵. Interpretative case selection follows the logic of the problem, puzzle, or dilemma that motivates the research. As already explained in chapter 1, in the case of my research the initial dilemma was the coexistence of participatory democracy and bureaucratic government and their contradictory influences on the nature of public encounters. So, the cases had to help understand in the best way possible *what actually happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory practice*.

I figured that formulating an answer to this question set two basic requirements to the cases to be selected: they needed to be unmistakably cases of community participation and, secondly, they had to be so with the widest possible variety between them. After having formulated a definition of community participation which was sufficient for knowing what to look for, I tried to find cases with a high degree of *meaningful variation* between the ways in which citizens and public professionals encounter each other. I preliminarily selected the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Italy as three countries with a diverging socio-political context for community participation and explored the empirical literature to see whether differences in their governance systems and cultures as well as practical experiences with community participation would render comparison meaningful. After finding sufficient support for the meaningful variation between the countries, I then selected cities which had strikingly similar policies for community participation. Table 3.2 illustrates that Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna had recently issued a policy of which a main ambition was to “engage” or “involve”

⁵ In fact, Wagenaar (2011) argues that *heuristics*, rather than *methods*, is the most proper term for the kind of rules and strategies of inquiry that guide interpretative research, as the inductive process harbors so many unexpected turns and dilemmas that there is little method in managing the research.

citizens for more “social cohesion and inclusion” and “structural and sustainable” “influence”. In each city, I collaborated with a contact person to select the most challenging neighborhood possible in terms of deprivation, problems, and socio-economic and ethnic differences.

Glasgow	to “support the development of active and informed communities that can engage with and have an influence on the community planning process” (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p. 6)
Amsterdam	“ involving residents ... both with setting goals on the neighborhood level as with implementation and evaluation ... [with] extra attention for difficult to reach groups ... [as] to have structural and sustainable conversations ” (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008b, p. 5)
Bologna	“valuing the active citizenry , favoring an increase of social cohesion and inclusion, involving persons who are usually disadvantaged or less inclined to participate” (Comune di Bologna, 2008, art. 40.1)

Table 3.2 Policies for community participation (my translations)

The next subsection explains how I went about collecting qualitative data in each of the cases.

Data Collection: Intensive Interviewing

In each case, I started by writing a paper that explored the background of the local governance system, the community participation policies, and the neighborhood. This paper was based on analysis of all the relevant policy documents and research that I could obtain. To find my way in the local area, I found a locally well-embedded contact person at the neighborhood and/or city level who helped me to make an initial list of interview candidates, facilitated my access to all meetings during my research period, and provided me with relevant policy documents. Over the course of about three months, I then conducted 20 interviews with a variety of public professionals and residents who were active in each of the community participation projects. The selection of respondents developed organically according to emergent themes and suggestions made by other respondents, but in general I tried to talk to people with varying levels of experiences and expertise. I tried to maximize variation in backgrounds by contacting public professionals working in different organizations and functions, and residents living in different parts of the neighborhood and for varying periods of time. In concrete terms, the eventual raw data consisted of 655 pages transcribed interview text, notes of 8 meetings, and 42 analyzed policy documents (see table 3.3, p. 71).

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna	Total
Interviews	19	20	20	59
Meetings	3	4	1	8
Policy documents	13	19	10	42
Transcribed text	240 p.	234 p.	181 p.	655 p.
Memos (pages)	9 (64 p.)	8 (59 p.)	8 (88 p.)	25 (211 p.)

Table 3.3 Overview of fieldwork results⁶

Intensive interviewing formed the main thrust of the data collection process, while participant observation at meetings and document analysis were used additionally to check the reliability, or credibility (Fischer, 2003, pp. 154-155),⁷ of the first order narratives provided by the respondents and the second order narratives that came out of my analysis. In analyzing policy documents, this was done by extracting necessary background information about the history and characteristics of the neighborhood and project –and as such also becoming a more knowledgeable interviewer– and critically scanning for underlying values, beliefs, and goals. By observing participants at meetings, I attempted to obtain an impression of the atmosphere, topics, and modes of conduct of the residents and public professionals. Although I approached this in quite an unstructured fashion⁸, I often noticed that themes from the interviews also emerged during the meetings, participants acted in accordance with their first and second order narratives, and respondents adequately reconstructed those meetings at later interviews. The field notes taken during meetings, together with notes taken during the fieldwork in general, formed an important source of reflection on the course of the research (Fielding, 2001).

For the interviewing, an in-depth and intensive approach was taken (Weiss, 1994; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Wagenaar, 2011, chap. 9). The goal of the interviews was to *develop the narrative* of the respondents, i.e. learning about their experiences, which I as a researcher have not had but the interview provides me a window on. To do that, I tried to build a “working relationship” with the respondents (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 252-253). The key to high quality narratives, or good qualitative data, is making sure that the respondents understand the goals of the research and what is expected of them, as well as feel

⁶ Final interview in Glasgow was cancelled at the last moment and I was therefore unable to arrange an alternative before the end of the fieldwork period.

⁷ Participant observation and document analysis were not intended to conduct a validity check of the truthfulness of the interviews, i.e. whether respondents were actually doing what they said. In the end, the goal of the interviews was to develop an understanding of differences in interpretations, mental reconstructions, and frames (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002).

⁸ In the concluding chapter I will discuss how ethnography could have contributed to the research and provides a fruitful approach for future research.

comfortable enough for self-disclosure. If such a working relationship is absent, respondents will provide short and generalized statements, good intentions, and opinions, instead of the detailed, open, and extensive descriptions of personal experiences that narratives consist of. Therefore, I interviewed respondents in a setting they were familiar with (their office or a public meeting space) and explained in advance the purposes of the research and the interview. Most importantly, I always stressed that I was looking for detailed and concrete experiences, and that I was there to learn from them because *they* were the expert, not me. Although people often modestly denied the significance of their experiences, I made a sincere effort to convince them of the opposite.

During the interviews, my most important task was to monitor the quality of the data. This is a difficult task, because the interview should develop as a *directed conversation* or *unfolding story*, which on the one hand is informal, open-ended, and guided by what the respondent is saying, while, on the other hand, follows a general list of themes and questions to keep the respondent on topic (Charmaz, 2002; Wagenaar, 2011, chap. 9). I always let the wording and order of the questions vary according to what a respondent was telling me, thereby probably qualifying most as an unstructured interview (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). But there was in fact a certain structure: each interview had a beginning, middle, and end to ensure a natural build up of questions and expectations and flow of information and disclosure. Therefore, I always started with the same *opening question* (“You are a resident of [neighborhood]/working here as [function], could you please tell me under which conditions you first came to live/work here?”) and *closing question* (“Based on everything that you’ve told me, what lessons do you draw for the future?”). The opening question is formulated relatively open, but nevertheless centers attention on their personal history and actual experiences with regards to community participation by focusing on the concrete conditions under which they first came to live or work in the area. From their initial answer, many themes emerged that we could then explore further. The closing question induced respondents to reflect and get a sense of closure.

In the middle of the interviews, the questions were always formulated in an active and open way to stimulate respondents to provide as much useful detailed answers that did not sum up or skim over issues and experiences. I often had to ask the respondent for more elaboration or details of a statement, with probably the most often used question being: “Can you give me an example of a concrete situation in which you experienced this?”. Asking for examples guides a

respondent away from giving generalized answers or justifications that summarize rather than describe experiences. When determining the next question, I tried to create a natural transition from what a respondent had just said by either continuing on the same topic or coming back to a topic that was mentioned before (which I noted on my note pad with so-called “markers”). I further monitored the natural flow of the interview by being alert to emotional signals, encouraging them to tell more by verbal and non-verbal cues, not intruding the respondent’s story, and talking about myself only briefly and without disclosure when the respondent asked me something (Weiss, 1994; Charmaz, 2002; Legard et al., 2003).

Perhaps the best illustration of this interviewing approach comes from an interview with a police officer in Amsterdam. After talking for around 20 minutes about her daily activities, the neighborhood, and contact with residents, I asked how the introduction of the Neighborhood Approach –the community participation project– had affected her activities. She responded by asking me what *I* meant by “the Neighborhood Approach”, because for her it was completely unclear what this project had actually changed to her contact with residents. I responded that I thought it was very interesting that for her the change was unclear and encouraged her to tell me more about this continuation. In this way I not only diverted attention away from myself, but more fundamentally invited the respondent to develop her narrative about struggling with the added value of the project. It also led me to focus in other interviews on what respondents understood to be the nature and added value of the project, discovering that the project did not have very clear rules and structures and was only an overarching label for a broad array of diverse and ongoing activities, and identifying the flexibility of the policy framework as an important conceptual issue.

As such, the data gathering of my research followed a grounded theory process to reveal “constructions or competing definitions of the situation as given *in action*, not merely stated in reconstructed accounts” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 180; emphasis added). The quality of the data is in the level of concreteness and detail of the respondents’ narratives. This enabled me to raise analytical issues out of diverging stories, and translate these into conceptual categories and, then, theoretical explanations. Therefore, I recorded and transcribed the interviews word-for-word as to get a firm grounding in what a respondent had actually said. By transcribing verbatim, not omitting “um-s”, repetitions, errors, and incoherent sentences, I could present utterances in their actual, real-world, narrative form and was able to tease out doubts and

inconsistencies in the thinking of a respondent. The next subsection explains how coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling further guided the grounded theory process.

Data Analysis: Coding, Memo-Writing, and Theoretical Sampling

The analysis of the transcribed interviews started with coding: “the process of defining what the data are about” by “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). The most important question to ask when looking at interview data is: *What is this an instance of?* This helps to take the first step in going from description to conceptualization: what is actually going on in the data? Codes have to be active and evocative words that are narrow enough to describe detailed parts of data and broad enough to represent underlying assumptions and feelings or broader patterns and tensions. In other words, codes are sensitizing concepts that stick closely to the view of the respondents as well as lead to theoretical categories. I always tried to stick close to the data by describing respondents’ thoughts and activities on their own terms, rather than immediately applying already existing theories, to see things that would be overlooked from *a priori* assumptions. For example, the code *canalizing* was very helpful for interpreting the goal-oriented way of working in relation to the strict political mandate in the Bologna case. *Canalizing* enabled me to suspend theories of dependence on political support and power inequality to set the agenda, and, instead concentrate on the practices through which local actors managed to “dig the canal” in the first place, how they focused attention and energy on specific topics within its “shorelines”, and which issues were left out of the conversation by the straight line the canal drew from A to B.

While the use of sophisticated software packages such as NVivo are popular for grounded theory, I analyzed interviews in a more crude way by using the comment function of Microsoft Word to label segments of data, or meaning units (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 262). The meaning unit can vary from a sentence to a chunk of text as large as a page, depending on *what that piece of data is an instance of*. Each interview generated some new codes, even though this happened less towards the end of the research process. Initial coding led to a variety of detailed codes in the beginning and gradually turned into focused coding, in which I only started to use the most significant and frequent codes. In each case I tried to start afresh rather than importing codes from the other cases, but several codes proved to work in making sense of specific practices in

each case. For example, in the Amsterdam case I ended up with 13 codes which I had used in at least two interviews; 4 of these had originally emerged in the Glasgow case, while 7 of them made it into the thesis. In order to interpret codes, I used narrative elements by, for example, pinpointing the frame (values, actions, and causal beliefs) of each respondent and counting their use of empty signifiers. I then noted the codes and the numbers of the comments in a separate document together with some initial explanations of their meaning. This document then formed the basis for a memo, which I wrote according to the themes that emerged from the comparison of several interviews⁹.

Memo-writing was a pivotal intermediate step between initial analysis and writing drafts as it helped to evaluate the data and analysis, i.e. to explain codes, link them to each other, develop ideas, and fine-tune subsequent data search (Charmaz, 2006). Several techniques that helped to focus memos were to give them a title, define categories, and discuss where the categories and data were leading the research. Furthermore, numerical and graphical representations of codes, actors, and connections aided insight into the relationships between codes and categories (Roe, 1994, pp. 155-162). Initial memos were detailed reconstructions of first order narratives. In more advanced memos I developed meta-narratives by defining categories, identifying gaps, and looking for patterns. Gradually, the focus changed from comparing data with data towards *creating dialogue between theory and data*. Indeed, while my first memos were analyses of individual interviews of about 2-3 pages, final memos were theoretically driven treatises of about 20 pages. As such, memo-writing furthered the grounded theory process from analytical categories as descriptive and synthesizing tools to conceptual categories that serve theoretical definition and the production of a meta-narrative.

The codes emerged and developed from a creative and iterative interpretative process. Each code has its own story: some quickly disappeared while others stuck right from the beginning of a case; some came directly from the words of a respondent while others sprung from my mind; some described a single practice while others continuously took on wider and more diverse meanings. I will discuss the origins of one code in each of the empirical chapters to further illuminate the cases and focus on one example here to provide more insight in the analytical process. *Work in progress* is one of the most powerful and interesting codes of the

⁹ While a few memos were written about 1 interview and a few about 4 interviews, usually the memos covered 2 or 3 interviews.

research. It was not only one of the first codes, but also one of the few that originated from the words of a respondent. In the third interview in Glasgow, a Community Planning officer concluded his description of all the practices he engaged in to stimulate community engagement by saying that:

But that's again what I say about the nature of it and it's about continuing to go out and spread the word and networking with partners to make sure that ... they're spreading the word... So, but it's just an ongoing piece of work ... that doesn't stop... So very much **work in progress**...

First of all, when analyzing the interview, “work in progress” immediately appealed to me as a succinct and evocative way to capture what the practices of this Community Planning officer were an instance of. That is, it helped me to describe (in memo 3) how his narrative revolved around the high workload that resulted from the high turnover of participants, ambiguity about the practical implications of Community Planning, and the complexity of bringing together a diverse community and group of public agencies.

But, secondly, it would quickly take on a broader meaning. By comparing his narrative with that of an antagonized resident in memo 4, it struck me how the Community Planning officer made a “normative leap” (Rein & Schön, 1994) by stating that the *work in progress* is “in the nature of it”; i.e., while he assumes that *work in progress* is something that needs to be accepted and requires ongoing professional support, the antagonized resident took the *work in progress* as a sign of professional incompetence and the futility of Community Planning. While the resident told a lot about the *work in progress* of local problems and community engagement, her narrative was not structured around a belief in accommodating this in any other way than simply empowering “the community”. Thirdly, I started to compare narratives by asking: to which degree do they recognize *work in progress*? How open are they to other's stories about *work in progress*? And are the stories local actors tell about their wide variety of experiences with the complexity, ambiguity, and changeability of their setting an instance of their belief in the value or futility of Community Planning for dealing with *work in progress*? I came back to this issue in memos 5, 6, 8, and 9, but did not yet grasp the magnitude of *work in progress*.

But this started to happen, fourthly, when during the Amsterdam case I found more and more narratives structured around the belief in recognizing and accommodating *work in progress*. I

was wary of transferring codes from one case to the others, so while analyzing the first four interviews I came up with several other codes (*finding the way, losing track, being reasonable, being occupied, getting to grips*) to make sense of the ways in which the local actors were determining what to do in their complex, ambiguous, and changeable setting. But, from memo 3 onwards, *work in progress* kept on making more sense in capturing the complicated details and ongoing change of the local setting. Local actors told many stories of *seemingly small problems* (see chapter 5) which were an instance of their awareness of the *work in progress* of their setting as well as their tendency to adapt to this in pragmatic ways by *getting to grips*. These codes were worked out memos 5, 6, 7, and 8. In the Bologna case, finally, *work in progress* helped from the first interview onwards to capture how the narratives of the majority of local actors were an instance of their belief in the *groundbreaking* nature of their participatory experiences for dealing with their up to then extremely challenging setting. In each of the following memos *work in progress* was further broadened and deepened, so that in the end it turned into the general code for the process through which local actors engaged with their setting, as well as the underlying tensions between their narratives of which institutional design best fitted this setting.

The meta-narratives developed along similar lines. To reiterate from p. 66, meta-narratives form the overarching story of a case, displaying the broader patterns, tensions, problems, and opportunities that emerged from comparing the narratives of local actors. To be sure, capturing a case in a single meta-narrative means that details and nuances are cut out in order to make the broader pattern visible. At the same time, a meta-narrative tells a nuanced story about internal contradictions, variations on the broader pattern, and underlying tensions. The key question for constructing the meta-narratives was: which code best captures the overall story that I want to tell about this case? The narrative analysis helped to find an answer because it identified in each case a dominant narrative and a counter narrative (Roe, 1994), which were revolving around a main pattern. For instance, the local actors in Bologna were manifestly divided between a majority telling stories of “helplessness and control” to praise the benefits of *canalizing* and a minority telling stories of “change is only an illusion” (Stone, 2002) to criticize the potential of *canalizing* for solving local problems. While several powerful codes emerged (*groundbreaking, creating conditions, nuts and bolts, keeping distance*), I found that most narratives in the Bologna case were an instance of the broader pattern of *canalizing*. The origins of the three meta-narratives are explained in more detail in chapter 4.

Finally, the process turned to perhaps the trickiest part: theoretical sampling. This refers to the stage in which one should be more confident in judging what the most relevant parts of the analysis are and how the data could be rearranged and ordered. Theoretical sampling means turning the inductive process on its head, by taking the emerged theory and returning to the collected data and/or to the field for additional data. Data analysis is supposed to be guided by the emerged theoretical categories in order to reconfirm their presence, refine their properties and links to the broader context, and spot possible flaws and unforeseen insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory leaves unclear, though, when this *salto mortale* exactly has to be conducted. To some extent, the usefulness of grounded theory remains limited to the process of sensible *theorizing* grounded in the empirical data: “theory generation continues to be the unfilled promise and potential of grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 135). While several criteria exist for assessing the quality of the data, their collection, and the analysis, we have no specification of what a grounded theory should look like, let alone epistemological criteria for assessing its quality (Dey, 1999).

I found it difficult to determine when the research process had arrived at a coherent and consistent theoretical framework that was strong enough for deductive application. With hindsight, I was too eager to get to the theoretical conclusions and start writing the chapters of this thesis. I underestimated the amount of work involved with doing a focused review of the literature, establishing links between my findings and existing theories, and determining my contribution. Over the course of nine months, I took several attempts at reformulating the main argument and contribution by writing papers and chapters. But the most valuable heuristics in this period were writing theoretical memos and feedback reports for each of the three cases: the latter forced me to explain in clear terms what I had found and what that meant, the former helped me to write freely about my ideas for and dilemmas with formulating a theory. Through this process of going back-and-forth between theories and data, I started to see that my findings were substantially about the quality of communication, refined my understanding of what this meant, and in the end came up with the theoretical concept of communicative capacity for rearranging and making sense of the data.

In sum, grounded theory offered a helpful set of heuristics for accessing and assessing the narratives of local actors about their participatory practices. Intensive interviewing, coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling guided the inductive interpretation of the narratives

towards an analytical understanding of underlying assumptions and broader patterns as well as the formulation of meta-narratives and theoretical frameworks. Through a dialogue between theory and data, I could start to understand how local actors were related to their social context and how the cases could be compared to each other. However, there are no criteria to assess the exact nature and quality of a grounded theory. So what is it, then, that we are left with after a grounded theory process analyzing the narratives of local actors? Is it more than just an in-depth description of the cases? If the outcome is a theory grounded in practice, how does such a theory look like and what is its added value? The next section turns to these questions by clarifying how capturing the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens leads to a theoretical account of relational processes of knowing-in-interaction.

Knowing-in-Interaction: Theorizing Relational Process

The final part of this chapter tries to cast some light on the type of knowledge that emerged from the narrative analysis of the stories public professionals and citizens told about their encounters in participatory practice. The preceding section explained how this knowledge emerges through a process of grounding theories in practice, but that its epistemic qualities are unclear. At the same time, the discussion of public encounters, communicative in-between, interpretivism, IPA, dialogical practices, narrative analysis, and grounded theory has provided some indications as to how we might appreciate the theory that emerged from the research. The previous chapter clarified how and why this thesis tries to formulate an answer to the research question (*how do public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy?*) by examining the meaning and added value of the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens. This section explains how the emergent theory aims to capture their communicative practices as emerging through a relational process of *knowing-in-interaction*.

Chapter 2 explained that the thesis aims at deepening and widening our understandings of the added value of public professionals and citizens coming together for participatory democracy by focusing on the encounter itself as a distinct phenomenon. That means considering that what public professionals and citizens are able to do and achieve is not a function of their pre-held preferences or of the contextual conditions, but emerges from the process of interacting with each other and the situation at hand. That which happens in the communicative space in-between public professionals and citizens, i.e. their practices, or practicing, of participation, is

what shapes the meaning and added value of their encounters. So, the goal is to make sense of the process through which public professionals and citizens arrive at an understanding of what to say in a specific situation or how to address someone else. As explained on p. 60, we can grapple with this process of *knowing-in-interaction* by capturing the meaning of what local actors do in terms of their relational practices. This approach builds Donald Schön's notion of knowing-in-action:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life we show ourselves knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action" (Schön, 1983, p. 49; emphasis in original)

Reformulating the notion of knowing-in-action as *knowing-in-interaction* helps to emphasize the focus on the relational process through which the contextual enactment, or performance, of communicative practices emerges. A brief discussion of the recent development of a relational ontology and an epistemology of practice around the notion of process helps to further explain what this approach does for our understanding of the meaning and added value of public encounters for participatory democracy,

First, in a relational ontology (Stout & Staton, 2011), the basic premise is that processes do not exist as a result of the activities of substantive entities such as organizations, policies, or public professionals, but, instead, are distinctive forces constitutive of these substantive entities. Processes are "design-independent" (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 277-279), "unowned" (Rescher, 1996, p. 44) non-substantial forces with distinct characteristics that influence what substantive happenings and entities come into being. So, the nature and meaning of, for example, a participatory project do not follow from the stable properties of a set of actors, institutions, and problems, but rather reside in the interactions between them. What we claim to know about this participatory project are not the stable traits of a fixed entity "out there", but rather the emergent properties of the interactions of the actors with each other and the situation at hand. Actors are engaged in an "eternally unfolding present", or temporally and contingently evolving process, in the course of which they activate knowledge to form an "actionable understanding" of the most feasible course of action (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). In doing so, they actively draw on, and recompose, their structuring

background of “ongoing business” (ibidem), as well as provisionally redefine themselves against the differences of others in a process of “mutual becoming” (Follett, 1919; Stout & Staton, 2011).

Asserting that we cannot account for everything going on in participatory practice in terms of stable properties or contingent subjectivities is not to deny that certain substantive things exist in social and physical reality. Rather, it is to claim that “people bring ... [these things] into existence by the ways in which they attend to, distinguish, define, and act towards” (Prus, 1996, pp. 11-12) them while being engaged in the “push and pull of the world” (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011). The work of Follett (1924) is helpful to understand why seeing social situations in terms of process is so important. She explained that human activities are never merely a response to a static external stimulus; while performing an action, we change our thoughts towards it as well as to the setting, which then changes the activity towards our new thoughts and the setting, etc., etc. This “circular response” makes that in social settings distinguishing between “you”, “me”, and the “situation” is both impossible and futile: the interactive process between these three is constantly changing “you”, “me”, and the “situation” into something different. Therefore, the goal is to capture the dynamics of this process of “interweaving” (Follett, 1919) in terms of the concrete contingent activities with which we interact with each other and the situation at hand.

Second, process cannot be captured in formal definitions but only in terms of practice. In an epistemology of practice, it is practice, and not theory, that has (epistemic) primacy (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011). Theory has to illuminate the meanings of social phenomena in their local context, not in an abstract or philosophical sense, but in terms of the concrete organization of social and political life (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Laws & Hajer, 2006). By interpreting their everyday practices, we can reconstruct what actors are actually conveying when they communicate, and formulate theories that put this conduct into perspective. What we want to comprehend are the ways in which actors make practical judgments in the face of concrete situations (Fischer, 2003, pp. 150-151). Theories need to clarify not how knowledge is (to be) applied in practice, but how “practice addresses the constraints and affordances of what we know and the contexts within which alone we can generate and deploy what we know” (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011, p. 209). Practice has distinct epistemic qualities of its own that activate us in using certain knowledge in our interactions with each other and the world. Thus,

knowledge does not underlie and enable practice; what we know depends on what we do (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011).

Process and relational meaning cannot be simply read off practices, nor can they be understood easily, but, rather, emerge from a dialogical analytical process. As explained on pp. 57-62, to discover the nature and meanings of practices, we cannot settle for what actors state their intentions, beliefs, and perceptions to be, and accept these self-interpretations as the way the situation “truly” is (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 18-19, 48-50). Rather, we need to ask them about what they *do*, what their daily practices are. The meaning of these practices has to be actively interpreted by going back-and-forth between different practices, concrete situations, and local context, and analyzing the work narratives do for these practices. In this dialogical process we confront initial assumptions with empirical data, from which we generate analytical categories, which we then compare again with empirical data, etc. etc. The type of (grounded) theorizing going on here is a form of *ideal-typing*: building analytical accounts “of the meaning of a social phenomenon [in which] [t]raits from empirical reality [are] brought together into a meaningful unified construct” (Stout, 2010b, p. 499). This means abstracting away from the empirical details without losing touch with these details or collapsing apparent similarities into a narrow interpretation that unduly reconciles significant differences. The value of a theory, then, lies in “the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with ... the informal logic of actual life” (Geertz, 1973/1993, p. 16).

Moreover, further to the discussion on p. 58, the emergent theory of *knowing-in-interaction* is not to provide “the definitive resolution of a [problem], but the temporary stabilization of a situation that is unhinged or threatens to become so” (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 309). It has to help in dealing with the “radical uncertainty” (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003, pp. 9-10) of daily practice (Laws & Hajer, 2006). As there is no Archimedean point from which we can resolve the overwhelming complexity and pluralism that define contemporary policy issues, we can never eradicate the possibility that unanticipated or undesirable consequences emerge from the unforeseen interactions of the plural, complex, and contingent elements of a situation (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 14-15). Misunderstandings, tensions, and conflicts are inevitable to the human condition. The answer to this condition is to aim for “enhancing the awareness of uncertainty and unawareness” (Hajer, 2003, p. 186). That means that a theory has to facilitate actors in asking intelligible questions about conventional ways of thinking and acting by being

empirically grounded in what actors actually do, *interpretatively sensitive* to the meanings of these actions, and *ethically illuminating* for dealing with concrete situations (Forester, 1993a, pp. 18-19; Bevir, 2010, pp. 10-13).

In conclusion, this section has explained the way in which I have gone about in theorizing the *knowing-in-interaction* of public professionals and citizens as to supplement the discussion of the type of knowledge that comes out of a grounded theory process, and, more importantly, to further clarify how we might understand public encounters as a distinct phenomenon that has direct consequences for the quality of participatory democracy. By discussing the notion of process in terms of a relational ontology and an epistemology of practice, it was explained that we can capture the meaning and added value of public encounters in terms of the practices that emerge from relational processes of interacting with each other and concrete situations. That is, what happens when public professionals and citizens meet depends on the communicative practices that emerge through the process of engaging with the push and pull of participatory practice. The next chapters demonstrate that public professionals and citizens tend to sustain dominant communicative patterns that limit their ability to solve local problems, because three processes of participatory practice keep on focusing the attention of their narratives on the substance rather than the process of communication. This leads to a theory of communicative capacity in the concluding chapter that helps to make sense of meaning and added value of public encounters, or communicative in-between, for the quality of participatory democracy.

Final Remarks

After the discussion of narrative analysis in this chapter, we can hardly contest John Forester's statement that *apparently innocuous storytelling ... can do a great deal of work*. Forester is one of the pioneers of narrative analysis, as his work has demonstrated that giving thorough consideration to the stories policy actors tell about their everyday experiences can lead to more informed theories and practices of policy making. From this standpoint, I have considered how analyzing narratives helps to examine the meanings and added value of public encounters for participatory democracy. I discussed how narrative analysis might help to understand public encounters, or communicative in-between, as a distinct phenomenon by identifying it as a dialogical form of interpretative policy analysis, explaining that narratives can harbor specific forms of communication, accounting for the grounded theory process through which I have

developed a theoretical narrative from the stories local actors told, and clarifying how we can meaningfully theorize practices of *knowing-in-interaction* in terms of relational process. Taken together, the chapter has tried to make insightful the *great deal of work* that *apparently innocuous storytelling* has done for this research to explain how the quality of participatory democracy is shaped in the encounters of public professionals and citizens.

4. Communicative Patterns and Process: What Happens When Public Professionals and Residents Meet

the lesson is that participation needs to be understood not as a moment but as a process
~ Public professional Bologna

This chapter provides a first answer to the research question: *how do the encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?* The preceding two chapters explained that questions have arisen on the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy, and, this thesis aims at finding a better understanding by examining the concrete practices and processes that form the communicative in-between. This chapter presents the empirical findings of my research to answer the first sub question: *what happens when public professionals and residents meet in community participation?* The main argument of this chapter is that, when they met, public professionals and residents developed patterns of communication that constrained their ability to solve local problems. In each of the cases, communicative patterns were embedded in the interactions of local actors with each other and their local context, affecting the course of the conversation often with little regard for the style of communicating suitable to the situation at hand.

The comparison of the three cases reveals that each case had a distinct communicative pattern. Each pattern had specific benefits and shortcomings, and none was ideal for all circumstances. The ways in which public professionals and residents addressed each other tended to follow the same local pattern, because they focused their attention on substantive issues instead of the process of communication. However, the analysis shows that the conversations between local actors were often unproductive because they did not address conflicting beliefs, values, and feelings below the surface of their communicative performances. Hence, the chapter suggests that awareness of the nature and impact of various modes of communication could facilitate different conversations and outcomes. To better grapple with the quality of the process in-between public professionals and citizens, the analysis leads to the notion of communicative capacity: the ability to recognize and break through dominant patterns of communication by adapting the conversation to the needs of the situation at hand. This finding provides a preliminary answer to the research question: the quality of participatory democracy hinges on the communicative capacity public professionals and residents exercise in their encounters.

The next chapters will show in more detail how this still nebulous notion works and what makes it so complicated.

Participatory Practice as Process

The main lesson of this chapter is “*that participation needs to be understood not as a moment but as a process*”. Participation practice is never perfect and there are no definite measures to resolve local problems. One mode of communication might work well at one moment, but needs not necessarily be adequate for future situations. No optimal mode of communication exists, because, as the analysis shows, communicative patterns are based on two indispensable, yet incompatible, underlying belief systems: *Community* (local actors need to be left free to communicate depending on their social interdependencies, common values, and reciprocity) and *Planning* (stable relationships and fixed institutions have to enable local actors in channelling their knowledge to pre-set goals). Although these belief systems surfaced from the internal divisions among local actors in the Community Planning system of Glasgow, it is a helpful heuristic to compare the other two cases, where either *Community* (Amsterdam) or *Planning* (Bologna) proved to be the dominant belief system underlying local narratives. Understanding community participation as process means being aware of the ways in which the narratives of local actors uphold these belief systems, and, in consequence, reduce the quality of their communicative process to a specific pattern of communication as well as their ability for moving practical situations forward. They could change this by adapting the type of talk to temporarily stabilize the irresolvable tension between *Community* and *Planning*.

This focus on ways to solve problems (substance) rather than on the type of communication appropriate in specific situations (process) reflects the tendency to treat the communicative in-between as instrumental to substantive issues under discussion. As explained on pp. 48-55, public encounters are often not considered as a relational process with a distinct base of existence in participatory democracy. That what happens in the communicative space in-between public professionals and citizens tends to be approached in terms of undistorted transmission of information, ideas, and arguments. How to address each other often goes unnoticed, and remains enfolded in the (inter)actions between local actors. However, as this chapter will show, by seeing the communicative in-between in terms of relational, situated

performances, we can grapple with the meaning and added value of the communicative practices residing in the tacit, enfolded knowledge-in-interaction that often goes unnoticed.

In each of my three cases, public professionals and residents had a dominant communicative pattern, which, in distinct ways, enabled and restricted their ability to understand each other, make decisions, and solve local problems. In the Glasgow case, local actors were engaged in a pattern of *making it work*: overt and tacit disputes between opposed views on the issue of “it is working” or not, which sustained a situation of antagonism and stalemate. In Amsterdam, local actors had a more pragmatic pattern of communication, *being in touch*, in which mutual trust and personal relationships served as the basis for gradually finding solutions to local problems, while, at the same time, not facilitating structural changes. The case of Bologna was characterized by the communicative pattern of *canalizing*: ordered and reasoned exchange of arguments within fixed boundaries to make concrete decisions, but also achieving little beyond these fixed boundaries. These dominant patterns of communication proved hard to change because local actors prioritized attention to the immediate issues at hand rather than to the forms and pattern of their communication and the underlying beliefs, values, and feelings that supported these.

These three dominant patterns form the meta-narratives of the cases. As explained on pp. 66, 77, meta-narratives leave out details and nuances to make a broader pattern visible and also reveal inherent tensions of and variations on this pattern. These meta-narratives gradually developed through the analytical process by comparing second order narratives and locating the central issue around which the dominant and counter narrative revolved. In Glasgow case, the narratives of the local actors were deeply divided in two opposing groups. Although they were friendly with each other at the meetings I attended and were not fighting all the time, all local actors told stories about how they were not really making enough of a difference to local problems. *Making a difference* emerged from the narrative of respondent G5, a resident who was probably the most fiercely opposed to Community Planning of all local actors, as she was angry about how its introduction had caused the community groups and organizations she was involved in to lose public funding and decision making power despite working well. This code initially best captured the pattern of antagonism and stalemate. However, during the chapter writing I changed the code for the meta-narrative into *making it work*, which seemed to work a bit better in capturing their unproductive fixation on whether “it was working or not”. This

code also proved helpful in making sense of the other cases, as generating positive effects tends to be the most important concern of all local actors. But in Amsterdam, the local actors were much more pragmatic and not divided, as everyone shared the value of *being in touch*. In Bologna there was a division among local actors, but a majority of them found that *canalizing* was working.

Along these lines, the analysis shows that the work the narratives of public professionals and residents did for their in-between was sustaining dominant patterns of communication. By capturing the communicative pattern of each case in a meta-narrative, the analysis reveals how their narratives enabled them to achieve only so much through their public encounters. For each case, the analysis takes four steps:

- 1) a historical narrative which facilitates understanding of how a communicative pattern emerged in the local context;
- 2) a comparison of individual narratives which shows that local public encounters were embedded in this dominant pattern of communication;
- 3) an interpretation of storylines, causal beliefs, or diagnostic-prescriptive stories to tease out the beliefs and tensions below the surface of the narratives; and
- 4) a reflection on how the dominant pattern of communication affected the quality of participatory democracy.

In the concluding section, the three meta-narratives come together in a view of community participation as process. By considering the quality of participatory democracy as ongoing process, we can start to see why public professionals and residents need the communicative capacity to recognize and break through dominant patterns and tailor their conversations to the needs of the situation at hand.

Glasgow: Making it Work

...we know how we want to do it. But the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice... (Respondent G4 – Community Planning officer)

The Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) was the first case of the research. Immediately, this case made apparent that communicative patterns are a central and neglected part of participatory practice. Although the notion of communicative capacity emerged much later along the analytical process, the GCPP case suggested that constructive and productive

patterns of communication are vital for *making it work*. *Making it work* is a powerful, and somewhat ironic, title for the meta-narrative of the GCPP, because it indicates that local public encounters were dominated by *antagonistic communication through overt and tacit disputes about the issue whether Community Planning was working or not*. Across the board, public professionals and residents were committed to solving the grave problems local communities were facing, but found that they had only limited possibilities for actually *making it work*. As respondent G4, the key figure in the area for getting residents to participate and public professionals to engage with them, summarized the main dilemma of her work “the theory of how you’d plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice”. Thus, *making it work* both refers to the gap between their ideals and actual practice, and the antagonistic pattern of communication through which local actors talked about, and further reinforced, this impasse.

The analysis reveals in four steps that the communicative pattern of *making it work* inhibited local actors in moving their discussions forward and spending their time more productively on finding solutions to local problems. First, the local context is sketched in which the meta-narrative of *making it work* emerged in order to reveal the origins of the tendency to contest whether “it is working”. Second, the analysis shows that local actors tended to communicate by expressing, and not moving beyond, their conflicting standpoints. They often assumed that they were right (and others wrong) and hardly ever enquired into each other’s underlying beliefs, experiences, and emotions. However, when we, thirdly, move below the surface of their narratives, two things become clear: (a) all local actors shared a commitment to *making it work*, and (b) the opposition between their conflicting views was related to a fundamental tension between the two contradictory underlying belief systems of *Community* and *Planning*. Finally, I argue that local public professionals and residents could benefit from recognizing the presence of this underlying tension and the dominant communicative pattern, and reflecting on the ways in which this distorts their shared ambition for *making it work*.

Since the New Labour white papers *Modernising Government* (1998) and *Neighbourhood Renewal* (1998, 2001), the landscape of urban governance has significantly changed (Foley & Martin, 2000; Johnstone & Whitehead, 2004a). The goal was to develop collaborative and inclusive partnerships to promote democratic renewal, social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. All local authorities had to put Local Strategic Partnerships

(LSPs), called Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) in Scotland¹⁰, in place that “joined up” all relevant policy areas and local public agencies (Imrie & Raco, 2003a). Moreover, urban policies included the formal requirement to grant residents a role in local governance processes. However, despite far-reaching ambitions, policies left the structures and procedures through which partnerships had to operate unspecified and were not grounded on a formal division of legal, financial, and political responsibilities (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2004; Sinclair, 2008).

In 2004, the GCPP was introduced to replace the Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs), which had been present in eight Glaswegian neighborhoods. The GCPP was to provide *in every area of the city* the same structures and rules for collaboration between local public agencies, voluntary organizations, private sector organizations, and “the community”. In accordance with the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003), the GCPP committed to instituting “more effective delivery through partnership ... [and] effective and genuine community engagement” (2004, p. 2). The Glasgow Community Plan 2005-2010 envisaged four goals: (1) coordinated, equal, and cohesive partnership working; (2) equal and comprehensive structures across the city; (3) broad, inclusive, and equal engagement of residents; (4) actual influence of residents on decision making (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004). Concrete strategies for achieving these goals needed to be specified annually in a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) based on local needs and consensus of all local stakeholders, and also reflecting the Scottish Government’s National Outcomes and National Performance Framework¹¹.

The GCPP was governed by a Strategic Board, which consisted of six statutory partners¹². The city was divided in five strategic planning areas (North, East, South East, South West, and West), each again divided into two Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) areas. Each LCPP consisted of several collaborative structures¹³, of which the LCPP Boards and the Community Reference Groups (CRGs) were the most important. LCPP Boards were strategic

¹⁰ In England, Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) and later LSPs were instituted. After devolution in 1999, the Scottish Executive first continued with the SIPs and replaced them with CPPs in the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003).

¹¹ Furthermore, other policy documents that had to be taken into account were *Modernising the Planning System*, *Regeneration Outcome Agreement 2006-2008*, *Fairer Scotland Fund*, *Framework for Community Reference Groups*, and *National Standards for Community Engagement*.

¹² Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue, Strathclyde Police, and Glasgow Chamber of Commerce

¹³ These will be further discussed in chapter 5.

platforms for representatives of local partner agencies, the CRG, and local councilors. In the area where the research took place, the LCPP Board formally consisted of 20 members: four Councilors, five community residents¹⁴, and eleven members from partner agencies¹⁵, and was attended by several Community Planning officers. The CRGs consisted of individual residents and Community Forum¹⁶ representatives, totaling up to 18 members in the area where the research was conducted. LCPP Boards and CRGs each met every 6-8 weeks to discuss collaborative projects, neighborhood management, and modes of community engagement.

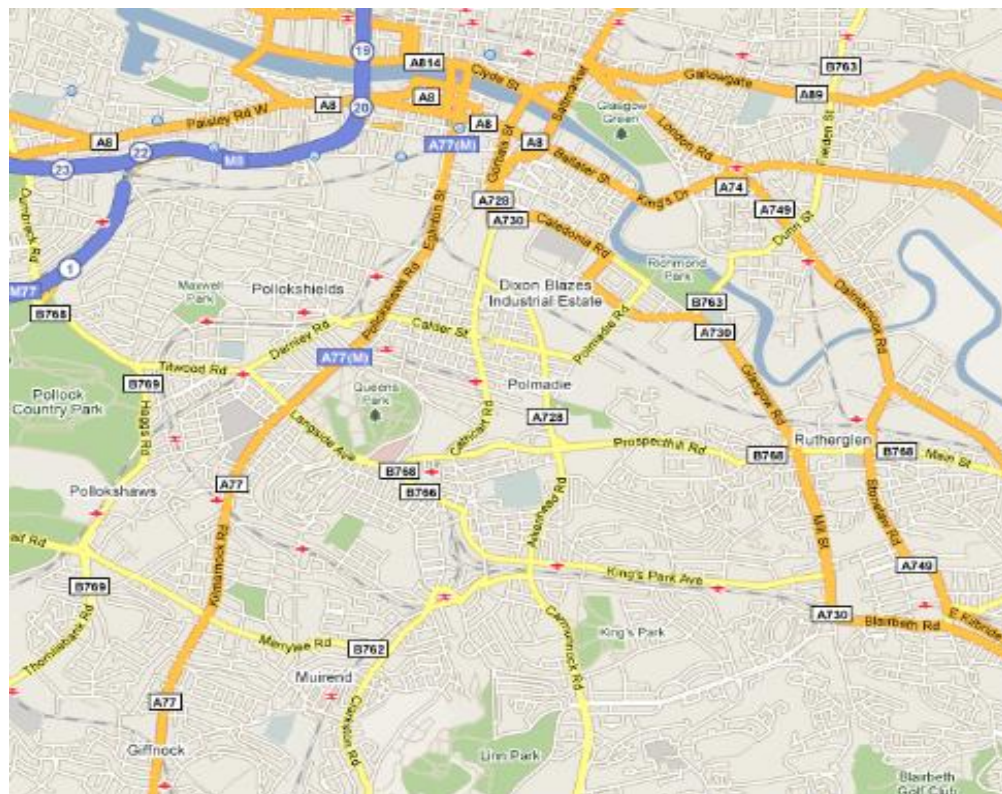


Figure 4.1 Glasgow South East is located south of the city centre under the River Clyde

The research was conducted in the area Pollokshields & Southside Central (P&SC), which together with Langside & Linn formed the South East strategic planning area, and covered the area south of the city centre below the River Clyde up to Carmunnock, the most southern end of the city (see figure 4.1). PSC included the neighborhoods Pollokshields, Strathbungo,

¹⁴ Representatives from the CRG are for the Voluntary Sector, the Community Councils, the Public Partnership Forum, the Local Housing Forum, and Equalities (i.e. the “Black and Ethnic Minority Community”).

¹⁵ Community Health & Care Partnership, Glasgow South East Regeneration Agency, Glasgow Community & Safety Services, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Local Housing Forum, Culture & Sport Glasgow, Glasgow Housing Association, Strathclyde Police, Jobcentre Plus, Glasgow Land & Environmental Services.

¹⁶ Community Forums are neighborhood level statutory bodies which were legally instituted in 1973.

Shawlands, Govanhill, Crosshill, Gorbals¹⁷, and Toryglen (see figure 4.2). The area and its population ($\pm 50,000$) were characterized by a great amount of diversity. The “Black and Ethnic Minority population” was reported to be the highest of the city (19% versus an average of 5.5%) and one of the highest of Scotland¹⁸. Second, socio-economic variation was high (the percentage of managerial positions is higher than the city average (28.9% vs. 24%) as was the number of unemployed (11.2% vs. 8.7%)) and unevenly spread out over the area: in West-Pollokshields there were expensive Victorian villas, while East-Pollokshields, the Gorbals, Govanhill, and Toryglen belonged to the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland (see figure 4.3; p. 92) (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2006; SLIMS, 2007).

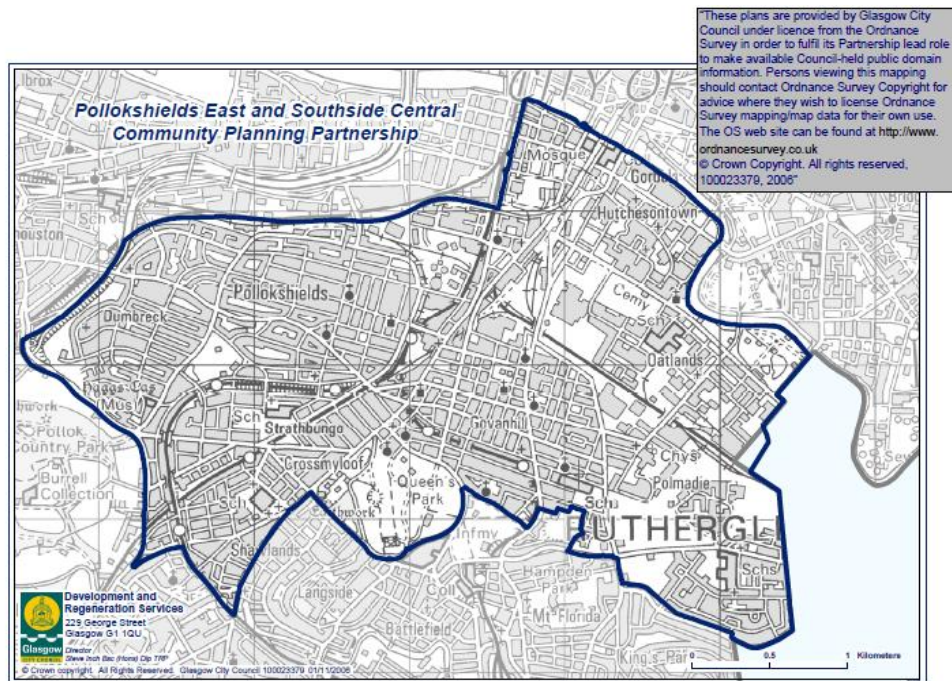


Figure 4.3 The administrative boundaries of Pollokshields & Southside Central

Furthermore, the most deprived areas in P&SC suffered from a range of severe problems that far outweighed averages for the city and the country. For example, in the Gorbals 33% of the working age population claimed Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance versus a 10% Scottish average. With 1,147 crimes per 10,000 population in 2004, crime levels in the most deprived areas were well above averages for the South East (723), Glasgow (842), and Scotland (530). Hospital admissions related to alcohol abuse (2,927 per 100,000 in 2001-2004) in these areas more than doubled the numbers for the South East (1,405) and Glasgow (1,241),

¹⁷ The Gorbals covers the neighborhoods Laurieston, Hutchesontown, Oatlands.

¹⁸ Immigrants are most importantly Pakistani, Indian, Somali, Chinese, Jewish, Czech, Slovakian, Polish, and Roma, as well as other backgrounds. Each of these "ethnic groups" or "communities" has their own subdivisions and cultural dynamics and experiences a lot of influx and outflow.

and for drug admissions the differences were even more staggering (904 versus, respectively, 354 and 295). Although the problems in these areas were amongst the most severe of the city, numerous other areas had comparable levels of deprivation (SLIMS, 2007; Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2008).

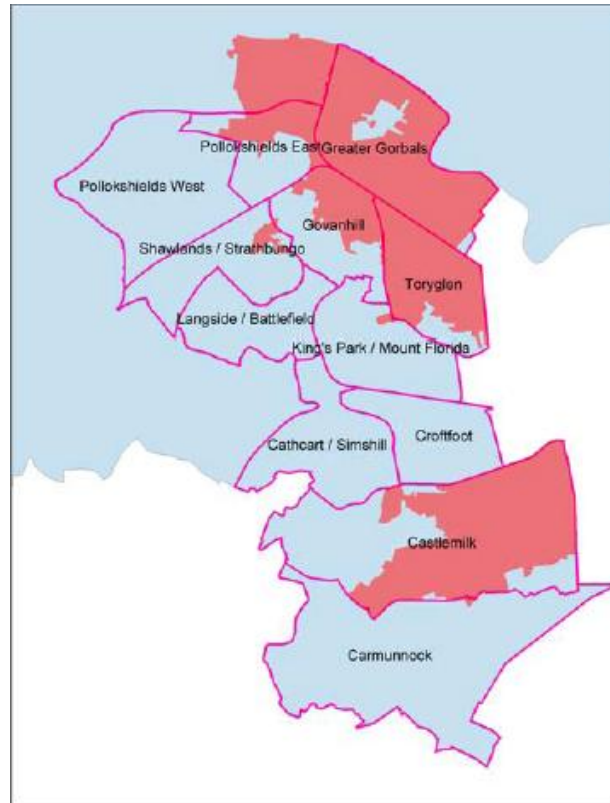


Figure 4.3 South East areas belonging to 15% most deprived in Scotland (marked in red)

Thus, the historical narrative of this case portrays the rationale behind instituting the GCPP as follows: to provide a new participatory infrastructure that comprehensively covered all the areas, problems, and stakeholders in order to facilitate more effective problem solving. The emphasis given to an “equal”, “inclusive”, and “effective” approach (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p. 6), formed a recent twist to the long-standing commitment in Glasgow to alleviating the level of grave problems in its most deprived areas. Indeed, the idea of Planning *with* the Community sounds appealing and innovative. Or, as respondent G14, a pensioner with a long history in local politics and volunteering succinctly put it in his Glaswegian accent: “This is a big thing they say they’re *gonnea* do. And it sounds good. But it *dunnea* happen.” His stories about his area, the Gorbals (one of the red areas in the top of figure 4.3), illuminated how the vastness and complexity of the local problems and the GCPP

system made it very challenging to live up to the commitment to *making it work*. So did it happen? This is what public encounters in the GCPP focused on.

The second step in the analysis is to demonstrate that local public encounters were embedded in a dominant pattern of communication about *making it work*. The following quotes reveal the inclination of public professionals and residents in the GCPP not to move beyond oppositional standpoints. Local actors expressed strong views on the issue of whether Community Planning “is working”. Some were very positive, some were outright negative, and only a few took a more nuanced stance. Compare for example these statements by, respectively, a local police officer, an active resident, a public health manager, and a regeneration manager:

[T]he boards are very well-structured, they’re very well-run, um, and everyone has an opportunity to put forward if they have a concern. (Respondent G9 – Public professional)

It should be a case of if there are structures there, ... make the best of them, ... instead of them having to reinvent all the stuff. Which is what they’re trying to do, and not very successfully. (Respondent G11 – Resident)

So it’s a lot of very joint processes, almost trying to pull people together, um, so that we’ve almost got shared priorities. (Respondent G19 – Public professional)

I think that Community Planning ... suggests and offers something that none of us really knows exactly what it is that we’re trying to get out of it. (Respondent G6 – Public professional)

Based on these opposed views, local actors did not manage to arrive at a consensus about Community Planning. Because how can it be the case that there are “very joint processes” while at the same time “none of us really knows exactly what it is that we’re trying to get out of it”? Who is right in stating that it is “very well-structured” and “very well-run” or “not very successfully”? Is one side simply wrong? Or should we conclude that Community Planning works well on some points and not so much on others? That people simply always disagree? Such questions do not bring us much further, because they rest on the idea that there is a single truth to be discovered and an ideal of participation to be achieved. If we take this approach, we accept the existing narratives, and the conflict between them, and fail to ask “What generates these disagreements?”. By using narrative analysis, instead, we recognize the existence of “multiple truths” and try to understand where these narratives come from, before arriving at a judgment about the best form of participation for the situation at hand.

The third step, therefore, is to move below the surface by exploring the beliefs, emotions, and experiences on which local actors have constructed their oppositional views. The following two narratives about what “communities” need and want are representative of both viewpoints. The first story comes from a Community Planning officer, who was mediating between partner agencies and residents based on a strong concern for serving the community with a personal touch, and the second from the proactive pensioner we just met on p. 93.

communities ... don't want ... that somebody comes along and offers a service, you know, for a couple of weeks and then disappears again, because the money has run out or the people haven't thought about it properly. And it's about saying, you know 'If you allow us time to understand what your views and thoughts and expression and wishes are, we can try to do that'... [T]he partners need that amount of **flexibility** as opposed to having a **rigidity** of 'This is the way we do things, you know, and we're not going to change our way'... **The partners know by working effectively with each other ... they can deliver more effective services** ... because if they spread themselves so thinly then they're not going to achieve anything. But if **they target resources**, 'I'm doing it in this particular area on a Tuesday and you're doing it on a Wednesday'... And that gets back to a point a long time ago ... that there would have been ... partners who wouldn't have been seen dead in the room with another... Now **they realize that** the only way they're going to deliver effective services... And most of them **are enjoying that**, you know, **they're achieving what they're set out to do by using that additional resource, ... [getting] recognition by a community** who says 'Yes, at last, somebody is listening to us, we've been asking for this for ... thirty-five years, you know, and now somebody is listening'. And **you would hope that once you've achieved that happy medium ... that you try and build on that...** So I mean, **it's working ... and I think it will continue to work...** (Respondent G2 – Community Planning officer)

But **getting, um, the community involved and ... to work with one another is not very easy, you know**, because they all want to be on top... [chuckles] And a lot of people are naturally negative, they don't see the positive side and look ahead, they just argue their own point... **We've been sitting and talking about the same thing for two years and we'll be sitting here in another two years...** You got to find out where you're going and make sure that people... And I think that's the problem with Community Planning and the Community Reference Group..., **people don't really understand what it's about, where we're supposed to be going**. And that's not their fault, that's the fault I think of the Council, ... because **the community won't cooperate unless they know exactly where they're going**. So the, I blame **the Council**, or whoever is in charge of Community Planning, **are not getting it right...** [T]hey're just consulting the community and ... **not actually asking to give advice properly...** they're giving members of the community the opportunity to criticize and condemn what's actually happening, ... because they're not explaining it properly. Um, **we'll never get anywhere**. (Respondent G14 – Resident)

At first glance, we might wonder what is so fundamentally contradictory between these narratives. Both respondents express a quite similar view on how community participation

should ideally be: people joined in a communal approach to solving problems based on mutual understanding. So what is the problem then? Well, one of them thinks Community Planning is *making it work* and the other one finds the opposite. Respondent G2 asserts that “it’s working and will continue to work”, while respondent G14 concludes that “we’ll never get anywhere”. These opposing verdicts are supported by two diverging storylines (see p. 65). What work do these narrative structures do?

The first diagnosis is based on a *story of helplessness and control*:

“the situation is bad. We always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

In this narrative, communities desire effective and durable problem solving. This could not be achieved before, as partner agencies displayed “rigidity” in their way of working, “spread [their resources] so thinly”, and “wouldn’t have been seen dead in the room with another”. Now, however, Community Planning forms “a happy medium” which helps agencies in “achieving what they’re set out to do”, because it facilitates “flexibility” in the ways services are delivered and more effective “target[ing of] resources”. All stakeholders “realize that [this is] the only way they’re going to deliver effective services”, “they are enjoying that”, and get “recognition by [the] community”. Hence, Community Planning is *making it work* because it offers control over a previously helpless situation.

The second diagnosis is based on a *story of change is only an illusion*:

“you always thought things were getting ... better. But you were wrong. Let me show you some evidence that things are in fact going in the opposite direction. Improvement was an illusion” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

This narrative posits that public professionals cannot solve problems together with residents before having reached some mutual understanding about “what it’s about, [and] where we’re supposed to be going”. Community participation might seem straightforward, but, in actual fact, getting “the community involved and ... to work with one another is not very easy”, because “the community won’t cooperate unless they know exactly where they’re going”. While some might be under the illusion that Community Planning has created a productive dynamic, it is “not actually asking to give advice properly” and is “not getting it right”. Therefore, Community Planning is not *making it work* unless it will take a fundamentally

different approach that grasps the terms on which residents are willing to participate and recognizes the ways in which they need to be addressed.

These conflicting diagnoses of the current situation are not just a matter of two local actors with different experiences taking opposing positions, but point to a deeper tension between their narratives. The first narrative values Community Planning because it introduced a single, coherent approach to participation as collaboration based on coordination of input and output. Local actors need to translate the desires and needs of the community into these coordinated plans and targeted resources. Participation will only work if there continues to be control over the commitment of local actors to collaborate in this way. In other words, this narrative values participation as *Planning*: adhering to fixed institutions to channel knowledge and have stable, committed relationships. In contrast, the second narrative reproaches Community Planning exactly because it tries to establish a system that controls participation. Residents feel constrained and forced into a single mould, and therefore retreat into defensive and conflictive behavior. Participation will only work if residents are addressed on their own terms through personal engagement with their views and ways of working. This narrative, then, values participation as *Community*: gradually developing social relationships towards collaboration through interdependencies, common beliefs and values, and reciprocity.

Thus, *Community* and *Planning* are not the natural partners they were assumed to be with the institution of Community Planning. Upon deeper inquiry, *Community* and *Planning* appear to embody fundamentally opposed ways of thinking, acting, and organizing. To be sure, that does not mean that local actors can never, or did never, reach pragmatic consensus. In practice, many different practices and institutions can be, and sometimes were, developed intermediate to *Community* and *Planning*. But local actors in the GCPP did not often manage to do so in a productive way, as for example transpired during a LCPP Board meeting in November 2009 which I attended, when two residents disputed that the “Big Event” (a one day gathering of residents and public professionals) “couldn’t have worked as a community event”. The story of respondent G4, who, as already mentioned at the start of this section, was responsible for turning this unproductive pattern around, stresses the depth of the problem:

the Community Planning partners come to Community Reference Group meetings and present their strategies and plans and proposals, and then there is a discussion about it, at the moment. But **we’re wanting to move forward in a more, in a better way**, so

that they come and discuss their plans for engagement, not their strategies they've already decided, you know. And that the Community Reference Group members are actually actively involved in going out and seeking views on these issues and bringing those views back... And **that's what we need to move to**. But at the moment we're in a sort of more 'This is my plan, what do you think of it, like it?'... [W]e haven't got that whole process nailed yet, but **we know how we want to do it. But the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice**, because in practice you've got quite limited options on the table. I mean, often we don't actually have that many options. If you narrowed it down to what are the options for the priorities here ... it comes down to judgments made by people who have influence. And it's, you know, **it's difficult to, to really present options in the complex policy environment that we have**, where you've got national objectives, and city-wide objectives, and then local issues coming into play, and **not always that much room to move on how you do things**. So ... **getting that engagement to be really meaningful is really tricky**, you know. (Respondent G4 - Community Planning officer)

The respondent identifies a discrepancy between "the ideal world" and practice, and feels that the options to change this situation are limited. This narrative, which I coded *being stuck*, sets the fourth step of the analysis; i.e., demonstrating how communicative capacity might help to break through the dominant pattern of *making it work*. The narrative argues that there is "not always that much room to move on how you do things" and it is hard "to really present options". Public professionals struggle to effectively integrate all the elements of the "complex policy environment", such as national and city-wide policies and strategic priorities, with local problems and needs expressed by residents. Residents might interpret the resulting lack of "meaningful" participation as a matter of ill-will on the part of public professionals and resort to an antagonistic stance. According to this narrative, the local actors are *stuck* in this pattern of communication. However, is *being stuck* really an inevitable outcome? At the moment, public professionals and residents are both convinced that they "know how ... to do it" and that their view needs to be adopted "to move forward in ... a better way". But the fundamental tension between *Planning* and *Community* indicates that there is no permanent, ideal mode of participation. By not recognizing the conflicts between these underlying belief systems, local actors are indeed likely to continue *being stuck* in an unproductive pattern of communication. Acknowledging each others' belief systems could be a first step towards working out practical agreements on what form of participation fits concrete situations at hand.

In conclusion, then, the communication between local actors in the GCPP was characterized by *making it work*: an antagonistic pattern of communication of overt and tacit disputes about whether "it was working" or not. The analysis demonstrated that (1) a discrepancy between the

ideal and practice of *making it work* emerged from the local context, (2) local actors communicated about this discrepancy without moving beyond their opposing standpoints, (3) the underlying tension between *Community* and *Planning* narratives drove a wedge between their shared ambition for *making it work*, and (4) more constructive communication could be achieved based on attention to the belief systems underlying their narratives. Lacking such capacity sustains an unproductive pattern of communication.

The next two cases have more productive communicative patterns. At the same time, the case of the GCPP revealed the underlying, irresolvable tension between *Community* and *Planning* much clearer than the other two cases. Local actors demonstrated the need for regulation and control of a comprehensive and coherent system as well as interdependency and reciprocity in personal contacts. In the other two cases, local actors did not draw out this tension as clearly, placing the dominant emphasis either on *Community* (Amsterdam) or *Planning* (Bologna). As will be argued in the conclusion of this chapter, the ability to take and defend both positions makes for a fuller understanding of the nature of communicative capacity and is therefore an important element for considering how public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy.

Amsterdam: Being in Touch

you actually have to intervene in a process on which you hardly have any influence ..., in the relationship, in the communication between the organization and the residents.
(Respondent A18 – Public professional)

The case of the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijk aanpak*) was the second site of the research and illuminated a completely different communicative pattern. After the apparent absence of a productive pattern of communication in Glasgow, local public professionals and residents in Amsterdam appeared to possess a certain ability for searching pragmatically and collaboratively for shared solutions to local problems. The meta-narrative of *being in touch* denotes the way in which they were inclined to have *extensive personal contact focused on gradually working towards more mutual understanding, trust, and adaptation in order to find joint resolutions for concrete, practical problems*. All local actors were in contact with a wide range of other actors about numerous local problems and tried to bring about some change through open, empathic, and reciprocal communication. But, as respondent A18, who worked for the City District to coordinate collaboration between local public agencies and

residents at the strategic level, admits, this was a complex and messy “process on which you hardly have any influence”. *Being in touch*, then, refers to a pattern of communication in which many different ways of working and thinking are valued, as well as the need to connect them to each other, but which also makes problem solving very intensive, fragile, and dependent on personal relationships.

Using the four steps indicated on page 88, the analysis shows that *being in touch* is based on a *Community* narrative that enables local actors to communicate in flexible, spontaneous, and creative ways, but at the same time is short of a *Planning* approach that would endow them with formal structures, budgets, and hard-and-fast rules for more structured and efficient decision making and problem solving. First, the AW is inevitably bound up in a local context of great variation in actors, neighborhoods, and problems, mutual interdependence, and joint discretion for making it all work. As in the Glasgow case, secondly, local actors in the AW were concerned with *making it work*, but their dominant communicative pattern consisted of pragmatic personal contact focused on underlying beliefs, feelings, and experiences. Third, moving below the surface, an analysis of causal beliefs reveals (1) a dominant inclination to strive for resolving problems and conflicts by *being in touch*, and (2) a counter-narrative of *Planning* that articulates the shortcomings of this *Community* narrative. The analysis therefore concludes that the communicative pattern of *being in touch* facilitates a process of finding otherwise unattainable solutions, but is not ideal because it limits the ability of local actors to streamline the process and towards concrete, widespread results.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, several decentralization reforms made collaboration and participation more manifest in urban governance (Denters & Klok, 2005). While central policy coordination, performance measurement, and funding¹⁹ continued to play a role, municipalities and housing corporations²⁰ received the principal responsibility for jointly formulating long term policies and budgets (*meerjarenplannen*). Their interdependence for implementing these long term plans followed from the former having the authority to buy ground, issue legally binding planning documents, and maintain public spaces, and the latter having the authority to construct buildings and maintain social housing and facilities. At the same time, local service

¹⁹ Municipalities are funded through local taxes (18%) and central government grants that are open (38%) and ring-fenced (44%). The latter are decreasing in importance and relaxing their criteria (Denters & Klok, 2005).

²⁰ Housing corporations own 36% of the total Dutch housing stock. In Amsterdam this is 50.2%. For the nature and origins of housing corporations see Gerrichhauzen (1985).

providers in schooling, health care, police, and social welfare received substantive autonomy to develop their own policies and municipalities became less responsible for the content of these policies and more for facilitating cooperation among these organizations (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1997; Louw et al., 2003; KEI, 2004; Verhage, 2005).

The start of the AW in 2008 marked the local commitment to further embed the needs and activities of residents as central elements of urban governance. The newly created Ministry of Living, Neighborhoods, and Integration had introduced “The Neighborhood Approach” at the national level in 2007 as an integral and joined-up approach to community participation in the most deprived urban areas (Ministerie VROM/WWI, 2007). This policy culminated from the Big Cities Policies (GSB – *Grote Stedenbeleid*) (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1997, 2002, 2004), which had framed disadvantaged neighborhoods as increasingly socially disintegrated, ethnically segregated, and economically deprived “problem accumulation areas” (Uitermark, 2005). Funding was now targeted to 40 neighborhoods, which had been selected as the most problematic areas of the country, to enhance levels of “liveability”. The policy granted municipalities, housing corporations, and other local public agencies the autonomy and shared responsibility for developing their own local Neighborhood Approach (Andersen & Van Kempen, 2003; Dekker & Van Kempen, 2004).

In Amsterdam, national funding was granted to five nationally selected neighborhoods (*wijken*), in total consisting of seventeen quarters (*buurten*), spread out over nine city-districts. Funding was used to facilitate “resident initiatives”, i.e. a participatory budgeting system in which residents were invited to propose initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions of their area, and, after a voting round had awarded them the funding, also to carry out their initiative. In each area, residents met every six weeks with middle level and street level public professionals of the City District, housing corporations, police, and social work to monitor the progress of resident initiatives, neighborhood management, and the jointly formulated *Buurt Uitvoerings-programma's* (BUPs – Quarter Implementation Programs). In addition to the resident meetings, which already existed before, resident platforms were instituted as a kind of informal board of a few residents who prepared meetings and monitored daily affairs. Public professionals met in (1) an “area team” including alderman, administrative directors representative, and communications advisor; (2) “direction groups” of area managers (City District) and area developers (housing corporations); and (3) “executive meetings” of quarter

managers (City District), neighborhood managers (housing corporations), quarter coordinators (social work), and quarter directors (Police). A city-wide management team, finally, monitored and coordinated all neighborhood level activities (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008).



Figure 4.4 Bos & Lommer is located to the west (top left corner) of the city centre (A)

The Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach did not invest so much in comprehensive plans and overarching systems, but rather in building up social networks among residents and public professionals as a basis for collaboration. It offered budget and discretion for enhancing the visibility and approachability of public professionals in the neighborhoods and the activity and engagement of residents. For example, in the area where the research was conducted, the city district Bos & Lommer²¹, public professionals and residents had direct personal contact on a small scale through meetings and initiatives at the level of the six quarters (Kolenkit, Gulden Winckel, Gibraltar, Robert Scott, Landlust, and Erasmuspark – total population of $\pm 30,000$). These quarters each had their own distinctive physical characteristics, demographics, and problems, and their participatory meetings and initiatives had slightly different compositions and formats. During the fieldwork, at least 40 different civic associations and voluntary organizations were identified in the area.

The nature and extent of the problems in the quarters of Bos & Lommer differed greatly. Especially Kolenkit stood out, once having been labeled the “worst neighborhood of the

²¹ At the time of the research, Bos & Lommer still formed a city district. From May 1, 2010, the Municipality reorganized from 15 into 7 city districts. Bos & Lommer became part of the city district West.

country”, with the lowest average income and the highest unemployment rate (14%) of the city (vs. a 10.4% Bos & Lommer, 7.5% Amsterdam, and 4.2% national average). Although ethnic diversity was the highest in Landlust, with 127 different nationalities, 76% of the inhabitants of Kolenkit had a non-western migrant background (vs. 38% in Erasmuspark, 54% in Bos & Lommer, and 34.7% in Amsterdam). The housing stock in Kolenkit was almost completely owned by housing corporations (vs. 22% in Erasmuspark and 50.2% in Amsterdam). At the same time, safety, crime, and social isolation were bigger issues in Erasmuspark and Robert Scott. Furthermore, all quarters suffered, in different degrees and forms, from many other problems such as below average school results, above average high school drop-outs, badly maintained or inadequate housing stock, street litter and bulk garbage, bicycle wrecks, nuisance by junkies and groups of youngsters, and the ongoing demolition and reconstruction of housing estates (Stadsdeel Bos & Lommer, 2007, 2008 2009a; 2009b; Dienst Onderzoek & Statistiek Gemeente Amsterdam, 2009).

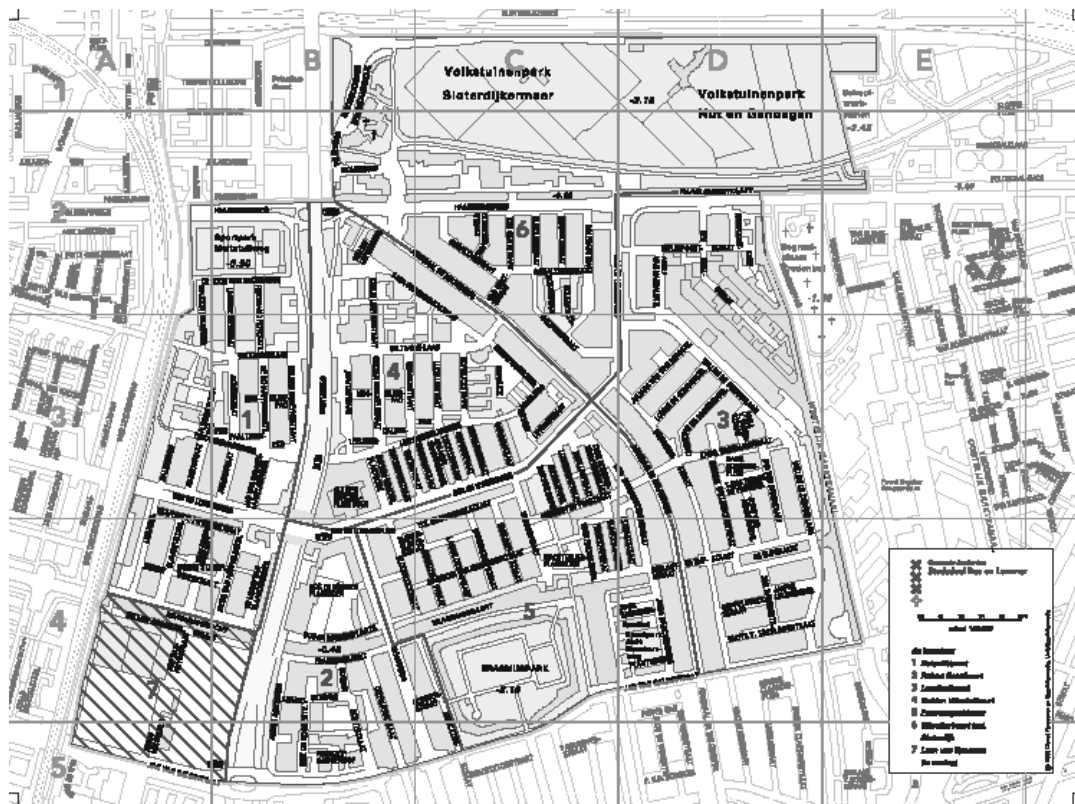


Figure 4.5 The quarters of Bos & Lommer: 1. Kolenkit; 2. Robert Scott; 3. Landlust; 4. Gulden Winckel; 5. Erasmuspark 6. Gibraltar; 7. Laan van Spartaan (under construction)

Thus, local actors were faced with long lists of complex and lingering problems which defied straightforward definitions and solutions. Many of these problems formed the tip of an iceberg

of “hidden” dynamics, so that a problem would be partially tackled only to later on reappear on the agenda. This way of working meant that there were always new points for the so-called “action points list”. This fixed component of the agenda of the resident meetings provided an overview of specific problems (e.g., “remove litter”, “badly maintained plantation”, or “repair broken windows”), the exact location, what would be done, by whom, and by when. The AW was intended to offer that extra bit of commitment and resources needed to come up with more innovative and effective solutions. The analysis now takes the second step, by clarifying the nature of the dominant communicative pattern: *being in touch*. The story of respondent A20 –a neighborhood manager of the City District who managed in two quarters the contact with residents and public professionals about neighborhood maintenance and resident initiatives around, e.g., cleanliness, safety, and regeneration– is not just an idiosyncratic typically Dutch problem, but is telling for the way in which local actors went about in enhancing the quality of participatory democracy by *being in touch*:

we noticed that almost in all of Bos & Lommer we have a bicycle stand shortage... Then we thought ‘We’re going to cooperate and make one campaign out of it and then ... it’s effective...’ Indeed, um, money was made available, which came in terms. So then it’s the turn of quarter A, and then of quarter B... **But with hindsight ... you knew actually in advance that ... you weren’t going to achieve a lot with that approach...** And later a few bicycle stands came, um, on the street where it was possible, but eventually not where it was very much needed because it wasn’t possible technically speaking... Then the second round of the Neighborhood Approach was going on..., [a group of residents] had investigated it so nicely, and came up with such nice, smart, um, solutions for it. And they got enough money from the Neighborhood Approach..., and they started a campaign ... **from a different perspective. Looking at, like, the relief of bicycle stands, like the removal of bicycle wrecks...** So ... they managed to get permission from the Daily Board, they’re going to start a pilot... And ... [the] Daily Board, they also have to be included very well. I don’t want that my Board is going to thwart me in some way. That’s like, **that bit of, um, freedom that you give them and trust at the same time.** One should, um, of course the ideas have to be realistic, have to be within the legislation, ... be achievable... But on the other hand, um, there might be possibilities that we’ve overlooked... **So at least you have to be open for it and go and horse around together.** (Respondent A20 – Neighborhood manager)

The respondent tells how she and her colleagues discovered a bicycle stand shortage and changed from a technical to a participatory approach. As they “knew actually in advance”, the initial technical approach did not work, because stands were placed at spots where it was technically possible but not where they were most necessary. Bicycle stands can only be placed if the physical dimensions of the street conform to the legal requirements, so that in the end it is not possible in the narrowest streets where a lot of bikes are actually crammed

together, blocking the whole sidewalk and forming a risk for road safety. From the technical perspective, no solution seemed to be possible. However, by taking a participatory approach, a previously unthought-of solution emerged. A handful of residents reframed the definition of the problem from a focus on putting in extra stands to looking at the removal of superfluous “bicycle wrecks”. Rather than implementing a program based on priorities and budget that trickled down from politics, the respondent and the residents now had to negotiate with the politicians for permission. She concludes that a structural solution for this bicycle problem, and other problems as well, requires local actors *being in touch*: to “be open for” alternative approaches, give others “freedom ... and trust”, and “horse around together”.

Resolving the bicycle problem is likely to remain a process of “horsing around together”²². The respondent said later in the interview, coming back to the example, that many bits and pieces still had to be worked out. When a bike exactly qualifies as a “wreck” and who has the authority to remove it are complicated legal issues. This means that a lot more time, effort, and resources will be required and will have to be negotiated with the local politicians, who, at some point, might get impatient for “results”. Many local actors therefore made great efforts to convince others that results can only be achieved by *being in touch*. However, not all public professionals and resident always agreed that this approach actually worked. Respondent A8, for instance, a young and active resident, told me how he had suggested three times already the same solution to a problem with storage box windows being smashed, which every time a public professional would react enthusiastically to but never follow up. This was only one of his many examples of the origins of his sceptical view “that you’re actually getting into some kind of cycle”. Below I will show in more detail that also in the case of the AW local actors differed on the issue of *making it work*. *Being in touch* means a lot of talking and “horsing around” and does often not directly lead to big, concrete results, and also hardly ever goes into “the big decisions”.

Contestation, conflict, and antagonism were undeniably part of local public encounters. At the same time, nobody was either an outright adversary or a fanatic zealot of the AW. Local actors expressed nuanced views about the pros and cons of specific events, activities, and problems. They expressed satisfaction, but also pointed out mistakes, problems, and frustrations. To

²² Indeed, a recent newspaper article mentioned that halfway August 2011, the year’s budget of the City District for requesting bicycle stands was already completely used up (Het Parool, 2011).

explain the dominance of a communicative pattern of *being in touch*, rather than *making it work*, the analysis now takes the third step by going below the surface. Consider the following two respondents –a middle level manager at a housing corporation responsible for the social dimension of the housing stock in one of the quarters who talks about the great amount of work citizen participation requires, and a resident who has been active for several years in the resident meeting and resident platform of his quarter and is very displeased with the big derelict site in front of his house that, at the time was already there for over three years:

we can learn a lot from our colleagues who say ‘No, ... [no use sending] a letter, we’ll go door-to-door’. Then I say ‘Yeah, **door-to-door, do you know how much time that costs?**’. Well, I did it a few times, you lose the entire afternoon. And then you absolutely don’t have the feeling the message is arriving. **But at the moment that you organize a [participation meeting], it appears that about thirty people come to it who are triggered by that personal contact.** Only a few minutes at the door, getting acquainted, introducing yourself, explaining what’s the plan. So I think you achieve a lot on the street level by just paying attention to that tenant, even if it is those ten minutes per house. **Calculate that, hey, 200 houses, ... times ten, well, you’re busy for days if you want to reach all residents.** Yeah, that’s just difficult... I’m glad we have those neighborhood managers, because they have the time for that... And I’ve got my hands full with nuisance and letters that come in, phone calls, bailiffs, lawyers... So those are my ... dilemmas. **I would like to put all my time into it, participation, [but] engaging people costs time.** And especially **the personal contact, I think that that’s the core of, if you, yeah, want to engage the tenant, they have to know who they’re dealing with. And you build trust by seeing each other more often, speaking to each other more often.** (Respondent A13 – Housing manager)

I have a piece of derelict land in front of my house. When I moved in there in the summer of 2006..., there were still fire fighter barracks then, it was made public that by the end of 2006 the lot would be demolished and then the ground would be prepared for construction and **in Spring 2007 they would start building there. It is still derelict now.** Um, so then we have an issue with the City District, with a project developer who has to build it, with a contractor who has to execute it, and with a housing corporation which has to purchase it. The last thing I heard was that it is [a contractor] who has to build there and that they are bankrupt. And **what actually is going to happen, nobody knows**, but really absolutely nobody. And **that’s dragging on for, what is it, three years now.** And no spade went into the ground yet, **absolutely nothing happened.** And **it is really a black box what happens there.** We can’t even determine ourselves who is leading in it, who eventually has to take the decision. **We don’t know who to address for that.** And so you can’t almost have any influence on it except for asking at each resident meeting ‘What’s the status?’. And then **just hope that the people who are there know something about it and are honest about it.** And that’s hard. But it’s indeed a very clear example of how all services have to cooperate, maybe not cooperate, and are not clear in the information they provide. And **it is undoubtedly like that with more premises.** (Respondent A5 – Resident)

At first examination, we might detect the same division and narrative structures in these stories as in the Glasgow case (pp. 95-97): a *story of helplessness and control* supports the argument that the AW is *making it work* in the first narrative (“it appears that about thirty people come to it who are triggered by that personal contact”) and a *story of change is only an illusion* undergirds the opposite in the second narrative (“absolutely nothing happened” and “it is undoubtedly like that with more premises”). However, these respondents’ broader narratives suggest something different. Respondent A13, for example, laments that he is forced to spend a lot of time in supporting residents in carrying out their initiatives, because they “are not willing to implement. And that’s the core of the Neighborhood Approach”. In contrast, respondent A5 assesses a project that was started to deal with safety problems caused by loitering youngsters as “now running well, it now took on such forms that it really led to a significantly safer neighborhood”. Thus, both respondents take a pragmatic stance towards the issue whether the AW is *making it work*.

Closer inspection of the stories above unveils that their pragmatic mode of communication is inexorably bound up with their shared causal belief that local problems need to be solved by *being in touch*. Causal beliefs are deeply held convictions about what has brought about a certain situation, or will bring about a desired situation, and facilitate or legitimate particular events, actions, and values (see p. 63). In the first story, respondent A13 shares his dilemma about using a personal “door-to-door” approach, which on the one hand takes away a lot of time from important routine activities, but on the other hand motivates residents to participate. In the end, he reveals his causal belief that the only way to really “engage the tenant, ... [is to] build trust by seeing each other more often, speaking to each other more often”. Also respondent A5 holds a causal belief in *being in touch*. He talks about a piece of derelict land that should have been built upon for years and the future of which is still shrouded in fog. Various public organizations are not cooperating and communicating well, leaving residents with nothing more than to “just hope that the people who are there know something about it and are honest about it”. The story, thus, conveys that the low degree of *being in touch* inhibits the situation to move forward.

On the one hand, the respondents believe that the more local actors are *being in touch*, the better they will be able to solve local problems. Their narratives emphasize that “getting acquainted, introducing yourself, explaining what’s the plan” enables others, because then

they “know who they’re dealing with” and “know who to address for” specific issues. *Being in touch* implies that local actors are responsive to each other’s needs, ideas, feeling, problems, and practices, and are open to negotiating flexible and creative solutions. In this *Community* narrative, participation depends on the ability to deal with persons and to improvise beyond policies, decision making structures, rules, and job descriptions, as formal institutions are not considered sufficient for harnessing the intricacies of local problems.

On the other hand, the respondents are struggling with the shortcomings of this narrative. Their stories point out that *being in touch* is a very resource, time, and energy intensive pattern of communication (respondent A13) and is very fragile when personal needs and distress are not recognized or big decisions and processes are out of reach (respondent A5). Therefore, local actors often expressed a desire for structures, rules, and plans that would create more clarity, certainty, and stability. Now, they had to take a lot of details into account, struggle to find out who is exactly doing what, and go back and forth between a great amount of different persons, policies, and problems. Formal responsibilities were shared rather than divided based on strict separations, and formal plans were the outcomes of negotiation and implementation processes rather than pre-determined. A *Planning* narrative would regulate participation more by focusing attention on determining precise goals to be achieved and decisions to be made, dividing responsibilities, and specifying mandates, budgets, and timelines for decision making and implementation.

Hence, the communicative pattern of *being in touch* embodies a tension between *Community* and *Planning*. The dominant narrative of *Community* was challenged by a counter-narrative of *Planning* as resolution to the existing uncertainty, instability, and lack of wide-ranging results. Indeed, the analysis above has shown that the communicative pattern of *being in touch* was out of balance because it was often not accompanied by formal decisions and results. But the analysis also demonstrated that more *Planning* might at the same time reduce the ability of local actors to “get acquainted”, give each other “freedom and trust”, and “horse around together”. The very nature of local problems and relationships precluded any strict planning or regulation. Therefore, finding a balance between *Community* and *Planning* will be an ongoing process in which local actors will have to negotiate the trade-offs for dealing with specific situations.

As the final step of the analysis, then, the next stories indicate how this dominant pattern of communication affected the quality of participatory democracy. Like respondent A18, who we met at the beginning of this section, respondent A1 was an area manager at the City District responsible for coordinating the regeneration of specific quarters at a strategic level. In this position, both experienced difficulties with sustaining trust with other public professionals and residents:

[The] City District is responsible for all social housing, and last year it drafted a MIPSAs. That is a Long term Investment Plan Social Housing. ... Just the collection of the factual information is already a lot of work, and then also looking strategically how we want these places to be used in the future ... **was so much work, and it had to be done on such short notice, that it has just been conducted internally...** So afterwards I went into the quarter with 'Yeah, ... these are the goals of the [MIPSA]'. 'Yeah,' **my housing corporation says, 'Hello, um, you didn't ask us anything, while we were supposed to collaborate, weren't we?** And in the meantime you already come up with everything'. Um, yeah, that's quite unpleasant. **But it is actually exactly the same with the corporations,** ... the decision making ... is at the level of the direction of that housing corporation, which has a lot more housing, covering many other neighborhoods, and they have to make a judgment 'What do I do with my own stock, ... how is the current situation, which strategic investment decisions do I take?'. ... So I say 'Well, pot calling the kettle black. I ... get confronted with the MIPSAs all decided, but you actually have that investment decision of the corporation. **So let's just with the two of us accept that we don't have any influence on the level of this quarter ...**'. Um, yeah, and then we were friends again and we were thinking like, yeah, that's just the way it is, but how can you make sure that those two decisions are in fact coordinated? (Respondent A1 – Area manager)

...a very elementary thing, but one which still often happens is that, um, communication between residents and just our organization... Look, **[a proactive resident] sends a letter with a complaint,** that letter, um, it reaches three different desks, um, eventually mine. Um, well, in the end all kinds of things go wrong, it appears, **I write an answer ... and bring the letter to the secretariat,** they have to dispatch it... That was just before Christmas, so **it just stays there for three weeks, because I accidentally used a wrong format.** So I don't get a call like 'Gee ..., you ticked the wrong thing, can you do it again', no, it stays there for three weeks. Um, well, I still send that letter, but **it doesn't arrive at the postal address** of [the resident]. So he emails me again, and I say 'Yeah, but I sent it already then and then'. Well, then it appears that something went wrong on that postal address. Anyway, **in the end something goes horribly wrong in the procedure and then I have to make a great effort to get and stay on speaking terms with [the resident],** and, um, also to explain in a proper way that 'Well, we just make mistakes as organization, we didn't manage it well, that's correct'. And, um, then I can't say much more than that... And, um, the distrust that residents have towards the City District is already huge, we have a very bad name... So, yeah, it's difficult then, um, that **you actually have to intervene in a process on which you hardly have any influence** ..., in the relationship, in the communication between the organization and the residents. Yeah, **you can ... chase it**

up in your organization, but anyway, that doesn't solve the problem of course. And you have a resident who for the umpteenth time, so to say, um, is disappointed, um, confirmed in his distrust. So those things are quite difficult. (Respondent A18 – Area manager)

Both respondents share one of their experiences with an administrative practice within their own organization. The first, drafting a long term social housing plan, was “a lot of work”, while the second, following the procedures in answering a letter, seemed “a very elementary thing”. Neither followed the planned route because “it had to be done on such short notice” and “accidentally ... a wrong format” was used. As a result, the respondents got into a conflict with other local actors and damaged mutual trust and relationships. Both indicate that they first needed “to make a great effort” to restore their relationships before they could proceed with their collaboration. Thus, their public encounters took shape through a fragile and delicate process of *being in touch* as mutual trust was not embedded in broader changes or institutions. However, also institutional improvements could have benefited the quality of participatory democracy: problems could have been prevented by more adequate linking up collaborative decision making and procedures at the top (respondent A1), and more streamlined internal communication (respondent A18). Still, these *Community* narratives reveal that a simple “shift” from *Community* to *Planning* is neither to be expected nor desired as the process of finding a balance inevitably comes with unforeseen shocks and bumps in the road.

To conclude, then, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam communicated primarily according to a pattern of *being in touch*. This pattern enabled local actors to pragmatically recognize and connect many different views and activities through their personal relationships. But *being in touch* also inhibited them in embedding, broadening, and channeling resulting collaborative expertise beyond specific relationships or situations. This communicative pattern was dominant, because (1) the local context often called for creative collaborative solutions to complex problems which defied authoritative decision making and technical implementation; (2) local actors were pragmatic about the degree to which the AW was *making it work*; (3) although often a need was identified for more formal structures, plans, and procedures, the dominant inclination continued to be resolving problems by building or restoring personal contact, understanding, and trust; and (4) more balanced communication could only result from reflection on the presence and limitations of this dominant pattern.

On the one hand, then, *being in touch* benefited the quality of participatory democracy because local actors were driven to “get acquainted”, give each other “freedom and trust”, and “horse around together”. Through this *Community* narrative, local actors managed to “get and stay on speaking terms” and develop previously inconceivable solutions. However, these solutions did not always translate into the wide-ranging results or broader institutional change which would bestow participatory democracy with qualities such as effectiveness and durability. On the other hand, then, the communicative pattern in Amsterdam did not enable local actors to make, and stick to, formal decisions, plans, and structures. The next case shows that such a *Planning* narrative can bring more clarity, certainty, and stability to public encounters, but also comes at the cost of a pattern of flexible, spontaneous, and creative communication. Thus, the tension between the belief systems of *Community* and *Planning* seems irresolvable, leaving the quality of participatory democracy to depend on the capacity of public professionals and residents to break through their dominant pattern of communication.

Bologna: Canalizing

From an initial phase of strong skepticism, we nevertheless managed to have credibility for doing participation and then ..., building on that, doing it in a way for effectively arriving at changes (Respondent B9 – Public professional)

The case of Bologna’s Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) was the final case of the research and turned out to be an excellent complement to the previous cases. After the local actors in Glasgow, who were divided between the contradictory narratives of *Community* and *Planning*, and the dominance of the *Community* narrative over a counter-narrative of *Planning* in Amsterdam, in Bologna, *Planning* proved to form the dominant narrative and *Community* the counter-narrative. The meta-narrative of *canalizing* explains the dominance of *Planning* with a communicative pattern that enabled local actors to channel their energy, attention, and behavior from an initially antagonistic situation towards the formulation of concrete proposals and plans. Respondent B9, who grew up lived in the neighborhood and took part in the participative workshops as a neighborhood official, explains how *canalizing* has enabled going from “an initial phase of strong skepticism” to “effectively arriving at changes”. The public professionals and residents who took part in the so-called participative workshops (*laboratori*) exchanged views and arguments according to formal procedures and fixed boundaries. *Canalizing*, then, denotes a pattern of communication which

does not transgress planned guidelines for the sake of achieving concrete results, and, as such, limits the free-floating and capricious emergence of ideas, feelings, or relationships.

Also the analysis of the PSC follows a four-step structure, showing that the dominant communicative pattern of *canalizing* is grounded on a *Planning* narrative in which the goals, timelines, and inclusion of local actors are purposively circumscribed. This pattern effectively led the participatory process from a problematic situation to a set of joint decisions, but also downplayed the freedom, spontaneity, and creativity inherent to a *Community* narrative. First, the participative workshops were created as the result of a series of institutional reforms to the urban governance system and the strong local need to regenerate areas characterized by decay, conflict, and stalemate. Second, the participative workshops were the first of their kind and were widely appreciated by local actors for their propensity to establish a productive pattern of communication. Public professionals and residents achieved unexpected and unprecedented results through rational deliberation, and only a small minority condemned the participative workshops for not *making it work*. However, third, (a) while on the surface local actors all agreed that, despite formal constraints, *canalizing* still formed an ideal communicative pattern, (b) a division between those adhering to a *Community* or a *Planning* narrative lingered since underlying beliefs and feelings were not addressed. Finally, then, the analysis establishes that the communicative pattern of *canalizing* enabled a focused and productive process in a highly complex and messy environment, but is also not ideal because it subjects the scope of public encounters to pre-determined formats.

Participatory democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy. Up to the decentralization reforms in the 1990s and the recognition of local constitutional autonomy in 2001, the Italian system was highly centralized and local government came down to the administration of central policies²³. An urban governance system and history of community participation as in the other two cases was absent, as Italy did not have a national urban policy, minister, or ministry for this area (Dente, 1985, 1997; Governa & Saccomani, 2004). Local government policy did not extend beyond the housing policy of the Ministry of Public Works (integrated into the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport in 2001), and the 1942 national planning law (renewed in 1980), which required local governments to formulate a General Regulatory Plan

²³ The reform process was already initiated in 1970, when Parliament approved the creation of regions. But up to the 1990s, these reforms did little to actually decentralize any real formal powers to local tiers.

(*Piano Regolatore Generale*). The reforms created an interdependent multi-level governance system, in which municipalities and regions were autonomous policy making bodies (Capano & Gualmini, 2006) looking to translate their newfound responsibilities into more effective and legitimate local political and administrative systems. Many local entities included legal requirements for citizen participation in their new planning systems.

In 2008, the PSC of Bologna was instituted as new a comprehensive planning system following the Law 20/2000 of the Region Emilia-Romagna, which completely reformed the regional planning system (see Provincia di Bologna, 2003; Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2003; Comune_di_Bologna, 2008, 2009). The PSC specified strategic goals for urban regeneration in seven thematic future visions on the city (*Le Sette Città*) as well as the formal decision making structures, rules, and procedures. After the PSC was formulated based on citizen input between April 2005 and May 2006, and adopted by the City Council in 2008, citizens were involved in eight participative workshops spread out over the city to feed into the formulation of an Operational Municipal Plan (POC – *Piano Operativo Comunale*). A POC specified for the next five years specific projects in operational terms, their cartographic representations, and technical norms. The participative workshops consisted of sets of meetings in which facilitators (*facilitatori*), assisted by administrators and planners (commonly referred to as *tecnici*, technicians), used participative techniques to help citizens in translating their needs and desires into concrete proposals for the area under discussion (Comune di Bologna, 2009b).

The research was conducted in the neighborhood Bolognina, where the two most ambitious participative workshops (*Laboratorio Mercato* and *Laboratorio Bolognina Est*) had been organized. Bolognina ($\pm 32,750$ inhabitants) is part of the Navile District together with the neighborhoods Corticella and Lama (total population $\pm 64,600$). It is located just to the north of the historical city centre, from which it is separated by the railway tracks of the central rail station, and consists of three zones (historical Bolognina, Arcoveggio, Casaralta). Bolognina is perhaps the most paradigmatic case of the crumbling of Italian civil society and local communities as a result of the collapse of the traditional political system in the 1990s, massive deindustrialization, and immigration (Callari Galli, 2007). Over the course of the last decades,

Bolognina changed from a tightly-knit working class community with a strong identity²⁴ into a deprived area with massive amounts of derelict land, immigrants, and safety problems.

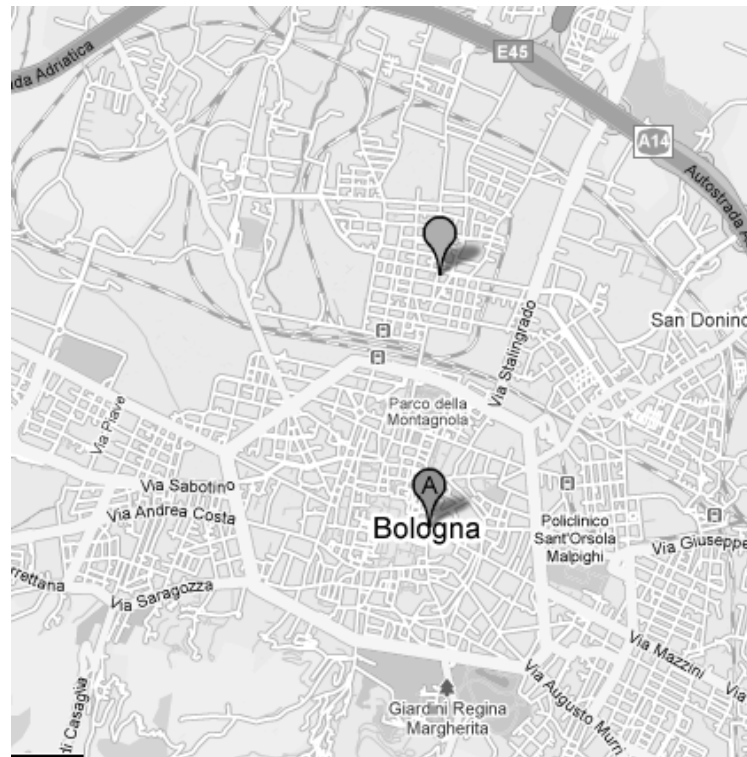


Figure 4.6 Bolognina is located to the north of the city centre (A)



Figure 4.7 Bolognina in a cartographic representation

²⁴ Bolognina is known as the most “red” area in the most “red” city of the country, which was especially reinforced by the discernible presence of the Resistance in the area during WWII. It was in Bolognina that the leader of the Communist Party in 1990 announced the dissolution of the party after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a historical event commonly known as “*la svolta della Bolognina*”.

The neighborhood was mainly built to provide housing for the manual laborers working in the industrial factories Casaralta, Cevolani, and Sasib (respectively train, automobile, and machine industry). Their closure in the 1980s announced the weakening of the strong social networks that had grown around the workplace, the Church, and the Communist Party. When also the latter two “poles of socialization” started to disintegrate, the traditional inhabitants became an increasingly isolated group of elderly faced with influx of younger people working in the tertiary sector and immigrants from a variety of countries (70% arrived in the last ten years). The population got distinguished from the rest of the city by higher levels of unemployment (5.3% vs. 4.4%), educational backlash (elementary school as highest level of education versus higher education was 61.9% vs. 11.1% compared to 54.8% vs. 16.6% for the city), and inhabitants with an immigrant background (19% vs. 10.5%)²⁵ (Comune di Bologna, 2007b, 2009a, 2010). The abandoned areas of the old factories, military barracks *Caserma Sani*, and gigantic fruit and vegetable market *Mercato Ortofrutticolo* became hotspots for drug dealing, illegal habitation, violence, and prostitution, causing tremendous distress and grief among the residents (Callari Galli, 2007; Procopio, 2008; Daconto, 2010).

Thus, the reform of the urban planning system and the degeneration of the area, as well as other neighborhoods, created a strong impetus for *canalizing*. In fact, in 2005, residents of Bolognina, in particular those living close to the old *Mercato Ortofrutticolo*, were engaged in a protracted conflict with the Municipality over the regeneration of the area. A situation of antagonism and stalemate had emerged, because the area had been left to decay for fifteen years and the plans which were eventually formulated in 1999 proposed to create a kind of “gated community” which would effectively shield off the current residents from the new greenery and public facilities inside with a big wall and several high buildings. The residents felt anything but compensated for their years of waiting and suffering (remember the woman of the story at the beginning of chapter 1 who was so furious that she threatened to kill the architect). Respondent B13, a long-time resident, explained to me how the plan for this “Berlin wall” triggered several civic associations to get together, compile, distribute, and analyze a survey, convene a meeting with the recently elected political authorities, and convinced them to organize participative workshops to resolve the conflict. With the support of several

²⁵ The majority of *stranieri* (foreigners) came from China and Romania, but significant segments also originated from Morocco, Philippines, Bangladesh, Albania, Ukraine, Moldova, Pakistan, and Eritrea

neighborhood officials and civil servants, they managed to create the conditions for a deliberative space that could *canalize* the existing antagonism towards new outcomes.

The success of the *Laboratorio Mercato* did not only lead to adoption of its proposals, which “radically modified the previous plan” (Comune di Bologna, 2007a, p. 46), but also of its institutional format (Ginocchini & Tartari, 2007). In 2008, the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* was started as the most ambitious of all participative workshops, as it set out to facilitate residents in formulating proposals for the regeneration of the three abandoned factory areas in the neighborhood (Ginocchini, 2009). While the previous *Laboratorio* was coordinated by three expert facilitators appointed by the Municipality, for *Bolognina-Est* a public bidding process was commissioned and won by *Associazione Orlando*, a locally based but (inter)nationally operating women’s rights association. Taking the second step, the analysis now shows that *canalizing* was the dominant communicative pattern in the PSC. The narrative of respondent B14, professional facilitator who had been hired as an external expert to assist *Orlando*, about the preparation of the participative workshops is illustrative:

To prepare the meetings we worked with the technicians **to decide ... what kind of information we needed to show to the citizens**, and also we, um, prepared the question we used to open a meeting. I mean, um, ... we prepared ... a big poster, hm, on which several **key questions** are present, **the focus of the discussion**, um, **a scheme in which the things the people say are ordered**. Um, both in respect to the locations as to the themes, emphasizing that which is present, that which is the future, and that which is shared, that which is problematical, that which is an opportunity, and a criticality... [So] a big poster that guides and orients, ... **allows to collect in an ordered fashion that what the people say**, in a way that allows the people to write directly on these posters. It is like the preparation of these kinds of materials and also ... **cartographies or photographs**, images that can help or give examples, or for having a, **the materials with which to work**, writing together with people in small groups. This is how... (Respondent B14 – Facilitator)

The respondent describes how they went about in preparing and managing three thematic meetings. For every meeting, the facilitators and the “technicians” met to decide the exact topic, the questions that would focus the discussion, and “what kind of information we needed to show to the citizens”. From their analysis of the neighborhood and relevant rules and policies, the conveners prepared maps, photos, and models on the basis of which residents could form an image of how proposals would look like. Every meeting was introduced to explain what the current situation of the area under discussion was, what the PSC proposed, and what the goals and procedures of the meeting were. The format of small group and plenary

discussions, which was used for the thematic meetings, aided a deliberative process in which similarities and differences were confronted to build mutual understanding, compromise, and consensus. The facilitators assisted residents in marking “problems” and “opportunities” on maps and in 2x2 “SWOT” matrices with “present/future” and “opportunities/problems” on the axes. This helped “to collect in an ordered fashion that what the people say” and synthesize the final proposals in a report that was handed to the Municipality.

As such, the participative workshops had a variety of formats to *canalize* the inputs of the residents “in an ordered fashion” towards concrete proposals for the regeneration of the neighborhood. *Canalizing* became the dominant pattern of communication, because it not only facilitated a constructive and productive deliberative process, but also enabled a new type of relationships between public professionals and residents. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of 15 out of 20 respondents appraised the participative workshops for their unexpected and unprecedented potential for *making it work*, while the remaining five voiced considerable criticism, disappointment, and frustration. We can get below the surface of this division by taking the third step of the analysis and compare the stories of respondent B4, a middle level manager at the Urban Planning Department who talks about his role in the participative workshops, and respondent B1, a pensioner who had worked in one of the factories and for whom this was his first participative experience.

one of the things we saw in the experience of the Laboratorio this year is that **you can't discuss everything. You have to delimitate the field in which you can discuss, um, because otherwise the discussions can get, um, can [go astray]**. And so, if this happens, the Laboratorio is no more useful, you don't get anything. While **you are discussing about, if this pedestrian, um, [walkway] has to be green or not**, it's an important question for the final environment that will be created by the realization of this work... **But you can't discuss if this pedestrian or bicycle route is better than a light mass transport system**. Because if you discuss that you don't get any route, any pedestrian route, you will have an abandoned railway as it is now... **So my role in this kind of processes was the one of telling the... [boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions**. I think this ... is considered a bad thing, um, by the people who have an ideological view on participation. And, um, in this year **we tried to demonstrate that participation can produce spaces**. And so if you want to produce spaces you have to go very near the needs of people and the way in which, um, the spaces are used. (Respondent B4 – Public professional)

[We had] good meetings and good discussions. However, the big decisions were assumed... All the projects of, on which the Laboratorio is working were already decided, all of them... The citizens have participated voluntarily. However, **they have decided the details between brackets**. Like, a bench, two trees, ... bicycle paths. The

rest, everything already, the frame was already decided. **That's all right, ... the function of the Laboratorio was emphasized a lot.** And the true function of the Laboratorio is to create, this is my opinion, consensus about the decisions... And **the citizens were pleased** ... because while the Laboratorio was underway it was understood that they were starting to work on all the, on the recovery... **And for the first time they found a place, the residents, where to, um, let their feelings run free...** (Respondent B1 – Resident)

In the first instance, both respondents seem to concur with the dominant narrative that *canalizing* is the best mode of communication for *making it work*. The participative workshops had “[boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions” because “you can’t discuss everything” and “otherwise the discussions ... can [go astray]”. Although some people might dislike that “the big decisions were assumed”, in the end “the function of the Laboratorio was emphasized a lot” and “the citizens were pleased” because “for the first time they found a place ... where to ... let their feelings run free”. By focusing on the decisions which can be made within the political mandate, “participation can produce spaces” and generate concrete, tangible changes. Thus, while both respondents are aware of the shortcomings of *canalizing*, they support this mode of communication with a *story of progress*: “In the beginning, things were pretty bad. Now they got better. Admitted, we are not quite there yet. But we are heading in the right direction.”²⁶

A closer look at their narratives reveals that these respondents actually provide contrasting *diagnostic-prescriptive stories* (see pp.64-65). Such stories represent a complex reality and a vision for future transformation based on such a subtle “normative leap ... as to make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious” (Rein & Schön, 1994, p. 26). The *normative leap* in the first narrative is made in the sentence “discussing about, if this pedestrian, um, [walkway] has to be green or not, it’s an important question for the final environment that will be created by the realization of this work”. Here, the implicit assumption of the respondent is that detailed physical interventions will have a significant effect on the livability of the area. While this might indeed be the case, this viewpoint contradicts the narratives of local actors in the AW describing local problems which defied technical planning and interventions (see pp. 101-102). Rather, the respondent, as urban planner, values the participative workshops because they facilitate the collection of the views of the residents, coordination of these views with the broader strategic planning goals, and prevention of “end-of-the-pipe” conflicts. As such,

²⁶ Adapted from Stone’s *story of stymied progress*: “Things were terrible and got better, but now there is a new obstacle to progress, and we must act to remove it” (Stone, 2002, p. 138).

canalizing provides a more stable and reliable basis than the previous system for the long term transformations of the city as a whole.

The *normative leap* in the second narrative is made in the statement that “The citizens have participated voluntarily. However, they have decided the details between brackets”. This is not so much a complaint about the symbolic use of participation by the Municipality, but rather that the fixed agenda and procedures inhibited residents in addressing local problems on their own terms. Public professionals focused attention on the design of the physical environment by translating individual needs, feelings, and desires into concrete proposals for the planning system. Certainly, the respondent thinks that the architecture of buildings and squares, the exact routes of pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes, and the types of greenery and parks will affect the usage, social dynamics, and safety problems of the neighborhood. But he questions whether it will be enough to reverse the strong social segregation and intricate safety problems that have so deeply permeated the neighborhood. Hence, *canalizing* has guided the residents towards decision making “between brackets”, away from the autonomous, emotional, and spontaneous contributions that they could make to deepen understandings of the nitty-gritty of local problems.

Thus, we see that the tension between *Community* and *Planning* also lingers underneath the surface of the communicative pattern of *canalizing*. Local actors achieved consensus on a set of pre-determined issues through a pattern of rational deliberation, but have as a result not addressed underlying beliefs, feelings, and experiences. Their public encounters did not take place in an open and continuous forum for delving into the progress and complexities of a mixture of everyday problems, projects, and initiatives (*Community*), but in a delineated and goal-oriented space that enabled the participants to arrive at concrete decisions about specific issues (*Planning*). The underlying rationale was not to let a river of talk run free but to dig a canal that could get the stream of words from A to B in a straight line. This *Planning* approach to participation intends to avoid the risk that all the talking diffuses into nothing, at the cost of artificially cutting through the natural state of the local context. Respondents B2, B9, and B11, public professionals who were all involved in facilitating the workshops, emphasized that a lot of their work consisted of explaining to residents what they could talk about and which topics were out of discussion.

Canalizing, in other words, means attempting to enhance the quality of participatory democracy by setting the goals, topic, and timelines in advance, conducting meetings based on a pre-determined set of participative structures and techniques, and working towards the formulation of concrete proposals which can be synthesized in a final plan. This means a communicative pattern of bringing together a variety of different people to discuss a common topic, making their individual viewpoints visible and concrete (e.g., by using maps and models), evaluating the tensions and trade-offs between them (e.g., by using 2x2 SWOT matrices), and working towards mutual understanding and compromise through the rational exchange of arguments. To be sure, respondent B3, who was active in civic groups and local politics, told that she had met new people and learned about their views on the neighborhood and experiences with safety problems. But there was no room for the conversation to take its own course. The viewpoints of local actors and the rules of the game need to be considered as factual and fixed, because a structured, ordered, and delineated process will maximize the capacity to solve local problems. The communicative pattern of *canalizing* supports this belief system of *Planning*.

However, the analysis has shown that *canalizing* still falls short in enhancing the quality of participatory democracy, because it excludes a *Community* approach such as *being in touch* in which local actors do not just try to connect their viewpoints on a functional level, but more fundamentally strive to establish a connection on the emotional level. That would imply not having a temporal project in which viewpoints and institutions are considered as factual and fixed, but rather an open and ongoing process for exploring deep values and feelings, broader problems of the neighborhood and the urban governance system, and the goals and boundaries of the process. The final step of the analysis, then, is to demonstrate that the communicative pattern of *canalizing* is valuable and yet partial. This story of respondent B7, who leads a social work association that provides support to youngsters, explains why participation is an ongoing process which requires diverging patterns of communication:

But the problem is that, um, after that, **after the workshops, nothing happened**. Because one thing is participation, asking people, listening to them, and so on, and another thing is doing. And what has to be done now, the entire requalification of the area is **such a huge project that it takes a lot of time just to start**. And then here we have political problems, we don't have the mayor. Um, ... and this slows things down very much. So the problem is that **when you start these kind of processes you also have to follow them [up]** and to make sure that what people say will be done sooner or later. **Otherwise the frustration will grow up** and that's what's happening now,

because **people have been asked for [input] and they don't see the results** of the, of what they said... They have been asked for what they want and they said what they wanted and now what they wanted is not there and **they don't know when it will be there**. And in that part of the city [safety] is a very big problem, criminality especially in Bolognina Est, in Casaralta, in those old factories... Um, **so people keep on suffering the same old problems. So let's see what happens in the [near] future**. [sighs] How long people will bear the situation. (Respondent B7 – Public professional)

By observing that “after the workshops, nothing happened”, the respondent indicates that participation is a continuous process that should not have stopped after the participative workshops. In fact, during my fieldwork I was only able to attend one meeting, because the recent dismissal of the mayor meant that the Municipality could not take any formal decisions and so also not decide to organize new workshops. The only reason a meeting could be held was because it was discovered that a legal rule for building heights was overlooked, which had implications for the plans that had been made. But the narrative of respondent B7 is more than a simple argument for putting the money where the mouth is, because it is not based on the causal belief that the local problems will be solved if *canalizing* will be extended to the implementation process. A continuation of *canalizing* is likely to get stuck on the functional level about why “people ... don't see the results”. Misunderstanding and antagonism will (re)emerge, because residents might not understand the complexities of the urban governance system and implementation process. In turn, public professionals have a grasp of how these complexities cause that “such a huge project ... takes a lot of time just to start”, but might not appreciate the extent to which “people keep on suffering the same old problems”. Therefore, what seems to be needed is a more open and unstructured process in which local actors can talk about their feelings of disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty, as well as engage in creative conversations to find previously unthought-of solutions and initiatives. Such a *Community* approach could compensate for the overriding emphasis given to *Planning*.

In conclusion, the analysis has shown that *canalizing* formed the dominant communicative pattern of public professionals and residents in the PSC. This pattern was institutionally embedded to achieve concrete results in a challenging context, but also downplayed more free-flowing, flexible, and autonomous communication. *Canalizing* was supported by a *Planning* narrative which inhibited a *Community* narrative to emerge, because (1) a stable and effective set of institutions was set in place to move forward from a situation of protracted conflict and stalemate; (2) local actors greatly valued an ordered and goal-oriented pathway to *making it work*; (3) the dominant predisposition was to focus attention on functional consensus and not

on emotional bonding; and (4) more balance between *Community* and *Planning* would require local actors to start understanding participation as an ongoing process in need of a broader and more varied forms of communication.

On the one hand, then, the communicative pattern of *canalizing* benefited the quality of participatory democracy, because local actors prepared “the materials with which to work”, “collect[ed] in an ordered fashion that what the people say”, and indicated “the... [boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions” to prevent that “the discussions ... [go astray]”. In this *Planning* narrative, “participation can produce spaces” because it employs pre-determined mandates and procedures, participative methods, and mediators. However, it remains uncertain whether the planned interventions will actually yield the desired changes, and whether the productive relationships between public professionals and residents are there to stay. On the other hand, then, the communicative pattern of local actors in Bologna limited their ability to engage in autonomous, spontaneous, and capricious encounters. The previous case showed that such a *Community* narrative can lead to profound and trusting relationships, but also reduces clarity, certainty, and stability. Again, therefore, developing the capacity to recognize and change communicative patterns requires something else than a simple “shift” between *Community* and *Planning*; it comes down to the ability to find a temporal balance in the course of a continuous process of talking, compromising, and challenging.

Summary and Implications: Communicative Patterns and Process

The goal of this chapter was to make a first step in answering the research question: *how do the encounters between public professionals and residents affect the quality of participatory democracy?* Based on the analysis of the meta-narratives of the three cases, this conclusion now provides an answer to the first sub-question: *What happens when public professionals and residents meet in community participation?* In short, the analysis demonstrated that when they met, public professionals and residents formed patterns of communication which shaped their ability to understand each other, make decisions, and solve problems. These patterns of communication proved difficult to change because attention was usually put on the substantive issues at hand, thereby neglecting the ways in which the beliefs, values, and tensions located below the surface of everyday talk unlocked and foreclosed possibilities for moving the conversation forward. There was no ideal pattern of communication for “making it work”.

Rather, the quality of participatory democracy depends on the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents to recognize what type of talk specific situations require.

First of all, what can be concluded about the public encounters in community participation that took place in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna? In each of these cases we saw that when public professionals and residents met, they developed a dominant pattern of communication. Although they expressed themselves and interacted with each other in a variety of ways, the analysis showed that public professionals and residents had the inclination to stick to one dominant communicative pattern. For example, in Amsterdam, local actors were sometimes engaged in antagonistic communication about *making it work* just as local actors in Glasgow, or tried to streamline their communication like local actors in Bologna were *canalizing*. But in the end the narratives of respondents A13, A5, A1, and A18 all appeared to be based on the belief that *being in touch* is the best mode of communication. Hence, several questions arise from the finding that public encounters were limited to a dominant pattern of communication: What do these patterns look like? How did local actors develop these patterns? Why could they not get out of these patterns?

The dominant pattern of communication of each case was captured in a meta-narrative. The meta-narrative of the Glasgow case told the story of the communicative pattern of *making it work*: the overt and tacit disputes about whether Community Planning was working or not. Local actors spent a lot of time contesting the most optimal institutions and knowledge rather than having constructive conversations about solving local problems. Rather than antagonism, the meta-narrative of the Amsterdam case embodied the more pragmatic and accommodative communicative pattern of *being in touch*: extensive personal contact focused on gradually creating more mutual trust, understanding, and adaptation in order to find joint resolutions for concrete, practical problems. Many different ways of working and thinking were in contact with each other in flexible, spontaneous, and empathic ways. In contrast, the meta-narrative of the Bologna case encapsulated the communicative pattern of *canalizing*, i.e. guided exchange of arguments within formal constraints in order to formulate regeneration plans. Local actors appraised the potential of their participative workshops for preventing the process to go astray and generating concrete results.

So where did these communicative patterns come from? Without pretending to provide a causal explanation for their origins²⁷, the analysis demonstrated in each case how the dominant pattern of communication was embedded in the local context. For instance, in Bologna, the inclination for *canalizing* can be understood in light of the strong local urge to turn around a protracted standoff over neighborhood regeneration, and the reforms to the urban governance system that allowed for experimentation with participative methods. In this context, it is hard to imagine a flexible and unplanned mode of communication such as *being in touch* to emerge and sink in. Once a particular mode of communication had turned into a dominant, recurring *pattern*, public professionals and residents tended to stick to this way of communicating. Two reasons have been found for this resilience. First, local actors held the belief that their existing mode of communication was ideal for community participation (Amsterdam and Bologna) or were wedged between contradictory ideals (Glasgow). Second, some wanted to transform the dominant pattern in an alternative mode of communication, but were unable to get a sufficient number of other local actors do to the same.

Why was it so difficult for public professionals and residents to change the underlying beliefs on which their dominant patterns of communication were based? The comparison of the three cases revealed that dominant communicative patterns were grounded on two contradictory belief systems: *Community* and *Planning*. This surfaced in the case of Glasgow, where local actors were divided between those who believed that participation can only work when communication is based on social relationships and develops freely and spontaneously from interdependencies, common beliefs and values, and reciprocity (*Community*), and those who believed in people adhering to fixed institutions which coordinate knowledge and maintain committed relationships (*Planning*). The dominance of *Community* in Amsterdam and of *Planning* in Bologna subsequently explained the difficulty of changing a communicative pattern based on one belief system to the other: *Community* and *Planning* stand in an irresolvable and endless tension because both belief systems are indispensable, not ideal, and incompatible. Why is that so?

Community and *Planning* are two sides of the same coin: both are necessary elements but neither tells the full story. On the one hand, the analysis showed that communication needs to be based on *Community*. In the Amsterdam case, the personal relationships through which

²⁷ This would be something that might be done with the method of process tracing.

public professionals and residents were *being in touch* enabled them to communicate in flexible, spontaneous, and creative ways about complex local problems. In Bologna, the absence of free-floating and capricious communication limited local actors in extending their efforts for solving local problems beyond pre-determined boundaries. On the other hand, these boundaries did enable them in *canalizing* their attention and energy towards concrete decisions in a challenging context. In Amsterdam, clear structures, budgets, and hard-and-fast rules were often lacking, so that communication was disjointed, uncertainty was sustained, and large scale results were hard to achieve. Thus, *Community* and *Planning* are both imperfect, and yet indispensable, belief systems for communication in participatory practice.

Moreover, *Community* and *Planning* are incommensurable: they cannot be reduced to each other (Stout & Salm, 2011). *Community* comes from the Greek *ko-moi-mei*, which literally means together change, or shared by all, and the Latin *communitatem*, which means quality of fellowship, or community of relations or feelings. Communication is motivated out of an autonomous and mutually felt willingness to convey information or feelings to each other (Taylor, 1982). *Planning* derives from the Greek *plano* and the Latin *planum*, meaning ground plan or (drawing on) flat surface. Communication is motivated out of an innate sense of obligation to transmit knowledge and comply with authoritative arrangements (Peters, 2001, pp. 238-240). Thus, if public professionals and residents communicate by adhering to formal structures, plans, and procedures as to sustain stability, certainty, and clarity (*Planning*), this goes directly at the cost of the autonomous, flexible, and spontaneous communication which emerges in the absence of a system in which plans, rules, structures, and roles are strictly specified (*Community*), and vice versa. In other words, *Community* and *Planning* are in a permanent tension that has no final resolution.

To be sure, *Community* and *Planning* are ideal typical constructs (Weber, 1949): analytical, and not normative, abstractions that are not to be empirically found in their “pure” forms. Both constitute idealized extremes that provide a yardstick for interpreting how and why the nature and meaning of different cases in social reality deviate. The two extremes do not exclude the existence of intermediate and mixed forms: something is never black or white, *Community* or *Planning*, but there are different shades of grey in between (see Rutgers, 2001; Stout, 2010b). Local actors can negotiate pragmatic compromises without letting go of their belief systems (Forester, 1999a). Indeed, in each of the cases we found mixtures of both *Community* and

Planning, and, in their own ways, local actors were striving to reconcile both. For example, respondent G4 told us how in Glasgow they were trying to close the gap between the ideal and practice of community engagement by balancing national objectives, city-wide objectives, and local issues in the limited discretionary room that they had (pp. 95-96).

However, a final balance cannot be achieved. The tension between *Community* and *Planning* is as irresolvable as the tension that freedom and equality constitute for liberal democracy: to guarantee equality amongst all individuals, a liberal democracy sets in place a system of sovereign power based on the rule of law, which by definition limits the freedom of the individuals. This is why (participatory) democracy is always lacking in itself, is necessarily imperfect (Mouffe, 1992, 2000; Staniševski, 2011). That does not mean defeatism: it actually invites negotiation of workable intermediate forms. However, what is misguided is the idea that a final resolution can ever be found. The “promise of becoming” –i.e. the promise of *arrival* at an ultimate ideal– sidetracks public professionals and residents from attention to the actual *process*. But if we accept that the communication between public professionals and residents is necessarily imperfect, we can start to see community participation as an ongoing process in which

no one reform is likely to settle all the problems. What is perhaps needed more than anything is to view [participatory democracy] not as a set of measures that will reconcile policy issues once and for all, but to embrace the [process] of becoming, of constantly exploring different possibilities (Staniševski, 2011, p. 23).

As already discussed on pp. 79-83, participatory practice is not a stable thing which we can master by understanding some fixed properties, but rather a *process* of forces and fluctuating activities which are “constantly reshaped ... through ... a dialectic that continually blends conflicting opposites into a[n] ... inherently unstable fusion” (Rescher, 1996, p. 13). This process is not rooted in the properties of substantive objects or actors, but is a distinct force taking shape in the “interweaving” (Follett, 1919) of local actors with each other and concrete situations at hand. This means we need to attend to the dynamic and evolving interactions of local actors with the affordances and resistances, or “push and pull” (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011), of participatory practice. The next three chapters do exactly this by focusing on three processes of participatory practice. These chapters show that the communicative capacity of local actors to animate dominant patterns was mediated by the ways in which these processes

of participatory practice kept on drawing their attention to substantive issues rather than to the ways in which they communicated about these.

By considering how these processes influence the communicative in-between, we will arrive at a better understanding of communicative capacity and what enables and inhibits local actors in exercising it. Chapter 5 shows that the *setting* in which public professionals and residents meet is a relentlessly complex, ambiguous, and changeable *work in progress*. Chapter 6 explains how the *content* of their conversations is an incessant *struggling* over different bits and pieces of expertise. In chapter 7, finally, we see that the maintenance of their *relationships* comes down to constantly *making connections*. Table 4.1²⁸ provides a rough overview of the ways in which the processes of participatory practice kept the communicative patterns of each of the cases in place. For example, the next chapter demonstrates that the setting induced local actors to communicate by contesting optimal institutional design, immersing in the nitty-gritty of local problems, or setting up a safe and insulated deliberative space. That does not mean that local contexts deterministically structured the ways in which public professionals and residents communicated. While this chapter demonstrated that communicative patterns did not emerge spontaneously between local actors and were embedded in contextual conditions, participatory democracy can certainly not be reduced to the (local) context. Instead, the next chapters show that *the practice of community participation, or the modes of engaging with the push and pull of participatory practice, generates particular forms of communication* which shape the added value of public professionals and residents coming together.

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna
Communicative Pattern	<i>Making it work</i>	<i>Being in touch</i>	<i>Canalizing</i>
Setting	Contesting what are optimal institutions	Immersing in the nitty-gritty of problems	Setting up a safe and insulated space
Content	Defending own view against others	Recognizing the value of multiple perspectives	Circumscribing what is relevant knowledge
Relationships	Focusing on others' beliefs	Pragmatic converging and clashing	Sticking to formal rules and roles

Table 4.2 Communicative patterns and processes of participatory practice

In sum, when public professionals and residents meet in community participation, they tend to develop communicative patterns which become difficult to change because of the irresolvable

²⁸ This table has already been discussed in chapter 1 and will be returned to in chapter 8.

tension between indispensable, not ideal, and incompatible underlying belief systems. But if there is no ultimate ideal of communication, and if community participation is an ongoing process, how do we know what should be done, what is better or worse, or that we are actually solving local problems? The analysis suggested that the answer lies in the capacity to move conversations forward instead of getting stuck in a single communicative pattern that keeps narrow practices in place. To do so, public professionals and residents need to focus less on the immediate issues, or content of the conversation, and pay more attention to the process through which the conversation is held. In each of the cases, we saw that we can learn a lot about underlying beliefs, tensions, and conflicts by looking below the surface of everyday talk. We found, for example, a conflict between deep-seated values and feelings lingering under the ostensibly strong consensus in Bologna, while in Glasgow a shared value was buried under apparently antagonistic gridlock. Thus, public professionals and residents need the capacity to recognize the influence of communicative patterns and break through them by adapting the mode of communication to the needs of the situation at hand.

For now, communicative capacity still seems quite an intricate and nebulous notion. The next three chapters will therefore discuss in detail how the communicative capacity of local actors emerged from the processes through which they animated the resistances and affordances of participatory practice. By doing so, these chapters aim to provide answers to the second and third sub-question (*How do public encounters in participatory democracy mean? How can the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy be enhanced?*) By revealing the ongoing processes through which communicative capacity shapes, and is shaped by, the setting in which public professionals and residents meet, the content of their conversations, and the associated relationships, the thesis will work towards the conclusion in chapter 8 about how public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy. This chapter has made a first step in that direction by demonstrating that, first, when they met, public professionals and residents developed dominant patterns of communication which mediated their ability to solve local problems, and, second, they required communicative capacity to positively influence this ongoing process.

5. Work in Progress: The Setting of Public Encounters

it's just an ongoing piece of work ... that doesn't stop ~
Community Planning officer Glasgow

The goal of this chapter, and the next two, is to connect the main finding of the previous chapter –that public professionals and residents developed dominant communicative patterns when they met– to the main conclusion of chapter 8 –that the impact of their encounters on the quality of participatory democracy depends on their communicative capacity for recognizing and adapting these patterns to the needs of the situation at hand. This chapter further clarifies what communicative capacity looks like, as well as what enables and inhibits local actors in exercising it, by discussing one of the three processes of participatory practice that emerged from the research: how public professionals and residents deal with the setting in which they meet. The next chapters will, respectively, focus on content and relationships in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the multifaceted, situated, and relational performances that form communicative capacity. As such, these three chapters formulate an answer to the second and third sub-question: *How do public encounters in participatory democracy mean? How can the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy be enhanced?* This chapter focuses on the ways in which the complex, ambiguous, and changeable setting in which local actors meet affects the meaning and added value of their encounters.

Setting: A Process of Work in Progress

The main point of this chapter is that the setting in which local actors meet is a *work in progress*: it consists of a great number of actors, institutions, policies, and problems, which constantly change in form, meaning, and importance. As the Community Planning officer, who we already met on p. 76, indicates in the opening quote, participatory practice is “just an ongoing piece of work ... that doesn't stop”. Of course, more adequate institutional design can render *work in progress* more manageable. But institutional design, as a single, stable pattern of engaging with the setting, is likely to have a limited reach, stay useful for only a certain amount of time, and can just as well create all kinds of unintended consequences that increase, rather than decrease, complexity and ambiguity. The point is not that institutional design is useless, but rather that the complex, ambiguous, and changeable daily setting of participatory practice cannot be “tamed” by the static drafting of institutional blueprints. In each of the

cases, the tendency of local actors to stick to a single pattern of engaging with their setting undermined their ability to animate its resistances and affordances. *Work in progress* asks for the communicative capacity to constantly reassess who can say and do what, when, and how in the setting at hand.

The concern with institutional design and reform is an inheritance from the first generation of participatory democracy. Many early contributors argued that the institutional walls of liberal representative democracy upheld a system of political power inequality, social inequity and exclusion, and administrative incompetence, and, therefore, needed to be brought down to erect a new “architecture” that guaranteed free, equal, and inclusive decision making and fair, consensual, effective outcomes (Pateman, 1975; Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1984b). This deep resentment against the misappropriation of public decision making powers and the deceptive inclusion of citizens in the process (Arnstein, 1969) continues to feed into the sentiment that “one of the reasons that people do not participate is that most Western political *institutions* do not really give them a meaningful chance” (Fischer, 2003, p. 209; emphasis added). Empirical research on the institutional design of participatory settings is not so much concerned with a radical shift in the democratic landscape, but rather with exploring what can be learned from practical experiences with institutionalizing participatory ideals in different socio-political contexts (Smith, 2009). This can lead to a better understanding of how institutional design can facilitate “authentic” participation and “genuine” deliberation (Saward, 2003; Fung, 2006, 2007; Thompson, 2008). Or, in more practical terms: “Clarifying the link between purpose and institutional design is vital in confronting the challenges faced by neighborhood governance” (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008, p. 71).

Similarly, in each of the cases of my research, local actors tried to enhance the quality of their setting by talking about how to refine rules, structures, and plans. By *starting from scratch* with a new institutional design, local actors in Glasgow got divided between proponents and critics of the reform. As a result, public professionals and residents were often contesting the proper form and function of participatory institutions instead of talking about how to resolve local problems. In Amsterdam, the institutional design granted room to local actors for *getting to grips* with the nitty-gritty of local problems. This flexibility generated a desire for better institutional design to create more clarity, certainty, and stability about who was supposed to do what, when, and how. Local actors in Bologna had been *groundbreaking* by establishing,

for the first time, participatory institutions that set strict limits to the conditions under which they met. This helped to focus their conversations on concrete decisions but also constrained them in addressing local problems on their own terms. Thus, in each case local actors engaged with the setting through a single pattern of institutional designing rather than cultivating their capacity to communicate about its unrelenting complexity, ambiguity, and changeability.

The code *work in progress*, as I explained on p. 76, emerged in the Glasgow case from the narrative of the Community Planning officer cited in the opening quote, but soon took on a much broader and richer meaning. The code *getting to grips* best illustrates this development. I developed this code in the first memo of the Amsterdam case, as the first two interviews immediately made clear that the local actors were deeply immersed in the nitty-gritty of local problems: they were constantly trying to *get to grips* with what was going on and what was the best thing to do. *Getting to grips* greatly deepened my understanding of how local actors engage with the complexity, ambiguity, and changeability of the setting. Whereas local actors in Glasgow had been bogged down on the organizational charts and rules and procedures that had been created by *starting from scratch*, the institutional flexibility in Amsterdam granted local actors as much freedom to develop tailor-made solutions as uncertainty about how to do so. From an interview with a local police officer, I developed the concept of *seemingly small problems* to capture how local actors got entangled in what seemed easy to solve problems, but soon turned out to be very complicated and difficult to do anything about. The complex interdependencies between the many actors and factors involved with problems such as unemployment, domestic violence, or anti-social behavior strongly illuminated the difficulty of *getting to grips* as well as the meaning of *work in progress*. The contrast with the Bologna case could not have been bigger, as local actors there took a very structured approach to deal with local problems. While this was *groundbreaking* for them, it also limited their possibilities for *getting to grips* with the *work in progress* of their setting.

The analysis demonstrates how the narratives of local actors about the setting in which they met inhibited them to break through their dominant communicative patterns with:

- (1) plotlines, causal beliefs, and normative leaps sustaining a single pattern of engaging with the setting;
 - (2) signifiers forming a vocabulary that affected possibilities for understanding each other;
- and

- (3) structures, rules, and policies featuring in holistic narratives about dealing with local problems.

In this way, the analysis shows that the work narratives do for the setting is narrowing the ability to solve local problems to a single pattern of dealing with the *work in progress* of the setting. Narratives of engaging with the setting neglected the capacity to communicate about adapting to the *work in progress* and therefore kept dominant patterns of communication in place. Hence, the final section concludes that the quality of participatory democracy is affected by the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents to adapt the course of the conversation to the needs of the situation at hand by constantly reassessing how they can deal with the ongoing *work in progress* of their setting.

Glasgow: Starting From Scratch

And everybody is feeling the same sense of frustration. But we're attending dozens of meetings, we're getting dozens of pieces of paper, we're preparing reports, we're observing the process, we're not actually doing what we believe is our role.
(Respondent G6 – Public professional)

The case of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) made clear that the setting is intrinsically *work in progress* and, secondly, how neglecting the capacity to communicate about this process of participatory practice is to the detriment of solving local problems. During the fieldwork in Glasgow, *starting from scratch* surfaced as the most adequate code to capture the unproductive dynamic that public professionals and residents sustained by mainly engaging with their setting by contesting their participatory institutions. *Starting from scratch* refers to the tension generated by the introduction of the GCPP between those in favor of the opportunities for comprehensive and consistent collaboration this reform offered and those who experienced it as suffocating, patronizing, and hampering. An impasse existed between two quite dogmatically opposed standpoints about whether to abandon pre-existing ways of working and fully adopt the new institutional format. By fixating on institutional design, and disregarding that structures, rules, and policies are *work in progress*, public professionals and residents seriously undermined their capacity to communicate about who could and should say and do what, when, and how to solve local problems.

Although many local actors were, in the words of respondent G6, a deeply committed and disillusioned middle level manager of one of the public agencies, “feeling the same sense of

frustration”, of course, the GCPP was in its totality not as disheartening as he portrays the situation. I attended several meetings of the Community Reference Group (CRG) and the Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) Board in Pollokshields Southside Central, at which a range of ambitious and important projects were discussed and coordinated, such as the Health Impact Assessment, Govanhill Neighbourhood Management, Fairer Scotland Fund, and Let Glasgow Flourish. However, that does not negate that a significant amount of time was spent on contesting the structures, rules, and policies through which this happened. Public professionals and residents felt constrained in their ability to solve local problems by this focus on institutions rather than problems. Across the board they expressed uncertainty about, or dissatisfaction with, who was supposed to do what, which decisions needed to be taken when, and how certain structures were to be developed. In one of the meetings, for example, respondent G6 several times asked for more clarity about how specific plans and procedures would actually work out. Thus, their capacity for communicating about *work in progress* was limited.

At the origin of this situation was the transition from Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) to Community Planning in 2004 (see p. 87). The Council had commissioned a review of the SIPs and found that local problems were insufficiently reduced. The main reason for this was said to be that organizations and projects were too constrained to the geographical boundaries of the few areas that had a SIP, while actual problems transcended these boundaries. Therefore, a new institutional format was developed aimed at similar structures and equal outcomes across the city. Taking its cue from the Scottish Community Planning policy (Scottish Executive, 2003), the GCPP Board required all “partner agencies” to (re)organize themselves according to the boundaries of the ten LCPP areas and provide representatives for each LCPP Board. Residents from different neighborhoods were invited to participate in the CRGs of the LCPP areas. Both assemblies got administrative support from a local team of Community Planning officers, each of which had an Engagement Network Coordinator (ENC) who was specifically responsible for engendering a new participatory setting.

The position and practices of these ENCs underline how this setting was *starting from scratch*: five people were appointed in these newly created positions to develop a new community engagement approach. They did this by holding consultations in the local areas, recruiting members from community groups and organizations as well as traditionally underrepresented

groups, and setting rules and procedures for the meetings together with participating residents. Although these practices might seem like the natural order of things, we should not gloss over the fact that the introduction of the GCPP was their *starting point*. Many residents and public professionals already had experience with the SIPs (or even before). While some saw the GCPP as a new opportunity to start afresh, others considered it a badly thought through artificial intervention in the ways of working and organizing they had built up over the years. Several other local actors were only involved after the start of the GCPP, for example because the organizations of some public professionals had a statutory duty to participate for the first time, or were just invited along later on. Respondent G10, a middle level manager at one of the public agencies who was new to the participatory scene, even said “my involvement really has only started last week”. These diverging starting points differentiated between the level of experience with, and knowledge of the GCPP, the SIPs, and the local area, as well as how legitimate the GCPP was considered.

Instead of constructive communication about how this variety in backgrounds could be turned into a collaborative advantage, *starting from scratch* generated strongly opposing narratives about the added value of the new institutional format. Compare for example the narratives of respondent G18, who worked at the policy making level and was involved in developing the GCPP, and respondent G8, an active pensioner who talked a lot to residents in the area during his daily walks, and found the new rules and structures inadequate:

So with Community Planning what you’ve got is you have to use the specific money that comes for Community Planning to target deprivation, but you don’t have to spend it within the areas where the worst five percent live for example. You can spend it as long as the effects of the money that you’re using is addressing deprivation for people. So ... that’s much more flexible, and **a much more grown-up approach** I think to dealing with these issues. So there were good things about SIPs, we did feel it was nice working in them, I liked working in them. **You felt more close to working in the communities** and, um, because **you can’t have that**, you just can’t possibly have that kind of a, you can’t know everybody within an area of that size, all the groups, **you just can’t, it’s not possible...** And so I suppose for the people who were involved in Social Inclusion Partnerships, ... they’ve moved from a situation where they probably felt much closer to things than they do now into something that is much bigger that has **a different kind of thinking** behind it. **And that takes time to get used to.** (Respondent G18 – Community Planning officer)

...the Culture & Sports people who are in charge of vibrance, getting excitement going, um, like sports and so on, ... said ... they had managed to get groups from different areas together and were disappointed that it didn’t seem to work. I pointed out

to them **it's obvious it wouldn't work**, because people in each area have their own identity, way of doing things and so on, and **you can't force people to say 'you're going to work together'**, they have to decide for themselves whether they want to work together. And so you organize a competition between them, between various areas, like **a football competition, something like that, and that would draw people together**. But you can't say 'you are going to'. (Respondent G8 – Resident)

Respondent G18 describes the transition to the GCPP with a metaphor of maturation to legitimize the policy that everyone should adopt equivalent understandings of the goals, rules, and possibilities to influence the process. Not working that close to each other anymore might be a loss, but is an unavoidable part of a more “grown-up”, sophisticated, and wise approach that just “takes time to get used to”. The narratives of respondents G1-4,9,10,12,16-18 all held that the GCPP would work better by *broadening* the collective understanding of the meaning of Community Planning, each others' practices, and benefits of collaboration. Respondent G8 all but agrees: he stresses that “you can't force people” to work in a particular way. Instead, organizing something like a football competition “would draw people together”, because it would allow collaboration to emerge spontaneously, create a sense of familiarity with different local identities, and respect residents' autonomy and needs. The narratives of respondents G5-8,11,13-15,19 all asserted that the GCPP would work better if it would be *doing it right* by “properly” treating, supporting, and empowering “the community” to solve their problems. Public professionals tended to hold the former narrative, and residents the latter. However, as respondents G6 and G19 (both public professionals) formed an exception, it seems that not their formal positions *per se* but rather their narratives of institutional design prevented them to communicate constructively.

Perhaps the best example I experienced of the clash between these opposing narratives was the introduction of the “Rules and Procedures for Community Reference Groups”. This seven page document was aimed at streamlining and normalizing the CRGs by requiring residents to be officially nominated by a constituent group which they should formally consult and give feedback to. This generated great resistance among the residents, who spent almost an entire meeting arguing that the consultation process for the document had been seriously lacking, the rules were unworkable because most of them were active in several platforms at the same time, and it would be beyond the remit of a *reference* group to do this formal representation. Nevertheless, the Strategic Board approved the document. Rather than an isolated incident, this clash was exemplary for the regular contestation of the institutional format. Fixating on

getting rules, structures, and procedures “right” made local actors often neglect the *work in progress* in which they were involved. Consider for example the Structure Diagram (figure 5.1). This rather complex organizational chart was designed in 2008 and has been constantly changing ever since. At the start of my fieldwork, the “Community Engagement Coordinating Group” had just been abolished. The “Thematic Groups” were just being developed at that time but were abolished one year later. Five months after that the CRGs were up for review and amendment. This constant concern with the institutional format *per se* diverted attention and energy away from finding practicable and sensible ways of harnessing local problems.

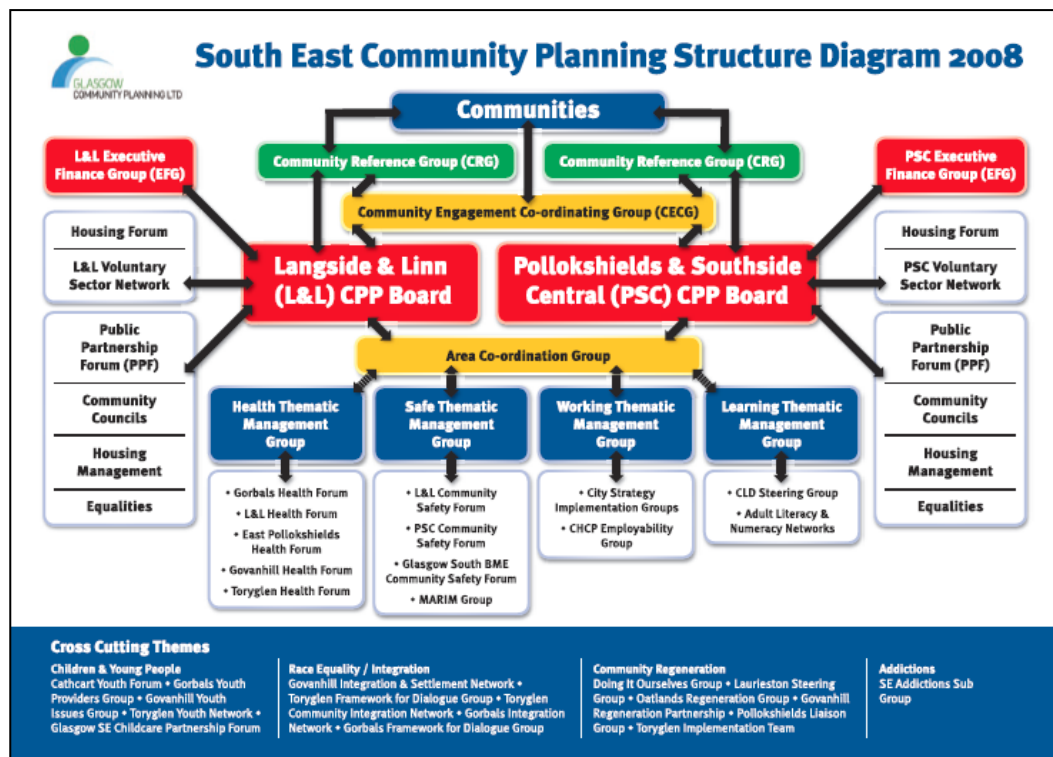


Figure 5.5 Community Planning structure diagram South East

Institutions often play an ambiguous role in British and Scottish (urban) governance. Their historical development is characterized by a piecemeal and incoherent style of reforming which has led to an interwoven patchwork of continuity and change, formal and informal arrangements, governmental and non-governmental actors, control and discretion²⁹ (Rhodes, 2000; Marsh et al., 2003; Richards, 2003). As a constitution³⁰ is absent, the constitutional basis for government is formed by a collection of conventions, traditions, Acts of Parliament and devolved bodies, and rulings of the Courts (Oliver, 2003). This has resulted in a situation in

²⁹ Some have even gone as far as dubbing this “the British syndrome of retrospective justification for ill-considered empirical developments. That is not to say that developments may or may not have been desirable but to stress that theory consists of a form of words to sustain disparate practice” (Jordan, 1994, p. 260).

³⁰ In the sense of a single document with codified rules that define and limit powers.

which local authorities have no autonomous basis of existence and cannot act *ultra vires*, i.e. beyond the mandate provided by Parliament, while at the same time having a great amount of discretion for local service-delivery and urban planning. Local authorities have to balance central government legislation, statutory instruments, circulars, judicial review, default power, inspection, statutory appeals, and financial instruments such as capping and ring fenced grants, with their agreements with QUANGOs, private sector organizations, and voluntary and community groups (Gray, 1994; Wilson & Game, 1994; Stewart, 2003).

Over the last decades, moreover, national policies for local governance have become broad indications and discursive strategies rather than detailed guidelines and coherent programs (Atkinson & Moon, 1994; Lovering, 1995; Newman, 2001; Imrie & Raco, 2003a). Under evocative headers such as “The Third Way” or the “Big Society”, local governments are made responsible for “an urban renaissance” or “a new era of people power” (Lees, 2003). Local authorities are legally obliged to collaborate with public agencies, voluntary organizations, the private sector, and community members in Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) for local service delivery and urban planning, but are provided with broad and indecisive indications as to how that should be done (Cowell, 2010; Matthews, 2010). Also urban development plans do not contain precise specifications of norms, criteria, rights, and procedures, but only priorities, targets, and indicators that provide guidance to planning processes in which stakeholders can determine which types of land use best serve “the public interest” (Adams, 1994; Healey, 1995; Booth, 2003).

Against this setting, the GCPP institutions imbued communication between local actors with a set of signifiers. Notice how the Glasgow Community Plan 2005-2010 shapes the wording of respondent G16, a middle level manager at one of the public agencies who was trying to pinpoint the meaning of Community Planning for his work, but do little to help him in giving concrete meaning to the signifiers:

Community Planning is a process that brings together the public sector, **partners** and the **community** to agree priorities on the planning and provision of **services**. **Community** Planning is about ... jointly planning **services** in a way that will ensure their more effective delivery through **partnership**... Effective and genuine **community engagement** is at the heart of this. We are committed to ensuring that **communities** play a key role in taking forward the **community** planning agenda both in our local **neighbourhoods** and at a city level (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p. 2).

A lot of it is around some of the **partnership** work. Some of the real struggles I suppose we're having at the moment is about that taking responsibility away from the key **partner** agencies, the Council departments, Regeneration Agencies, the Community Healthcare **Partnerships** saying 'We'll just do that' and saying 'Well, no actually we can't just do that, we need to work so that we get the **community** more **involved**, we get individuals more **involved**, we **engage** with a wider section of the population as well. Because I think that is one of the real issues at the moment in terms of **Community** Planning, **community engagement**, is we're not **engaging** with a wide section of the... And ... there needs to be that discussion throughout what do people actually understand by **community engagement**, **community involvement**, capacity building. Because I think it means all things to different people. Ehm, that a lot of people see **community engagement** as getting people **involved** in decision making processes within the area. ... So there's that whole thing about who we are **engaging** with and how we get them **engaged** and maintain their **engagement**. (Respondent G16 – Public professional)

Signifiers / Resp.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Community	134	140	179	211	164	190	133	68	135	22	88
Engage/involve	104	85	120	122	72	24	34	9	31	11	54
Group	46	36	82	142	111	38	46	12	49	34	51
Area	34	37	32	10	66	38	23	23	78	33	78
Partnership/join-up	35	67	51	39	13	22	1	5	25	8	6
Service	21	40	32	10	5	18	9	6	38	15	3
Represent	11	4	20	9	21	18	8	3	18	9	18
Signifiers / Resp.	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Tot	Av	
Community	92	24	104	78	100	141	124	123	2250	118	
Engage/involve	20	5	38	32	54	32	70	55	972	51	
Group	7	7	60	37	15	68	70	32	943	50	
Area	46	16	43	15	48	10	70	41	741	39	
Partnership/join-up	21	0	11	3	47	5	109	58	526	28	
Service	29	2	6	20	31	1	43	39	368	19	
Represent	6	0	16	3	15	19	4	8	210	11	

Table 5.2 Use of signifiers per respondent GCPP

Respondent G16 illustrates how the narratives of local actors were to a large degree based on floating signifiers (see p. 65) like “community”, “engagement”, and “partners”. He uses the signifiers “engage(ment)” and “involve(ment)” twelve times cannot pin down their meaning. Table 5.1 shows that “community” was the most frequently used and confusing one: as it was used on average 118 times in an interview, it was very unlikely to mean one thing to one person, let alone coherent usage by all local actors. Equally unlikely was a final agreement on when a person was “representative” or when there was real “engagement”. Some kind of selectiveness is inevitable when dealing with 50,000 inhabitants, nine “neighborhoods”, 121

community organizations and groups³¹, high variation in socio-economic status and ethnic background, and a lot of influx and outflow. However, local actors did not acknowledge that the meaning of their vocabulary was a *work in progress* that required pragmatic negotiation of sensible working definitions. Instead, they got entangled in contesting the institutional format.

Thus, the GCPP provided an ambiguous and constantly changing setting of general policies and broad guidelines. To solve local problems, public professionals and residents would need to acknowledge that their setting is an ongoing *work in progress*. This would require them to pragmatically give meaning to GCPP institutions in relation to the concrete characteristics of local problems and situations. However, the capacity of local actors to communicate about the setting was limited by the conflict that was generated by *starting from scratch* with the GCPP. Opposing narratives about the “right” structures, rules, and policies limited the ways in which public professionals and residents engaged with their setting. This inhibited them in nurturing their communicative capacity for reaching practical agreements on how to put institutions to work.

Amsterdam: Getting to Grips

There's a very obscure pallet. It's really ... difficult to put your finger on it, what's actually happening, who is doing what, what is where. (Respondent A2 – Neighborhood manager)

In the case of the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*), public professionals and residents were deeply immersed in the *work in progress* of their setting. This enabled them to focus on mutual adjustment between a multitude of actors and factors but at the same time created confusion about lacking coherence, clarity, and concrete results. From the fieldwork in Amsterdam emerged that the communicative capacity to engage with the setting could best be understood with the code *getting to grips*. Public professionals and residents were constantly *getting to grips* with what was going on by gradually trying to find more details about local problems, developing policies and initiatives tailored to specific problems, and strengthening collaboration and interdependencies. Making sense of this “very obscure pallet” as respondent A2, a neighborhood manager, put it, was very difficult. Public encounters regularly went astray, mistakes were made, tensions and conflicts arose, and

³¹ Engage Database, listing all known resident and voluntary groups in the city. Search on ‘Pollokshields and Southside Central’ as geographical area leads to 121 hits. (accessed 18-01-2009). [http://www.infobaseglasgow.org/asp/\(S\(ycvtny45hbqnl1552bupjw55\)\)/browse.aspx?Srch=Geo](http://www.infobaseglasgow.org/asp/(S(ycvtny45hbqnl1552bupjw55))/browse.aspx?Srch=Geo)

frustration and bewilderment were the result. Their flexible and pragmatic mode of engaging with the setting allowed local actors to respond to the nitty-gritty of local problems, but the *work in progress* often overtook them and blurred their communication.

Local actors such as respondent A2 found it difficult not to lose track of everything that was going on and what should be done. Public professionals and residents were greatly immersed in the details of specific events, activities, and problems and therefore did not always manage to coordinate their many different ways of thinking and working. They were often uncertain about the added value of the AW for *getting to grips* and expressed a desire for more certainty, stability, and clarity about structures, responsibilities, budgets, etc. Respondent A3, a middle level manager at a housing corporation, told how the complexity of massive housing estate renovation projects constantly frustrated her desire “to communicate reliable information to the residents” and make a lasting difference to the many problems her tenants had in their daily lives. The AW did not impose a general structure or detailed set of rules, but was added to already existing structures and resources to support resident participation and collaboration between the Municipality and other local public agencies. The freedom local actors had to fit the AW in with their practices and needs gave rise to a counter-narrative focused on reducing uncertainty, change, and ambiguity by clearer rules, structures, and plans. However, the tendency of local actors to engage with their setting by *getting to grips* impeded them in developing their capacity to communicate about the *work in progress*.

The most powerful, and at first sight absurd, example of this situation is the “bread problem” in the Kolenkit quarter: people threw out big pieces of bread, or even whole loaves, on the street, fields, and greenery, which attracted a lot of birds, producing large quantities of bird droppings on the pavement and cars, as well as rodents causing serious hygiene threats. Several solutions were tried out over the last four years: street signs that forbid throwing out bread, a public awareness campaign about consequences for public hygiene and health, street cleaning events, police patrolling and enforcement, and intervention in tenant status by the housing corporation. But the problem still lingered. The difficulty was finding out who was exactly throwing out the bread, what their motivations were, and what could be done to prevent it from happening. Eventually someone suggested placing three big garbage containers specifically for bread, which helped to collect a great amount of the old bread, although by far not all of it. Moreover, the containers introduced new problems because nobody was really

responsible for emptying them, and recycling was problematic because the bread was thrown away in plastic bags. The most captivating account of the bread problem comes from a local police officer, who told in her own vivacious way a story of over a page long (not included here for its length) about this “obstinate” problem “which we are really four years already, we’re bickering about that”.

This *seemingly small problem*, then, appeared to be exceedingly difficult to solve, required a lot of detailed knowledge, collaboration, and improvisation, and took a lot of time and effort from actors who would like to devote their attention to more “serious” problems. During my fieldwork, I found that public professionals and residents in Amsterdam were entangled in many of such idiosyncratic problems. Consider for example the experiences of respondent A10, a woman who over the last years had become a trusted figure in her neighborhood among immigrant women and in this way found out a lot about problems with domestic violence, and respondent A1, the area manager we met in chapter 4 who would like to change the inability of the City District to solve something seemingly simple like the renewal of a playground:

I also help people here in the neighborhood, and that’s really a very nice thing. Um, and people come to talk to me about their problems, because they’ve built up a bond with me... But **it takes a lot of energy, hey, really a lot, because there’s a lot of problems**. You’ve also got a lot of domestic violence here in Bos & Lommer. Yeah, **really big problems, but you don’t hear about it. It just goes to someone they really trust**. And I really find that terrible. Because they’re afraid to go to the Police ... who can’t do anything if no complaint is filed... **That’s why it gets stuck I think**. Because you can’t just knock on someone’s door and say ‘Yeah, I heard that you hit your wife’... **You can’t just go there**, no, absolutely not. Just if you hear something ... I do hear things sometimes, but then I’m also like, yeah, people are also very good in making a mountain out of a molehill. So actually you have to hear it yourself and also see it a bit... But it can also be a false alarm and then you’re standing there... (Respondent A10 – Resident)

...we had ... a resident initiative that a little house should be placed on the playing ground. But yeah, **that required a lot of work, but nobody here in the City District had it in his program**, so nobody had the time ... and the only one who took initiative was the alderman. Yeah, so he kept on shouting and then ... something happened, but that wasn’t coordinated. So that took months of work, plus that ... Waternet ... had to deliver the water. And, well, **sometimes very simple things**, but that also wasn’t in the program, like ‘Yeah, water isn’t possible over there because it doesn’t have an address’. Well there you go, then it was stalled for months again. And if you then saw that something that doesn’t go along established lines, how long it then takes to realize something, that’s unexplainable to residents. **‘Surely the City District is able to do something that small?’**. **We actually aren’t**. Well ..., that kind of cooperation, well, you actually want to be stronger in that ... Just being able to do some things that didn’t

had to be decided months ago and for which the budget had to be cleared three years ago and things like that. **And that is very difficult, ... it is completely stuck on all fronts.** And then you can do little, um, um, improvising, but a neighborhood *does* ask for that. It just says like ‘Yeah, hello, that tile is loose *now*, it has to be fixed *now*’. ‘Yeah, but we have a maintenance program and then in three years it’s the turn of the sidewalk in this street’. **Try and explain that.** (Respondent A1 – Area manager)

Both narratives are based on the plotline that I coded *getting to grips*. The respondents present themselves as (tragic) heroes who are desperately fighting against all odds. Once they got involved with the problem, they discovered tremendously complex barriers to obtaining the right kind of information and to getting interdependent actors to actually communicate. While facing reactions like “Surely the City District is able to do something that small?”, they looked beneath the surface of the *seemingly small problems* and found lengthy personal stories, a multitude of details and interdependencies, and a great deal of perceptions and ambiguities. Judging how much grip was possible and necessary was inherently difficult: what should we do and how much time and effort should we spend? As respondent A10 explains, “it takes a lot of energy... because there’s a lot of problems”. Investing in one specific problem might lead to an innovative solution, but can just as well imply that time is lost on minutiae or misconceptions that could be more effectively used to solve more problems on a larger scale. This open ended plotline helps the respondents to communicate that *getting to grips* is an inevitable, tragic fate: harnessing *seemingly small problems* means surrendering to a setting that consists of many details, interdependencies, and perceptions, with the prospect of losing track and not reaching any satisfactory resolutions.

As such, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam faced a range of lingering problems that regularly returned on the agenda: the demolition and reconstruction of large housing estates, nuisance by youngsters, defects in buildings and streets, dumping of litter and bulk garbage, language lags of immigrants, below average school results, burglaries, playground renovation, domestic violence, unemployment, lacking social facilities, and so on. Some problems could be quickly fixed, but the majority required regular check-ups, maintenance, and/or long term planning. Resident meetings and professional meetings served as platforms for taking stock of the problems and who had been doing what, discussing particulars and possible solutions, and coordinating activities. The resident meetings at which I was present were well-attended (respectively 47, 32, and 21 participants filling the room in the different community centres in which they took place), but differed greatly in dynamics and focus. The

presence or absence of specific individuals influenced what would be talked about, the course of the conversation sometimes depended less on the order of the agenda than on impulsively raised topics and it was often discussed at the spot who was actually responsible for doing something. It was, in a word, a constant *getting to grips* with the concrete setting.

Signifiers / Resp.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
(the) Quarter	85	46	25	49	39	33	31	50	18	17	81	74
(the) Residents	66	37	37	36	15	28	14	48	19	19	68	54
(the) <u>Neighborhood</u>	2	17	5	8	26	38	8	22	11	9	1	5
Physical/social	22	6	4	7	0	2	3	8	0	0	11	0
Involve/engage	6	12	4	1	4	3	5	5	3	0	10	13
Participation	5	2	8	1	1	0	0	0	6	0	27	3
Livability	0	9	3	3	0	2	0	3	0	0	3	0
Public/private domain	9	4	5	1	0	10	0	2	1	1	0	12
Partners	3	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5
Clean, whole, safe	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Area focused working	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	2
<u>Integrity</u>	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Signifiers / Resp.	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Tot	Av		
(the) Quarter	49	31	14	32	4	39	108	100	925	46		
(the) Residents	107	39	15	12	1	31	39	14	699	35		
(the) <u>Neighborhood</u>	3	39	1	0	8	5	23	2	233	12		
Physical/social	18	0	0	0	0	14	28	6	129	6		
Involve/engage	28	2	5	0	0	17	4	5	127	6		
Participation	46	0	0	0	0	8	17	1	125	6		
Livability	27	13	0	2	0	0	7	0	72	4		
Public/private domain	10	0	0	0	0	4	3	2	64	3		
Partners	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	2	28	1		
Clean, whole, safe	13	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	24	1		
Area focused working	0	1	0	0	0	8	2	0	22	1		
<u>Integrity</u>	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	9	0		

Table 5.2. Use of signifiers per respondent AW

The introduction of the AW was far from a breakpoint in the setting. By using the availability of central government grants for the most deprived neighborhoods (see p. 101), the aim was to strengthen the commitment of local public agencies to collaboration and resident participation and further broaden and deepen the participation of residents in meetings and initiatives. The AW did not establish a general structure, but sought to further institutionalize professional collaboration and left existing institutions such as resident meetings and quarter budgets intact. A general organizational chart is nowhere to be found in the main policy document (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008) and influence on local actors' vocabulary has been low. Table 5.2 shows that only a few signifiers were frequently used and that their usage varied greatly (notice

especially the high amount of zeros). Local actors primarily used empty signifiers (see p. 65), the meanings of which were fixed in the public discourse of the Big Cities Policy (see pp. 100-101). Also note that not “the neighborhood” (average use of 12), but “the quarter” (average use of 42) and “the residents” (average use of 35) were the most important signifiers. So, local actors’ narratives did not evolve around a strong vocabulary of Neighborhood Approach signifiers, but were by and large concentrated on the nitty-gritty of seemingly small problems.

The setting did not impose a single approach to coordinate all the different ways of thinking and working, but rather enabled policies, structures, and consensus to emerge and develop in an ongoing *work in progress*. On the downside, as public professionals and residents were relatively free to decide how to use the additional policies and budgets for their neighborhood, to many people it remained unclear what the nature and added value of the AW exactly was. Consider for example the responses I got from respondent A6, the police officer who told so engagingly about the bread problem, and respondent A4, a social worker assisting residents in setting up and carrying out initiatives who is frustrated about the difficulty of helping people, when I asked them what had changed for them since the introduction of “the Neighborhood Approach”:

You say ‘since the Neighborhood Approach’..., **what do you mean with ‘since the Neighborhood Approach has come’?** Because when I came here ... in 2006 then there already was a good, um, **there already was Neighborhood Approach**, that connection with residents and resident meetings and involving residents in it, **that was already well underway. A lot of things have been added** to that because of that list [the national government’s selection of 40 most deprived neighborhoods] and then **I constantly get ... engulfed by all kinds of things**. And then I think ‘Oh, there’s something else again’. But what do *you* mean with Neighborhood Approach? (Respondent A6 – Police officer)

we also got from the Neighborhood Approach again, ehm, extra money [for] house visits now... [P]eople go to talk about problems with residents from door to door. But that, if you go to the residents and talk about their problems, **if you don’t have anything to offer it’s no use, then you’re wasting money** with it also. And you go just to talk ‘Yeah, what is the problem?’, ‘Yeah, house is too small’, ‘And?’. Then you’re standing there, while you need to have something to offer before you go to the residents. We don’t have that... On the one hand, ... I see the Neighborhood Approach absolutely like something that needs extra money, but **it also needs an integral approach**... We need to cooperate with all organizations, just being clear... **It’s all unclear** about the Neighborhood Approach, not clear between the corporations..., between the City District and the corporations there’s no clear agreement, and also the other organizations which are active in the quarter, for them it’s also not a very clear story. And also, um, you also see that ... **the individual person is very important**. In

some organizations, someone works there for three months, who just started to get to know the neighborhood and the next day there's someone else... So you lose all, um, contacts that you've built up ... and you have to make them again and that then takes yet another year. (Respondent A4 – Social worker)

Both respondents are uncertain about the added value of the Neighborhood Approach. Respondent A6 cannot even distinguish between before and after and feels that she “constantly get[s] ... engulfed by all kinds of things”. The AW generated extra institutions and practices on top of already existing ones but did not really provide the fundamentals for any large scale changes or outcomes. The temporary additional resources facilitated for example house visits to talk about problems with residents, but “if you don't have anything to offer it's no use, then you're wasting money”. Moreover, respondent A4 indicates, outcomes by and large depended on the efforts and personal relationships of individuals. When residents moved or public professionals changed jobs, the remaining local actors had to start all over again with building up relationships, trust, and local knowledge. Therefore, what both respondents articulate is a counter-narrative about the need for long term vision, budgets, structures, and professional positions. The implicit belief is that fixed rules, structures and plans will enhance stability, clarity, and certainty by spelling out what “the Neighborhood Approach” actually comes down to and guaranteeing “an integral approach”.

This counter-narrative of stability, clarity, and certainty is a reaction to the inbuilt tendency for negotiation and consensus-seeking in the Neighborhood Approach as well as the Dutch (urban) governance system. Dutch politics and policy making are known for the emphasis on searching for consensus in a fragmented system (Toonen, 1990; Hendriks & Toonen, 1998; Kickert, 2003). Many interdependent stakeholders cannot unilaterally enforce any decisions. That means on the one hand that conflicts are often prevented or ironed out, everyone has equal rights and opportunities for speaking his/her mind, and that gradual progress and welfare are achieved in a relative stable manner. On the other hand, it leads to complaints about indecisiveness, lack of transparency, ineffectiveness, and “viscosity”. In urban governance, municipalities lack formal instruments for coercion or control and therefore rely on facilitating cooperation and informal negotiation to adapt plans along the way (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994; Verhage, 2005). The decentralization reforms (see p. 100) have further stimulated the tendency to have formal plans not directly shape local policies, budgets, and agreements, but rather to let them become conclusions of negotiation and implementation processes (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Priemus, 2004).

To conclude, AW institutions were intended to further deepen and broaden collaboration and resident participation. Existing structures and practices were not replaced by new institutions, but, rather, were intended to facilitate public professionals and residents in finding innovative ways to harness local problems. Public professionals and residents in Amsterdam were often deeply immersed in the *work in progress* of their setting. In the absence of clearly delineated responsibilities, detailed plans, and stable communication canals, there was a constant need for *getting to grips* with what was going on and what should have been done. This rendered the setting messy and asked for continuous renegotiation of lingering problems. Local actors held a pragmatic attitude to the concrete ways in which institutions could be tailored to local problems. But some also articulated a counter-narrative that fixed rules, structures, and plans would guarantee stability, clarity, and certainty. However, as they were entangled in *getting to grips* with the setting, public professionals and residents paid little attention to cultivating their capacity to communicate about how to engage with the *work in progress* more effectively.

Bologna: Groundbreaking

a role of great competence ... but also a professional revolution, because I can't remember technicians who ... would engage in discussion and listen to the citizens and translate ... the things citizens say into a project. (Respondent B19 - Resident)

Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) stood in stark contrast to the previous case, because it embodied a clear institutional design that guided public professionals and residents in dealing with *work in progress*. For the first time in the local history, a deliberative space had been insulated from political debate and antagonistic relations, in which residents, supported by public professionals, could make decisions about urban planning projects. This is illustrated by respondent B19, a middle aged woman who has lived in the neighborhood for all her life and had never seen public professionals “engage in discussion and listen to the citizens and translate ... the things citizens say into a project”. The fieldwork made clear that this setting was best reflected in the code *groundbreaking*: establishing a fixed institutional format to achieve unprecedented and unexpected results and modes of interaction. Public professionals and residents established, and adhered to, an institutional design that delineated who could say what, when, and how. This helped them to effectively confront specific elements of the *work in progress*, but also compromised their ability to see the setting as an ongoing process.

Whilst an overwhelming majority of local actors appraised the participative workshops (see p. 113) in line with respondent B19, a number of them communicated criticism, disappointment, and frustration about the degree to which the workshops enabled sustainable change. Respondent B8, for example, an elderly man who had worked in one of the factories, found that fundamental problems with safety and social cohesion had not been addressed on their own terms because of the focus on making proposals for physical interventions. The political, financial, and legal provisos that were made to break with the old unproductive way of working implied that strong limitations were imposed on the goals, topics, and time of the participative workshops. These limitations created the right conditions for turning a situation of conflict and stalemate into a constructive communicative process during the *Laboratorio Mercato*. But the institutional design of the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* was less effective in delineating the *work in progress*. As such, the question emerged whether the participatory institutions consolidated in the PSC really constituted such a *groundbreaking* reform, or merely reaffirmed existing institutions and problems.

The *groundbreaking* experience of the *Laboratorio Mercato* did more than resolving the longstanding conflict between the residents and the Municipality about the *Ex-Mercato* area. It led to fundamental changes to the setting as the Municipality adopted this institutional design as the participatory format that regional law required for the new urban planning system (see chapter 4). The *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* was the most ambitious of all the participative workshops since then, but turned out to be less effective than its predecessor in producing satisfactory and conclusive results. Respondents B2, B6, and B9, public professionals who had been involved in *creating conditions* (see pp. 149-150) for the workshops, explained in detail that the population was much more socially and ethnically diverse and less prone to participate, two of the three landowners did not partake, and the abandoned old military area – another degenerated problem hot-spot – could not be discussed. Moreover, at the time of the fieldwork, it was still unclear what would exactly happen with the results of the *Laboratorio* because the recent discharge of the mayor had led to a political vacuum in which the Municipality was not legally allowed to take any formal decisions.

The problems encountered during the participative workshops did not alter the overriding force of the dominant narrative (respondents B2-7,9-12,14,15,17,19,20), but did give rise to a critical counter-narrative (respondents B1,8,13,16,18). Consider how the narratives of these

two long-time residents of Bolognina, support these conflicting evaluations of the participative workshops:

I think it's always ... important to somehow try to, um, have **participative workshops** whether one manages to have a great project like Ex-Mercato or maybe doesn't completely manage like Bolognina-Est. Because I think that **if persons participate in these structures, they feel more that the area is theirs**, more belonging to ourselves, and therefore maybe manage to maintain it better... And also, in my opinion, **it is a way for persons to get to know each other, to understand each other**, to see the problems of another person that may not be mine and that I maybe don't consider but this person might have. For example, ... a lot of persons were against the youngsters of Ex-Mercato, which is a social centre, who obviously make music also in the night, ... walk with dogs, maybe have Rasta hair, and thus seem to be different... Then, instead, you get to know them, ... you see that they ... go to university, you see they are like, I don't know, like my son... So, ... you're not afraid anymore, because you know them and you understand how they can be different from you but without being strange... **So, these participative workshops are in my view also a way to improve the neighborhood**, ... also because, um, at the moment there are, um... Uniting people would really be the lesson in the end that is more important than the urban plans for good cohabitation. (Respondent B10 – Resident)

I don't know if in the future there will be other structures ... of participation like Bolognina Est. If they will be there, they will have to be made in a way more, um, ... extended over time. The Laboratorio ... has been operative for three months, hell-for-leather with meetings... And so **we have been really butchered**, it was not possible ... to analyze all the aspects. But we have been pressed because a project had to be presented... We started in October and I think we had to present it in December, a crazy thing, with people who ... weren't yet prepared for these things here... So, **the things have been done with too much of a hurry**. And so ... it did not bear fruit, um, like was hoped. All in all **we have been constrained to accepting a status quo**, um, caused by a scarcity of time... The second phase, that ... [focused on] the ex Sasib area also had the same characteristic, done in a hurry and badly, already with the *work in progress*. So, what, for the citizen, what does this mean, that they are already constructing? So, **I perceive also a sort of delusion from the side of the participants**. Because we found ourselves in ... a state of play in which in reality you could not intervene much if you didn't talk about the bicycle lane turning right or instead turning left. (Respondent B8 – Resident)

The first narrative upholds the idea that the participative workshops were *groundbreaking* based on the *storyline of helplessness and control*³². Since the disintegration of the strong social networks that characterized the neighborhood until the 1990s, the residents have increasingly experienced segregation, indifference, and fear. The participative workshops offered new opportunities to reverse this negative spiral because “it is a way for persons to get

³² “the situation is bad. We always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

to know each other, to understand each other”. According to respondent B10, improving the neighborhood asks for more contact, mutual understanding, and ownership. Even when one “maybe doesn’t completely manage” to have “a great project”, it is still “important to somehow ... have participative workshops”. In other words, they were a first step in the right direction on a longer path of development. In contrast, respondent B8 structures his rejection of the *groundbreaking* nature of the setting according to a *storyline of change is only an illusion*³³. The meetings did little more than pressuring a group of not well-prepared residents into taking a few minor decisions about very complex issues. The residents “have been really butchered” and “the things have been done with too much of a hurry”. While participative workshops seemed like an opportunity to really influence the future of the neighbourhood, in the end the residents “have been constrained to accepting a status quo” and felt “a sort of delusion”. So, little has really improved.

These narratives should not be read as mere expressions of conflicting hard-and-fast stances, but rather as stories communicating diverging visions on the potential of the participative workshops to deal with the *work in progress* of the setting. Both respondents agree that the setting is *work in progress*: improving the social and physical conditions of the neighborhood is a complex and long term process to which the participative workshops have only made a limited contribution. They disagree, however, about whether the participative workshops offer more opportunities or constraints for future change. The opportunities and constraints of the *Laboratorio Mercato* and *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* resulted from strong agenda-setting efforts aimed at *creating conditions* in which participation would be possible. Since this form of participation was unprecedented, a lot of ground had to be cleared to make the *laboratori* possible. With the counter-narrative, several local actors formulated objections to the resulting artificial and illegitimate exclusion of a lot of problems, people, and places. Conversely, as the story of respondent B6, a neighborhood official who helped to prepare both *laboratori*, about the negotiations with the landowners demonstrates, the dominant narrative considered the constraining conditions as an unfortunate but inevitable element of being *groundbreaking*.

We have asked ... to meet with the landowner, because it was important to know if the landowner would create problems or not during the Laboratorio. Also because we understood well that the landowner had an interest in a transformation of the land tax that would lead to an increase in value... We said to the landowner that

³³ you always thought things were getting ... better. But you were wrong. Let me show you some evidence that things are in fact going in the opposite direction. Improvement was an illusion (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

... the agreement on that tax in terms of the building indices of that area, that we didn't want to put that under discussion. However, a part of that value would have to be transformed in services for the citizens. Second issue, the project had to take the history of Bolognina into account, so it could not be a separated reality but had to be intertwined with the historical part of the neighborhood that was around this new area... **The landowner agreed but asked for guaranteed timescales** on the implementation of the process. **We have guaranteed the timescales, but we asked the landowner for a robust collaboration** in the costs of the ... Laboratorio. This was fundamental, because it needed to have facilitators, sociological research ... on the composition of the population ... to see what types of responses there were among the residents. How many schools, how many health clinics, ... how much greenery, how many, for example, gyms, etcetera... **The landowner accepted and the Municipality has formalized the process** ... to arrive at the ... presentation of the proposed project. (Respondent B6 – Public professional)

The respondent illuminates some of the *work in progress* inherent to the regeneration of the Mercato area³⁴. Before the *Laboratorio* was possible, they had to negotiate with the landowner that the building indices and land value would not be decreased and might even increase, that the project had to be harmonious with the historical surroundings and would support service provision to residents, that timescales would be respected, and that the costs necessary for preparing the project had to be shared. Elsewhere in the interview, the respondent explained how the preparations also comprised extensive political bargaining between the Neighborhood Council and the Municipality, active involvement of a group of antagonised civic associations, and the exploration of several technical possibilities with regards to the height and design of buildings, infrastructural routes, and standards for traffic nuisance. Underlying these practices was the belief that the only way for the participative workshops to be effective was *creating conditions* which “guarantee” that certain decisions could be made about particular topics within a limited time span. In other words, the *work in progress* of the setting needed to be “bracketed” by establishing fixed goals, structures, and procedures to achieve concrete results.

Hence, the participative workshops were designed with clear rules for who could decide about what, when, and how. That is not to say that the residents were used as tokens in a symbolic participative process in which all the decisions were already taken. All the meetings were structured according to particular participative methods, such as Scenario Workshop and Open Space Technology³⁵, in which facilitators assisted residents in free and informed deliberation

³⁴ He explained later in the interview that the situation for *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est*, with three landowners and a more diverse population, was far more complex.

³⁵ See <http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?> and <http://cordis.europa.eu/easw/home.html> for more information on these popular participative methods. Chapter 7 will return to them in more detail.

about concrete proposals for how the areas should look like. This formal regulation of decision making powers implied that residents could only discuss problems within the fixed boundaries of the participative workshops, or, as analysis of the vocabulary shows, only *in terms of* the participative workshops. Compare, for instance, the positive narrative of a planner who felt that his project of redeveloping an old railway track that runs through the neighborhood benefited from participating, with the skeptical narrative of an elderly resident active in a civic association for immigrants who quickly dropped out because she did not feel taken seriously:

...a **project** was already being developed for, um, the bicycle and walking lane along this railway track. Um, ... [the Laboratorio] could integrate our **project**, ... with the prospect of enriching this **project**... making it not only a street for cycling but also a linear park. This was a bit the motive for which at a certain moment we ... were asked to **participate** really directly in the meetings of the Laboratorio, um, by presenting our **project** ... And we have gone to the **neighborhood** ... where the **citizens** were present who had already done the work, part of the work, ... and we have presented this **project**. Clearly at this point we have searched to, um, ... integrate the **project** of the bicycle lane by collecting also, um, suggestions, desires, um, from the participants of the Laboratorio who really asked to enrich this **project** ... by connecting it to ... interventions for **requalification** that will be done successively. (Respondent B17 – Urban planner)

Yes, well, **I have hardly followed it, because ... I don't believe in it**. Because I have followed the first meetings and they talked about everything except of this situation [of hidden criminality and illegality]. When I talked with [one of the organizers] and said '... but what are we talking about? When you go out here in the night, um, it becomes a Bronx, **the houses overcrowded, the illegal blacks... We don't talk about it**'. She said to me ... 'Ah, you make this intervention and report it to us'. I mean, I felt like I was mocked a lot of times. **It is a reality that everyone knows and I don't know if it has come out of the Laboratorio** ... and about what they have talked... They surely have done good things... If from an urban point of view Casaralta has a destination, a **project** has been done, it can be that it's good. However, I know that at the end [the theme of hidden criminality and illegality] won't come out, because ... in the end there's a contract between the politician and the constructor. (Respondent B16 – Resident)

These respondents tell diverging stories about how open and constructive the participative workshops were for dealing with local problems. Their vocabulary reveals that the formal boundaries of the participative workshops were more exclusionary to the latter respondent. The narrative of respondent B17, who refers, for example, seven times to “project” here, fits neatly around empty signifiers of the PSC (see table 5.3; p. 152) such as “project” (average use of 23), “citizens” (average use of 44), “neighborhood” (average use of 23), and “requalification” (average use of 6). In contrast, the narrative of respondent B16 is primarily concentrated on “hidden problems” that fare less by this vocabulary and the formal institutions

that support it. In other words, the participative workshops can on the one hand be seen as *groundbreaking* –i.e. a promising institutional design that granted residents more possibilities, freedom, and tools than before to influence local decisions– but, on the other hand, as having only narrowly dealt with the *work in progress* of the setting –for instance with regards to the possibilities of residents to discuss and decide upon issues autonomously.

Signifiers / Resp.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
(the) Citizen(s)	40	67	82	61	85	19	54	12	54	10	24
(the) <u>Neighborhood</u>	5	25	18	31	9	15	8	26	20	46	26
Project	0	38	9	17	13	16	15	5	91	9	85
Area	6	27	57	29	43	7	37	3	23	5	31
Participation	14	27	9	8	26	5	15	12	39	18	12
(the) Municipality	23	21	10	34	7	7	1	1	39	17	14
(the) City	0	10	3	64	0	3	6	4	8	13	18
Transform./ <u>riqualification</u>	0	6	0	43	0	3	0	0	12	3	8
Zone	8	0	0	0	3	7	0	18	3	36	3
Signifiers / Resp.	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Tot	Av
(the) Citizen(s)	50	13	66	94	7	17	83	19	28	885	44
(the) <u>Neighborhood</u>	37	41	39	49	30	15	21	26	14	501	25
Project	12	24	7	18	8	49	0	6	38	460	23
Area	39	19	28	17	0	15	19	8	8	421	21
Participation	33	17	6	55	16	17	1	19	30	379	19
(the) Municipality	0	26	4	50	1	12	8	9	4	288	14
(the) City	0	2	7	15	2	11	7	3	5	181	9
Transform./ <u>riqualification</u>	1	9	5	0	0	7	1	4	16	118	6
Zone	0	0	0	0	10	11	0	9	7	115	6

Table 5.3 Use of signifiers per respondent PSC

The narrative of *groundbreaking* institutional design fits in with the *work in progress* of Italian urban governance. The recent decentralization reforms (see p. 109) gave local governments greater possibilities to create more independent and effective governance systems (Carson & Lewanski, 2008; Ferrari, 2008), but for now leave undecided whether changes to the setting will turn out to be real windows of opportunity or mere window dressing (Bussu & Bartels, 2011). The danger is that citizen participation does not turn into more than a legal requirement in the so-called “Strategic Planning” systems. These project-based collaborative networks are supposed to facilitate partnership between municipalities, private landowners, public service-delivery agencies, entrepreneurs, and civic associations (Franz, 2001; Capano & Gualmini, 2006). Innovative participatory methods are often used to involve citizens in the planning system and revitalize relationships between citizens and local authorities (Sclavi et al., 2002). However, the degree of actual change is likely to depend on local conditions because the legal,

political and administrative capacity to break with histories of politicized participation, conflict, and stalemate is often low (Cognetti & Cottino, 2003; Dente et al., 2005; Healey, 2007).

In sum, the PSC offered an institutional format making concrete decisions about specific urban planning projects. In a challenging setting with an overwhelming amount of *work in progress*, public professionals and residents instituted strict limits on who could say and do what, when, and how. By insulating a deliberative space for constructive communication, the institutional format enabled concrete and consensual decisions about specific goals and topics as well as new relationships between participants. These unexpected and unprecedented results generated a dominant narrative that depicts the participatory institutions as *groundbreaking* for the setting. At the same time, a counter-narrative emerged about the constraints imposed by the institutional design, asserting that the participative workshops have only scratched the surface of local problems. Thus, considering the setting solely in terms of institutional design will only reaffirm these two conflicting narratives. Instead, public professionals and residents need to develop their capacity to communicate about *work in progress* beyond the boundaries of their participatory institutions.

Summary and Implications: Communicative Capacity and Work In Progress

The goal of this chapter was to clarify how the setting in which public professionals and residents met influenced their ability to recognize and break through dominant communicative patterns, as well as how their communicative capacity affected the quality of participatory democracy. In brief, the narrative analysis showed that the setting was a complex, ambiguous, and changeable *work in progress*, which public professionals and residents tended to grasp in narratives that supported a single pattern of engaging with the setting. Accordingly, in answer to the second sub-question of the research, the meaning of public encounters took shape through the process of communicating about how to engage with the setting. In Glasgow, local actors were contesting their institutional reform as they were *starting from scratch* with their collective understanding of the concrete meanings and practical conduct embodied in these participatory institutions. In Amsterdam, public professionals and residents were constantly *getting to grips* with the vast number of details generated by all the people, problems, and policies in the absence of a clear institutional format. In Bologna, local actors had been

groundbreaking by establishing a fixed institutional format and sticking to the formal rules and procedures. The added value of each of these communicative practices was limited as local actors neglected the capacity to adapt their dominant pattern of communication to the *work in progress* of the setting.

The analysis demonstrated that public professionals and residents in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna were striving to improve the quality of their setting by better fitting participatory institutions to complex neighborhood problems. However, the trade-offs between the different settings of these three cases showed that there was no unproblematic way of engaging with the setting. If participatory institutions are flexible as in Amsterdam, local actors have room for adapting institutions to local needs and practices but may also have insufficient guidance and coherence. If, on the contrary, institutions are more strictly defined as in Bologna, guidance and coherence also imply a rigid straightjacket which can excessively constrain local actors. Finding a middle way that fruitfully combines these opposites is, as the Glasgow case showed, also inherently difficult. This supports the conclusions of chapter 4 that *Community* (flexible institutions and room for pragmatic action) and *Planning* (rigid institutions and strict adherence) are in endless and irresolvable tension.

The cases revealed that we should understand the setting in which public professionals and residents meet as *work in progress*. This ongoing process embodies indeterminate, iterative, and confusing events in which actors join and leave at different points in time; their individual remits, motivations, and working relationships are uncertain; the legitimacy of individual actors and institutions is contested; the language and cultures of organizations, communities, and groups are diverse; new policy ambitions are introduced which are often imprecise and ambiguous; rules and structures are regularly revised; the composition and needs of the neighborhood are complex and changing; the scope, causes, and consequences of problems are uncertain; and clear, unambiguous standards for measuring success or failure are absent. In a word, the setting of public encounters is inherently complex, ambiguous, and changeable. The form, meaning, and importance of specific parts of this complicated interplay of factors and actors are constantly changing. Therefore, the meaning and added value of public encounters depends on their ability to recognize how this *work in progress* influences the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations. The analysis identified three ways in which the process of engaging with the setting affected the communicative capacity of local actors.

First, the ways in which participatory institutions were introduced in each case affected how public professionals and residents addressed each other. The introduction of new institutional designs implied a drastic and abrupt break for the setting in Glasgow and Bologna. While in the latter case this enabled local actors to work together on making joint decisions, in the former case mutual relationships were seriously disturbed. The key difference between these cases was whether local actors accepted the starting point, structures and procedures, and vocabulary of the new institutional format. The institutions of the PSC “managed to have credibility” (respondent B9), whereas the institutions of the GCPP led to a situation in which local actors were “not actually doing what we believe is our role” (respondent G6). Therefore, some local actors in Amsterdam were striving for gradually building a shared and unitary format around the variety of existing practices and institutions. However, the counter-narrative in Bologna revealed that collective support of the institutional design in itself is not enough. Institutional designs provide “standard grids” (Scott, 1998, pp. 2-3) of formal and informal institutions which are placed over existing practices, areas, and problems. The meaning and added value of these institutions depends on how local actors use them as reference points for making sense of the *work in progress* of their setting. So, public professionals and residents have to reflect on what the introduction of participatory institutions comes to mean.

Following on from that, secondly, the vocabulary of public professionals and residents was of influence on their ability to communicate constructively and productively. In Amsterdam, local actors lacked a shared vocabulary and were therefore often unable to focus their conversations. In Glasgow, local actors used a set of evocative signifiers that did form a shared vocabulary, but they were unable to settle on the actual meaning of the signifiers as local actors in Bologna did. In the Glasgow case, the vocabulary consisted of *floating signifiers* between which –an often implicit– discursive struggle was taking place: e.g., who is really “representative” of “the community”? In the Bologna case, local actors made use of *empty signifiers* such as “project” which endowed the vocabulary with an air of single and shared meanings. However, this vocabulary was only of limited use for meaningfully talking about complex and hidden problems. Therefore, public professionals and residents need to inquire the meaning of their vocabulary: Are we using the same words? What meanings do these words have for different people? Is everyone familiar with these different meanings? Have we managed to translate these differences in practical agreements and actions?

Third, the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents was affected by the presence of many *seemingly small problems* such as community building, domestic violence, bread throwing, playground renovation, reconstruction of housing estates, hidden criminality, and illegality. Local actors stumbled upon problematical situations that at first sight seemed to be fairly easy to define and straightforward to solve, but quickly appeared to be extremely complicated and difficult to change. As local actors got further drawn into the conflicts between multiple problem analyses, the need for detailed knowledge, and the interdependence of different actors for doing something, their frustration over the lack of concrete results grew, and their ability to communicate about the problems decreased. Seemingly small problems do not just affect the ways in which local actors communicate because they are “wicked” –i.e., unique situations which have multiple competing definitions and no final resolutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973)– but more fundamentally because dealing with them “takes a lot of energy” (respondent A10) and still gets “completely stuck on all fronts”, which is “unexplainable” to outsiders (respondent A1). Thus, public professionals and residents need to be patient and open in talking about the complexity and ambiguity under the surface of seemingly small problems.

Thus, in answer to the third sub-question of the research, public professionals and residents can enhance the added value of their encounters by not only focusing their attention on how to link their participatory institutions to local problems (substance) but rather on the ways they communicate about the *work in progress* (process) of their setting. Local actors can adapt the pattern of communication that dominates their setting by reflecting on the introduction of their participatory institutions, their vocabulary, and the nature of seemingly small problems. That does not mean that institutional design does not matter or just depends on the context, but rather that communicative capacity is crucial to determining the specific ways in which institutions should be designed. While institutional design might help to create the certainty, clarity, and stability needed for effective communication, it can just as well generate conflicts, constrain practices, and put relationships under pressure. As such, institutional design can obfuscate the capacity to communicate and draw away attention, time, and energy from actually finding ways to resolve local problems.

To some it might seem unlikely that communicative capacity can offer a solution in situations where the institutional design is a major source of dispute. However, communicative capacity

can lead to workable institutional designs, if local actors are willing to start seeing institutional design as an ongoing *work in progress*. The design of participatory institutions is not a static one-shot affair, but is an iterative, interactive, and contingent activity of designing (Wagenaar, 2006, p. 228) that requires the space, devices, and capacity for more intelligibly adapting institutions to the complex, ambiguous, and changing local setting (Healey, 1996; Innes & Booher, 2003a, 2003b; Healey, 2006). Seeing the setting as *work in progress* implies recognizing that specific parts can be incomprehensible for a critical period of time (Perrow, 1999; Wagenaar, 2007). Many different factors and actors constantly interact in unforeseeable ways, so that local problems and processes are not characterized by standard, linear, and orderly sequences of interaction between their various elements, and cannot be captured in a single technology or policy instrument. Therefore, the quality of participatory democracy depends for an important part on the capacity of public professionals and residents to communicate about who can and should say and do what, when, and how in concrete, evolving situations.

To be sure, communicative capacity requires extensive knowledge of the institutions that make up the setting. The analyses above showed that we could make better sense of the mode of communication when taking into account how the setting was embedded in, for example, the evolution of national and local government (Rhodes, 1988; Raadschelders & Rutgers, 1996; Vandelli, 2007); local governance actors and networks (Wilson & Game, 1994); distribution of legal decision making powers, service delivery responsibilities, and fiscal responsibilities between different governance actors and territorial levels (Page & Goldsmith, 1987; Ferrari, 2008); and urban planning procedures (Adams, 1994). As no individual actor can have a comprehensive understanding of the role and interactions of all these factors, local actors need to be able to integrate their specific knowledge and experiences in a holistic understanding of the setting. The next chapter will discuss how their communicative capacity affects the *content* of the conversations public professionals and residents have.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrated that the quality of participatory democracy depends on the capacity of public professionals and citizens to communicate about the *work in progress* of the setting in which they meet. The setting is an inherent *work in progress* in which local actors are predestined for continuous confrontation with complexity, ambiguity, and change. Neglecting the capacity to communicate about this can lead to engrained patterns

of communication that sustain antagonism, deadlock, and failure to resolve local problems. Therefore, the primary concern about the setting in which public professionals and residents meet should be with cultivating their capacity to communicate about what has changed, what appears to be affecting what, and what might be the most sensible way of going forward in concrete and evolving situations. That means not letting the *work in progress* draw local actors into a dominant communicative pattern about how to engage with the setting, but adapting the communicative process to the resistances and affordances of the setting.

6. Struggling: The Content of Conversations

such a person needs years before he has recognition ... and then from what the residents are saying he is able to translate that in concrete steps in his organization. And yeah ... that's of course a continuous process ~ Resident Amsterdam

One of the conclusions of the preceding chapter was that for answering the main research question –*how do public encounters affect the quality of democracy?*– we need to consider not only the setting in which public professionals and residents meet, but also the content of their conversations. Local actors need to integrate their knowledge about, and experiences with, the multitude of factors and actors inherent to participatory practice. This chapter explores how this second process of participatory practice affected their capacity to recognize and break through dominant communicative patterns. The research shows that public professionals and residents were engaged in processes of integrating multiple forms of expertise, but lacked awareness of the communicative capacity needed to overcome tacit cognitive boundaries. The main argument of the chapter is that the content of conversations between local actors comes down to a continuous *struggling* with the nature and value of different forms of expertise. As the capacity to communicate about the content of their conversations greatly depends on the relationships between local actors, this chapter makes a bridge to the next chapter, in which this third process of participatory practice is discussed.

Content: A Process of Struggling

The main argument of this chapter is that the content of the conversations between public professionals and residents is a continuous *struggling* with taking onboard unknown rational knowledge about rules, structures, and policies, and acknowledging the emotional expression of feelings, beliefs, and experiences. The opening quote of the resident of Amsterdam, a brisk and assertive young man with a migrant background, a lot of participatory experience, and a sceptical attitude towards the authorities, reveals that exchanging expertise is all but a neutral and straightforward transmission of information: it is “a continuous process” of getting recognition to take part in conversations and learning to translate their content. Facilitating the exchange of professional and civic expertise is enough to get local actors “on the same page”; the content of their conversations comes down to a subtle activity of recognizing, empathizing, and appreciating what is being communicated. What emerged from the research in Glasgow,

Amsterdam, and Bologna was that enhancing the content of conversations between public professionals and residents was an ongoing process of *struggling* with the beliefs, perceptions, and emotions underlying individual knowledge and experience. Therefore, local actors need communicative capacity to turn *struggling* with multiple truths and forms of expertise into a productive process.

Next to institutional reform, advocates of participatory democracy proposed to reconceptualize the nature of expertise. Building on the waning of confidence in the profession(al)s and their adequacy for solving the problems of modern society signaled in the 1980s (Schön, 1983), it was argued that representative democracy had fostered a system of formal procedures and instrumental rationality that did not require public professionals to be “present” in the life world of citizens. Instead, professional expertise merely “re-presented” the problems citizens actually experienced (Hummel & Stivers, 1998). This detached application of specialized and standardized knowledge to concrete situations was found insufficient to deal with the complexity of modern problems. It had to be replaced by deliberation about the proper form and justification of state action by directing the “system world” –where professionals follow a rationality of technical details, legal norms, and large scale planning– towards a stronger grounding in the “life world” –where citizens experience the daily routines and problems of their direct living environment (Habermas, 1996; Kelly, 2004). Research has examined how public professionals have accommodated a wider range of worldviews, beliefs, values, and feelings to feed into the policy process, as well as the psychological, organizational, and social barriers inhibiting this change in the nature of expertise (Hartman & Tops, 2005; Wagenaar, 2007; Fischer, 2009).

Similarly, in each of the cases of this research, public professionals and residents were striving to enhance the quality of their conversations by connecting the system world and life world. In Glasgow, public professionals and residents were confronted with so many different pieces of information, knowledge, and experience that they tended to defend their own expertise by *taking a stance* rather than recognizing the value of others’ expertise. In Amsterdam, local actors were entangled in a process of getting *under the skin*: investing a great amount of time and energy in understanding the particulars of local problems, without being able to articulate this know-how beyond specific persons and situations. In Bologna, public professionals and residents clearly established what counted as relevant expertise, but were not able to consider

local problems beyond the *nuts and bolts* of urban regeneration projects. As such, in each case local actors limited the content of conversations to a single pattern of exchanging expertise rather than recognizing the inherent *struggling* involved in this process and the communicative capacity needed to render it productive.

Although a notion of *struggling* emerged in memo 6 of the Amsterdam case, it only became a code during the chapter writing as I realized that the code *keeping both feet on the ground* did not adequately capture how the content of conversations comes down to a kind of appreciative, emphatic wrestling with the meaning and value of knowledge, experiences, and emotions. The code *nuts and bolts* is perhaps the best illustration of this. *Keeping both feet on the ground*, which emerged from the second interview in Glasgow, focused on the pressures local actors experience in taking a lot of different bits and pieces of expertise onboard. This proved to be a central issue in all cases: local actors in Glasgow tended to respond to it defensively by *taking a stance*, in Amsterdam they were more patient and empathic by getting *under the skin* of persons and problems, and in Bologna they focused their attention on specifying the nuts and bolts of regeneration plans. *Nuts and bolts* emerged in the first memo of the Bologna case to highlight the inclination to approach local problems in terms of the physical interventions that would cause changes in social behavior. More than in the other two cases, this *Planning* frame set strict boundaries on what counted as legitimate expertise and portrayed the exchanging of knowledge as a straightforward process. This neglect of the *struggling* of local actors who had different forms of expertise and were, or felt, excluded from the process made me realize just how much all the actors in each of the cases were *struggling* to have their expertise recognized and valued, as well as how much was lost by failing to recognize each others' *struggling*.

The analysis demonstrates how the narratives of local actors concealed underlying cognitive boundaries and inhibited them in breaking through communicative patterns with:

- (1) frames (mindsets linking actions, causal beliefs, and values; see p. 63) sustaining a distinction between narratives of the system world and the life world;
- (2) plotlines, metaphors, and diagnostic-prescriptive stories supporting (the exchange of) different forms of expertise;
- (3) holistic narratives about the continuous *struggling* with the cognitive boundaries underlying different frames.

Along these lines, the analysis shows that the work narratives do for the content is narrowing the ability to solve local problems to a single pattern of exchanging expertise. Narratives of expertise kept dominant patterns of communication in place, because they limited attention to the communicative capacity for *struggling*. The final section discusses the implications of the capacity to communicate about the *struggling* with multiple forms of expertise for the quality of participatory democracy.

Glasgow: Taking a Stance

you can imagine the challenges of breaking down what ... Community Planning is and how it brings people together ... into something that's put straightforward out for people to understand and get their heads round and feel comfortable with (Respondent G4 – Community Planning officer)

Respondent G4, who is again a helpful starting point, conveys how the case of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) was characterized by a desire to integrate different forms of expertise as well as a lacking ability to do so. This discrepancy is captured with the code *taking a stance*, which refers to the inclination of local actors to defend their own expertise in the face of an overwhelming number of viewpoints and pieces of information. The GCPP was founded on the idea that all relevant forms of local expertise needed to be taken into account. However, individual local actors were inclined to hang on to the partial expertise deriving from their professional training, social environment, and personal experiences. They often failed to acknowledge that exchanging the variety of knowledge and experience was a matter of *struggling*. As a result, the GCPP did not turn into the knowledge exchange platform it was intended to be. Instead, public professionals and residents tended towards *taking a stance* by defending their own expertise and contesting the value of other forms of expertise.

That is not to say that local actors were not open to different forms of expertise. Each of them expressed a strong commitment to *making a difference* to local communities and a willingness to collaborate with each other in doing so. Everyone considered collaboration necessary for coming up with better informed solutions to local problems and most of them could provide examples of successful ways in which different forms of expertise had been integrated. A local police officer, for instance, told about how he had managed to resolve problems with youth gangs in an area by developing an innovative solution through collaboration with residents and a number of public agencies. However, even seemingly successful collaboration followed a

particular mode of communication that, in subtle ways, neglected certain forms of expertise. This was not so much the result of deliberate attempts to exclude knowledge and experiences held by particular local actors, but rather from lacking awareness of the ways in which by the setting and tacit cognitive boundaries turned exchanging expertise into a process of *struggling*. Public professionals and residents often did not display sensitivity to resulting feelings of misunderstanding, exclusion, and frustration, driving each other to *taking a stance* about what they considered valuable expertise. At the time of the research, local actors had not developed the communicative capacity for changing this lowered ability to collaborate, listen, and trust each other.

The GCPP policy made an explicit commitment to join up a wide variety of viewpoints, experiences, and sources of information:

“We will **work in such a way** that it supports the values of openness, parity between partners and achieving progress through consensus... We will develop **joint approaches** to improving service delivery and the quality of life for the citizens of Glasgow” (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p. 6).

Notice that the commitment made to “the values of openness, parity ... and ... consensus” leaves unspecified how public professionals and residents should go about in developing “joint approaches”. Stating that local actors can simply “work in such a way” to accomplish these values reveals the belief that building comprehensive expertise is a straightforward process of bringing together all “partners” and “the community” for joint decision making. As respondent G3, who, as already explained in chapter 3, is responsible for making this happen, explains:

these [Community Reference] Groups are **ideally all things to all people at all times**. In terms of representation they are meant to cut across all walks of life, all aspects of society, so that they are representative effectively from cradle to grave, all these groups, all nationalities, you know, ethnic origin, you know, sexual orientation... (Respondent G3 – Community Planning officer)

The goal of being “ideally all things to all people at all times” neglects practical limitations on the content of the conversations between local actors. Public professionals and residents were expected to keep a “feel” for the nitty-gritty of many local circumstances and individual situations as well as consider problems and solutions at the neighborhood, area, city, and national level. They needed to take statistics, policy goals, time lines, budgets, physical constraints, political dynamics, partner organization practices, and directly voiced community needs and demands into account about the complex nature of and relationships between safety,

health, unemployment, housing, etc. Each local actor was naturally limited in the amount of information, knowledge, and experience (s)he can mentally process and translate into concrete action. The most acute example of this was an elderly woman with an immigrant background, who was so overwhelmed by the discussion in the meeting that she did not say anything and later told me that she found the other participating residents “really better than me, because they’ve got more experience, by education as well, more experience” (respondent G13). While confrontation with different forms of expertise can enhance awareness of the partiality of individual expertise and the need to supplement each other, in the GCPP it led local actors to digging in their heels to defend their expertise as the most ideal. Why did this happen?

The previous chapter showed that setting was complex, ambiguous, and changeable, and thus generated many practical limitations on the ability of local actors to communicate about their different forms of expertise. This made the articulation of problems and solutions a process of *struggling* with determining which types of information, knowledge, and experience formed a legitimate basis for action. Once more we turn to respondent G4:

And then the ... dilemma is, you know, strategy needs to be ... based on evidence of need. **So if the evidence and statistics tells us that ... the main health issues are around alcohol, but all our community engagement tells us that local people are more concerned about drugs, you know, what do we then do?** ... But the issue is further complicated by the fact that we don’t have local autonomy over priorities and outcomes. We have our Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government that says that at Glasgow city level we have to deliver these outcomes. So we can’t just come up with these outcomes that we might like at a local level if they bear no relationship to the city strategic goal, if you like, and the national. So **we’ve got to find a way of having a local dimension to our decision making, but one that feeds directly into the city objectives**, which are that we need to address the issues that are set up in the Single Outcome Agreement. (Respondent G4 – Community Planning officer)

This narrative illuminates how making a collaborative judgment about opposing knowledge claims was implicated by the constraints of the setting. There is no ideal response if statistics are pointing in one direction and personal experiences articulated by residents in another. Indeed, the respondent states that they still “got to find a way” to deal with this. Especially since their discretion was limited, local actors needed to communicate carefully about ways to reconcile different views and beliefs about how complicated problems such as public health can be defined, measured, and acted upon. Quite the opposite, however, communication

between public professionals and residents in the GCPP was made up of tacit and overt disputes about what type of knowledge and experience counted as legitimate expertise.

Local actors were *taking a stance* based on different beliefs about the ideal nature of expertise. These beliefs were embedded in opposing diagnostic-prescriptive stories of the system world and life world. The narratives of respondent G9, a local police officer who patrolled the streets and also collected data for strategic decision making as middle level manager, and respondent G7, an assertive resident active in a number of community groups who strongly believed in the value of the community, are the most powerful illustrations:

...it's looking at, right, how can we pull things together, seeing what areas are we lacking in. And again, that's where you need an awful lot of the public consultation stuff. **We're looking at the results from the Neighborhood Management Survey, ... [our own] survey,** we're looking at results from what [other agency] have with their surveys, saying ' ... [W]e have got an issue in this neighborhood here ... in relation to ... anti-social behavior... **What ... resources are already in place there, what additional resources can we put in to that?** And more importantly, how can we involve the community in that, to try and address it?' And that's where **a lot of it is trying to get back to ... the communities, for them ... to become actively engaged in what we're doing...** 'It's maybe been the perception of this what it should be', or 'No, **what we're coming across, you're giving us information, we assess that information, and this is what we've gone back**'. And that's where we're gonna have to try and get that balance, ... so that people know that they're having an input, where their input is going to, and the result of that input, what the outcome is that's coming from there. (Respondent G9 – Police officer)

Workers of Community Planning attend meetings, ... but all they're doing is meeting other workers and a specific kind of resident who is already active. **What would be much more interesting if they went out and would actively sought feedback from people who aren't activists, people who they could approach at bus stops...** Maybe it sounds a bit crazy, but, you know, go and arrange with a butcher ... to allow you to sit in their shop for a morning and talk to the people that are coming in. And you get a snapshot, you know. People like me, everybody knows what we think because we tell it all the time. It is so much more important to go out and seek the opinions of the people who don't go to meetings, aren't activists. That's going to be the challenge, if they actually want ... community engagement... Go and stand outside a school at three o'clock and seek the opinions of mummies and daddies picking up their kids, you know. Or go and stand outside a subway station and ... speak to people there. I mean, **it's completely random, but I would suggest that you would get a broader view of, you know, what people actually need.** (Respondent G7 – Resident)

These stories set conflicting diagnoses of the needs of “the community” and prescribe different types of expertise. Respondent G9 describes the content of conversations as residents “giving us information” and public professionals who “assess that information” to determine which

“resources are already in place” and “what additional resources can we put in”. Within this system world narrative, community participation is needed to identify whether a problem is real or perceived, and, if real, to know where, when, and how to target it. This requires local actors to engage in comprehensive knowledge gathering, drawing up plans to adequately allocate resources, and feeding back decisions to “the communities, *for them ... to become actively engaged in what we’re doing*”. Conversely, respondent G7 stresses that public professionals need to become actively engaged in what residents are doing instead of the other way around. In this life world narrative, relevant expertise has to emerge from talking to customers in shops, parents in front of schools, and passengers of the subway. Although this might be an unconventional, time-consuming, and “completely random” approach, it will lead to better understandings of what local problems actually are and how they could be solved rather than using official channels for gathering and feeding back knowledge.

These conflicting narratives could have certainly supplemented each other if local actors would have recognized the value of both forms of expertise as well as their contradictions in diagnosis and prescription of who needs to engage in whose world. This could have led them to exploring the practical possibilities for constructive *struggling* with these differences. But underlying beliefs and feelings were usually left out of the conversation. Collaboration was treated as the instrumental exchange of expertise to resolve problems which local actors up to then were unable to do anything about. For example, a manager at an employment agency thought that collaborating with other agencies and residents would enable him to help more people into a job. This mode of communication became apparent from their success stories, which all had the same narrative structure. The narrative of respondent G12, a middle level manager at one of the public agencies featuring in the story, about a collaborative project for reducing “youth disorder” is an example:

...you might have heard of **the Stuff Bus**? Where, um, Glasgow Housing Association, um, ... Community Safety Services, um, ... and Culture and Sport Glasgow ... got together and we developed a response to ... youth disorder... So a lot of the problems that, you know, the Police were having to deal with, Fire responding to, ... **youths causing mayhem, because they have nothing better to do...** [W]e got some ... Fairer Scotland Funding, but all the partners put their hands in their pockets as well. Basically what we got was a minibus trailer and ... put into the bus things that would keep kids amused. So basically **it visits ... the local hotspots, where there’s plenty of youths, um, and hopefully stops them ripping up the area.** Because they can go in, play videogames, we have kind of five a side football arrangements that follow the Stuff Bus. So the kids now generally know when it’s coming to their area and can plan

their evening. When they go there, there's youth support workers that will **maybe try and get them into other things, work, education, other things than, you know, drink, drugs, anti-social behavior...** we worked closely on, um, ...we put in resources as well to actually develop the project, write all the bids to get lottery funding, we went to one of the big supermarkets over in the South area, got some money out of them as well... So that was a bit, **we genuinely did Community Planning.** Um, the resident surveys were saying that youth disorder was a big issue... So... there was a community message saying 'We need this fixed', ... **the partners** together took that issue and **developed a very successful response.** (Respondent G12 – Public professional)

The respondent tells about the way in which “the partners” found a collaborative solution in response to “a community message” about youth disorder. In first instance, we might tend to agree that the problem was solved more effectively than before because local actors exchanged their expertise. However, this narrative actually reveals a limited communicative capacity for exchanging different forms of expertise. The narrative follows a storyline of *helplessness and control*³⁶: because they “genuinely did Community Planning”, it suddenly became possible to resolve this grave and stubborn problem of youth disorder. This storyline aids the respondent in framing the problem as “youths causing mayhem, because they have nothing better to do” and the solution as giving them once a week the opportunity to play games and “stop them ripping up the area” and getting involved in “drink, drugs, anti-social behavior”. Although such outreach work is a widely accepted method for dealing with youth disorder, we can ask ourselves whether it is really the case that youngsters just “have nothing better to do” or whether their disorderly behavior is an expression of a life of deprivation, unemployment, and gang culture. Is this bus really a structural solution or are results only marginal, temporal, and local? Is the perception of success shared by all local actors or have certain voices been excluded? How have residents been involved in the decision making, implementation, and evaluation? And how does this collaborative approach relate to other local problems?

All these questions are not meant to discredit the positive experience of the respondent, but rather to emphasize that each local actor was unconsciously *taking a stance* based on beliefs, values, and experiences which were often overlooked and kept out of the conversation. The conversations of public professionals and residents certainly had the tendency to take different forms of expertise for granted and link them instrumentally in exchanging expertise. Instead of pragmatically enquiring how different forms of expertise could supplement each other, this

³⁶ “the situation is bad. We always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

sustained a process of *taking a stance* in which local actors implicitly and explicitly contested the value of each other's expertise. Consider the stories of respondents G5 and G15, two active and aggrieved senior residents involved in the CRG next to community groups in their areas:

I do go in blind down and I do fight and I have several fights over the issue that the [Community Health] Forums are shut down. They were doing what they were set up to do, differently in other areas..., but if at the end of the day **if it's local people run you've got what local people are looking for**. If you as a funder want to come in and actually do more, you have to give them an idea of what you want them to be. **You can't come in with this approach ... 'We'll set up our own structures'**, which Community Planning has been doing... I live in one of the worst areas for health ... and our health initiatives have been paid back to the bone. Our local health projects that drew a lot, smoking cessation groups, you know, weight loss things, you know, confidence boosting to get you out of depression therapies, you know, alternative therapies for residents... the only way to really fix Glasgow is by using the communities. And to get some kind of health employer coming in and saying 'We should be doing that'..., Glasgow folk turn away and say 'On your way'. ... People will come into a health club ... locally... That's where a big Glasgow strategy should be feeding into... **They should be saying 'What is it that you're doing that got the results and how can we help you get more results?'**. (Respondent G5 – Resident)

we've had various meetings ... over the past two years ... about **various issues, which we've been trying to raise, that were impaired**, um, by the involvement ... of superior powers, ... by the guidelines they bring down. And **they don't give us the freedom**, actually, of expressing or motivating these actions which we would like to be involved in. And get them to give us that service and provide it with that information and any projects, actually, which could be developed for the benefit of the community and **the area should be looked at more seriously**. And open discussions and dialogue on it. (Respondent G15 – Resident)

Both respondents fervently express their frustration about how their knowledge and experience was treated in the GCPP. As active residents, they had a long history of living in and working with their communities. They engaged in the GCPP meetings by *taking a stance* against the “superior powers” and the decisions and “guidelines they bring down”. This antagonistic mode of communication was supported by a frame that connected their *actions* of going “in blind down and ... fight” with the *value* that “the area should be looked at more seriously” through the *causal belief* that “if it's local people run you've got what local people are looking for”. That is, both respondents believe that “the community” possessed the right kind of expertise for solving problems and therefore needed to be adequately supported by the public agencies. In this frame, public professionals “impair” residents in their “freedom” instead of “saying ‘What is it that you're doing that got the results and how can we help you get more results?’”. Therefore, the respondents are *taking a stance* by defending the value of their own expertise

and discarding the value of public professionals' expertise. By heightening their cognitive boundaries accordingly, these residents were less inclined to open and respectful consideration of the value of other's expertise and have a lowered willingness to collaborate, listen, and trust each other.

In sum, the GCPP was founded on the idea that bringing local actors together was enough for constructive exchange of their knowledge and experiences. However, public professionals and residents held conflicting ideals of expertise and were engaged in an antagonistic process of *struggling* over what counted as relevant expertise. Being confronted with an overwhelming amount of information, knowledge, and experiences, local actors were *taking a stance* to defend the value of their individual expertise and discard the expertise of others. As such, they heightened the cognitive boundaries surrounding their narratives of expertise and disregarded the communicative capacity necessary for overcoming the resulting pattern of communication. Local actors insufficiently recognized that their conversations were a process of *struggling* with the content as well as the value of their knowledge and experience. Although there were certainly instances in which they were *struggling* in a productive way, public professionals and residents did not cultivate their capacity to communicate about the value and limits of individual knowledge, experience, and beliefs.

Amsterdam: Under the Skin

Often they just throw [things] into the group, you know, it really comes out of nothing... So ... in the beginning I felt a lot of resistance against that, you actually go into defence immediately... And of course you shouldn't do that, because ... eventually you hear the underlying story. (Respondent A6 – Police officer)

In contrast to the GCPP, the communication between public professionals and residents in the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*) displayed a common awareness that community participation asks for recognizing the value of multiple forms of expertise. Although they were not always able to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, local actors were usually open to considering various bits and pieces of information, knowledge, and experience to get *under the skin* of complex local problems. Respondent A6, the police officer we already met in the previous chapter illuminates why *under the skin* is a powerful code for understanding the nature of *struggling* in the AW: rather than going “into defence immediately” when people “just throw [things] into the group”, being open and patient would

lead to hearing “the underlying story”. Local actors thought that appropriate solutions for local problems could only be found by getting *under the skin* of people and their perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs. This meant that it usually took a great amount of time, patience, and energy to get to the bottom of things, so that the *struggling* took a somewhat idiosyncratic character and was very much dependent on who met who at a particular time and place. Public professionals and residents, then, demonstrated capacity for communicating about underlying beliefs, values, and experiences, but often failed to turn a productive process of *struggling* into durable and widespread results.

As public professionals and residents were inclined to take a great amount of practical details, nuances, and ambiguities into account, they were continuously *struggling* to develop their expertise beyond concrete situations. Local actors regularly managed to connect various forms of expertise to harness specific problems. But this involved such intensive work on the specific details of particular situations that they did not always manage to learn from such experiences by once and for all deconstructing the tacit cognitive boundaries that separated their ways of thinking and acting. For instance, respondent A15, a resident who organized small group events such as sowing classes or language lessons for immigrant women, could reproduce little of the discussion with public professionals of the City District Maintenance Department about dealing with garbage and litter problems at the residents meeting she attended a few days before. But she had detailed knowledge of the small scale social activities of immigrant women in the neighborhood who “do that unnoticed I think. But still it works out well”. Such detailed and secluded pieces of expertise turned public encounters often into *struggling* with many different viewpoints, experiences, and pieces of information. Although their cognitive boundaries proved to be surmountable, the ability of local actors to deepen and broaden productive processes of *struggling* remained limited. Often, subtle differences of interpretation and emotional signals remained unnoticed or unaddressed, and, where these were picked up by individual actors, they were not able to communicate them to other actors who had not been involved in the situation at hand. In other words, the capacity to communicate about expertise remained *under the skin*.

Public professionals and residents in the Bos & Lommer neighborhood had a great amount of detailed knowledge and know-how about the many *seemingly small problems* (see chapter 5) which were present in the neighborhood. They constantly ran into a complex array of

minutiae, ambiguities, perceptions, and emotions that they could not solve on their own or at that particular moment. For example, through several interviews and meetings I found out that something seemingly simple like excessive garbage disposal and street litter was related to:

- the ongoing –and regularly protracted– demolition, reconstruction, and relocation projects of the various housing corporations;
- lacking awareness and understanding of, or respect for, the rules for cleanliness among residents;
- insufficient resources of the Police to monitor violations;
- the routes and timetables of the garbage disposal service;
- the lack of resources and time to communicate the rules to all residents in languages they understand;
- deficient communication between housing corporations, City District, and contractors about changes to plans or exceptions to rules.

Therefore, exchanging information, knowledge, and experience was a continuous process of *struggling* by public professionals and residents trying to get *under the skin* of local problems.

We return to respondent A6, who further explains how she struggled with deciding what to do with the information she was confronted with during her public encounters:

...with resident participation ... you actually don't do anything else then responding to complaints and reports that come in. There are so many of those that it's impossible to deal with all of them. That are complaints about, um, hey, nuisance by neighbors, but **it then appears that there are very long stories behind that, or you don't really find out.** People complain or feel unsafe because of those neighbors or sometimes hear things that aren't there, they hear that in gossip, and you have to, **you're then digging a lot for the concrete complaint that's behind it and also ... you can do something with.** Reports about ... things that happen in the street, um, where you're usually not present on the moment it happens, or just too late, then it already stopped... With a lot of complaints that we get I can't immediately, um, act upon. And strangely enough, that's a shame sometimes, because you're also a do-er, you also want to solve problems, but **sometimes it helps more to take it in like a sponge.** Actually just accepting that you can't do much except lending an ear, sometimes registering it and sometimes there is a moment later when you can address it. This way you *do* get to know a neighborhood like this very well of course. And all sorts of complaints that are behind it. (Respondent A6 – Police officer)

The respondent explains that being responsive to all the demands and complaints of residents is very difficult, because of their complexity, quantity, and unexpected emergence. Therefore, she organizes this narrative of expertise around the *metaphor* of a “sponge”: “to take it in” and

accept “that you can’t do much except lending an ear, sometimes registering it and sometimes there is a moment later when you can address it”. Although she felt the inclination to respond immediately with words or actions, the content of conversations benefited much more from being open, comforting, and patient in listening to the “very long stories behind” concrete statements until she would arrive at a piece of information “you can do something with”. Local actors were therefore *struggling* to interpret and manage emotions, perceptions, and relationships, find out underlying stories, accept that many problems could not be immediately solved, and look for creative solutions. Communicating about expertise, then, came down to public professionals and residents trying to get *under the skin* of concrete situations, exploring their intricacies together, and tailoring solutions to what seemed appropriate to the situation at hand.

The AW was instituted to provide extra commitment to, and resources for, broadening and deepening the already existing exchange of expertise about local problems. The narrative of respondent A12, a social worker who managed the contact between residents and public professionals, illustrates how getting *under the skin* of a problem a resident observes with a play ground facility can lead to a productive process of *struggling*:

...so for example to change a play ground facility, um, that you’ve got a half pipe ... for skaters ... [and] a resident has something like ‘Yeah, ... skaters ... don’t make use of it, ... [it’s] rusting away and ... there are children ... climbing on it... Is it not possible then to take that thing away and put in its place a few small playing facilities for those children?’ ... [So] **that [resident] signals it because she lives across it.** And then you see that we have such a construction through which ... there is contact, hey, between that woman ... and the one concerned with public space, to see like ‘Okay, **how could you give shape to that in practical terms** so that it’s good for the resident, it’s good for the one using it, ... and that it’s also good for the one who has to place the facility’. So then you get a, yeah, I personally think ... **very good contact between that system and life world.** And yeah, within that **we operate as a kind of catalyst,** ... without taking part in the process you make sure that something results from it. (Respondent A12 – Social worker)

The respondent operated, in his own words, between the “system world” and the “life world” by organizing resident meetings, supporting residents in proposing and carrying out initiatives, and mediating between the public agencies and the community. Using the *metaphor* of a “catalyst”, he depicts his work as a dynamic process in which he is a change agent who “without taking part in the process ... make[s] sure that something results from it. In this narrative, catalyzing the exchange of expertise benefits public professionals, because they

obtain knowledge from residents' lived experience that they otherwise would not have access to, as well as residents, because they get access to the right persons and resources for getting their problems solved. Respondent A14, a local police officer who portrayed his understanding of the neighborhood as the street view of Google Earth as compared to the top-down Google Maps view colleagues in other parts of the organization had, provided a similar narrative. He was able to find the perpetrator of a murder in his neighborhood, because he knew that a resident living in the street where it took place was always sitting in front of his window at that time and must have seen something. Through his personal relations with the resident he was able to obtain the information that led to the arrest. Thus, getting *under the skin* of problems, people, and the neighborhood can lead to productive *struggling*.

At the same time, the narrative of respondent A12 also showed that, going back to the half-pipe example, his practices of catalyzing the exchange of expertise was a constant *struggling*:

[But] ... then the municipality has to take liability into account, a bit of safety. If they place something they have to take into account how big it can be according to the law... So also in terms of, um, if children fall then the surface for example has to be rubber, or it can't be within so many meters of another facility or something, those kinds of things. **Also that there are agreements that you can have an X amount of playing facilities in a ... neighborhood.** So yeah, if you already have exceeded that amount then it's of course not handy to put another playing facility, um, there. **While a resident for example says 'Yeah, it's really necessary for my place'. Very understandable from the viewpoint of the resident, but from that system world it's still like 'Yeah fine, we have agreed this within the system that there are no more than ten playing facilities in this area'. So then it's not always that easy.** Also when it's about putting oneself in someone else's position, **the empathy of, um, of the both worlds so to say.** (Respondent A12 – Participation broker)

The respondent explains that exchanging knowledge and experience is “not always that easy”, because life world and system world comprise divergent underlying logics. While a resident spontaneously signaled a problem and offered a creative solution, public professionals tended to respond by framing the problem in terms of regulations that intend to assure a fair, safe, and equitable distribution of facilities and finances. The respondent was in a position in which he could understand both viewpoints, but observed that “the empathy of ... the both worlds” was often lacking. Facilitating mutual recognition of different forms of expertise, then, was a continuous *struggling* to get *under the skin* of all local actors involved.

To further elucidate the differences between narratives of the life world and the system world, in the next two stories the proactive resident who told the story about the meeting which she turned around at the beginning of chapter 1, and the neighborhood manager who portrayed the setting of the AW as an “obscure pallet” in chapter 5, share their experiences with refurbishing one of the many playgrounds in the area:

Um, **I have asked for a toilet for gents in that swimming pool.** I say ‘**It’s dead easy,** in the corner... If you make a t-junction there to the drain of the janitor office..., there’s a toilet for children’... I also requested all that, there’s a changing facility for mothers ... that they can go with their baby stuff and a clean diaper, garbage can, everything’s taken care of. I say ‘If there’s a toilet there already anyway, why can’t there be a t-junction, so that gents toilet is also connected to that?’. ‘Yeah, but then a cleaning service has to come as well’. I say ‘What’s this? ... **Is that so difficult?** Just send someone? The janitor office also has to be cleaned, then it’s not that difficult for him to also do that toilet seat or just, he has the stuff in the cart anyway. Or do I see, am I blind?’. **I say ‘You just can’t organize anything, you just don’t see it,** you’re being so stupid’... No, **they’re now pissing against all the trees.** With the consequence that those children are watching how those men are peeing. And it smells. So? Well, they took pictures now and they were in the pool this week and they looked, so I suspect that a gents toilet will come now, because **it’s just terrible.** Because if in the summer those men are going to drink over there and they have beers, well, then you know how it goes... But there are all kinds of bushes and plants there, well, they’re completely destroyed now... And it smells horribly. **Because ... that guy that lives there on the first floor gets all that smell up there.** Beh. Well, that doesn’t make you very happy. So there I asked for a gents toilet. (Respondent A16 – Resident)

At a certain moment ... they had discovered that [playground] as City District Board, because the playground board ... didn’t cope anymore financially. The ground was owned by the City District appeared later and the buildings as well... Um, ... someone of Wellbeing had ... refurbished it, and also wrote an entire plan... Well, because the lines between the City District and that caretaker were not that well, that caretaker quit at a certain moment and, yeah, **there was a deadlock.** And I got complaints of residents like ‘Yeah, we have such a nice pool and we have a nice playground, but it’s not open anymore’... **The problems were stacking up.** Because ... there would be a renovation of those buildings, there was money for that, yes or no, eventually it appeared to be ‘no’. So then you need Real Estate. The support of that playground by Wellbeing was minimal and the caretaking of the playing apparatus was also not well arranged, so the Caretaking Department shied away. So those people were completely on their own... I finally took some steps, so that Real Estate went to look... Now it is the case that **we’re still talking about it while the playground is already closed for a year, because departments are just looking at each other and nobody takes up the initiative to do something structural with it...** But then you’re dealing with so many different parts ... with Caretaking, with Real Estate, with Wellbeing, ... Neighborhood Participation, residents In the meantime a lot of old energy bills and water bills of that club got stacked up, they never paid them, ... in the end they never got the know-how to run such an association... Well, we’re still dealing with that at Wellbeing to sort it out and make arrangements with [the water company

and the energy company] to make sure everything is definitely taken care of. Yeah, **those kind of things are terribly frustrating because you're pumping energy in it the whole time and you're trying to bring people together and then eventually, um, the result is still unsatisfactory** because you can't, um, yeah, get everyone working together..., to make sure that there's actually something happening in your organization. (Respondent A2 – Neighborhood manager)

These narratives describe a lingering problem that caused a lot of frustration and put pressure on the relationships between local actors. Both respondents use a *tragic plotline* in which they are the heroes who wanted to solve the problems but were powerless in making it happen. As resident, respondent A16 was regularly confronted with the urine smell that a group of homeless men was (allegedly) causing and had the feeling that the seriousness of the problem was insufficiently recognized. The situation was “just terrible”, while it would be “dead easy” to solve the problem by placing an extra toilet. But the public professionals were lacking in assertiveness: they “just don't see it” and “are being so stupid”. In turn, as neighborhood manager, respondent A2 faced many uncertainties about budgets, rules, responsibilities, and possibilities, as well as interdependent actors who were “just looking at each other” and did not take “up the initiative to do something structural with it”. From the “certain moment ... they had discovered that [playground] as City District Board” until a year later, he had been “pumping energy in it the whole time” and “trying to bring people together”. But in the end “the result is still unsatisfactory because you can't, um, yeah, get everyone working together”. As such, the diverging forms of expertise inherent to the life world and the system world limited the ability of local actors for getting *under the skin* of others.

Exchanging expertise by getting *under the skin*, then, was a complex and messy process in which the great amount of effort and energy put into it did not always translate into concrete outcomes. As a result, the content of their conversations drew local actors into a pattern of communication in which they were foregoing critical questioning of the framing of the actual problems and solutions. For example: Why are these homeless men actually there? Will they really start using a toilet? Would more effect not be sorted through physical changes to the relatively closed architecture, more police surveillance, social control by residents, or shelter and care for the homeless? Could a different kind of leadership not help to get the different local actors to work together? Public professionals and residents could render their *struggling* more productive by recognizing efforts, frustrations, and expertise and critically challenging each other's knowledge and experience. For instance, respondent A16 might try to understand just how deeply embedded fragmentation and technical specialization are in local governance

because the dense Dutch legal system strictly circumscribes competences and legal procedures (Van Roosmalen, 2007) and public organizations are free in setting their own policies and personnel management systems (Van der Meer & Raadschelders, 1999; Van der Meer & Dijkstra, 2000). Conversely, respondent A2 might invite other local actors to gather on the playground to experience the problems first hand as to motivate them to break through their deadlock.

The research in Amsterdam identified many situations in which public professionals and residents were as much *struggling* for solving particular problems as for recognition. Local actors such as respondents A16 and A2 have different backgrounds and experiences in the life world and system world and therefore do not see things the same way in the complex and ambiguous jungle of problems, policies, and people. Negative mutual perceptions were easily born when they were getting *under the skin* of local problems. Consider for example some angry residents who complained during residents meetings that they had not heard anything back from a reported violation of garbage disposal and a filed request for bicycle racks. Or, on the other hand, consider respondent A13, the housing manager from chapter 4, who got a low turnout at several neighbourhood events and was faced with returning damages in the same housing block. Although local actors had the ability to recognize the impact and value of the experiences, emotions, and knowledge that others had *under the skin*, frustrations and misunderstandings regularly limited their ability to go one step further and deconstruct the underlying cognitive boundaries to make their *struggling* more durable.

In conclusion, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam confronted each other with a great number of different forms of expertise. They actively participated in each other's "worlds" in order to exchange information, knowledge, and experiences across the division between life world and system world. By trying to get *under the skin* of people, problems, and perceptions, local actors demonstrated awareness of the need for recognizing the individual beliefs, experiences, and emotions that underlie the ways in which expertise was articulated. However, their inclination to be responsive to the details of the situation at hand asked for a lot of time, energy, and patience while not always lowering cognitive boundaries or leading to concrete results. As such, public professionals and residents were constantly *struggling* with how to integrate different forms of expertise. Thus, while local actors did demonstrate capacity

to communicate about multiple forms of expertise, they often did not manage to explicate and anchor this know-how beyond the details *under the skin* of specific situations.

Bologna: Nuts and Bolts

you don't have a ... [blank] sheet, to say 'Yes, I want this'. So you have to stay there and you have to talk about benches or the fountain and the table and the bar and the bicycle path. (Respondent B3 – Resident)

From a case in which public professionals and residents were *struggling* with the underlying details, beliefs, and emotions of many different forms of expertise, the analysis now moves to a case in which the exchange of knowledge and experience took place through a structured deliberative process that led to concrete decisions. In contrast to the AW, local actors in Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) were not in the position to have free-flowing conversations and delve into the nitty-gritty of complex local problems. As respondent B3, who we already met in chapter 4, put it, “you don't have a ... [blank] sheet, to say ‘Yes, I want this’.”. Instead, local actors had to focus their exchange of expertise on specifying the *nuts and bolts* (“benches or the fountain and the table and the bar and the bicycle path”) of the physical interventions to be made in the neighborhood. The code *nuts and bolts* neatly characterizes how in Bologna the process of *struggling* was subject to clear limits on what counted as relevant expertise. Although this aided local actors in openly articulating their expertise and formulating detailed decisions, it did little to widen their capacity to communicate about the value of multiple forms of expertise beyond the remit of their encounters.

The institutional format of the participative workshops (see chapter 4 and 5) determined the scope, content, and length of the conversations between public professionals and residents, and, as such, contained their *struggling* about what kind of expertise should be recognized. By taking part in the participative workshops, local actors certainly learned to consider different types of information, experiences, and viewpoints. On the one hand, this enhanced their ability to understand how the *nuts and bolts* of technical plans and legal requirements were related to the social dynamics, identity, and problems in the area. At the meeting I attended, residents were showed maps, architectural designs, and a scale model of the revised intervention, which were explained in relation to the relevant legal rules as well as their implications for the types and size of greenery and pavement that the residents had originally agreed upon. At the same

time, however, residents continued to face grave problems, while the possibilities for public professionals to solve these problems were by and large limited to long term regeneration projects. Being endowed with the *nuts and bolts* of exchanging different forms of expertise, local actors still had a long process of *struggling* ahead before having communicative capacity for breaking through this pattern of communication.

The public professionals and residents who took part in the participative workshops focused their exchanging of expertise on specific themes. During the *Laboratorio Mercato*, the themes were: the relationship of the area with the rest of the neighborhood; social impact, services, and accessibility; greenery and landscape; environmental sustainability and technological innovation; and mobility. During the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est*, the themes were the “linear park”; greenery; the square; connectivity; services and public spaces; architectural quality; commerce; livability and safety; mobility; and urgent measures against further degeneration. Each of these themes was discussed in one or several meetings in order to go from broad plans, ideas, and desires to concrete proposals. The following story of respondent B2, who was the key figure in preparing and facilitating both *laboratori*, makes clear how the exchange of expertise took the form of *nuts and bolts* of for example squares and parks:

...something very typical is **the discussion about public spaces**. So we have this, um, regeneration of Bolognina Est ... we have to build new public spaces. For example, ... ‘We don’t have a square, we would like to have a square’. And people discussing about ... what kind of square. Will there be **shops** or not? **Trees** or not? **Where** the square should be. Um, and some things like that. Or, um, something about the green areas... **Because every time people say ‘We want new green areas’, but then you have to discuss with them what kind of green**, because we have many different kinds of green for different ... users. How we can manage these green areas, making them safe? So people talking about ‘We want to have a ... **fence**’, um, a closed green area, something that is open from nine to five, or nine to nine, and then it’s closed, or maybe it’s better to have an **open area**. Um, ‘We should have something inside for example **ice cream shops**, ... **a bar** or maybe it’s better not to have it, something for **sport** or not’. You have many different examples of this kind of discussions (Respondent B2 – Facilitator)

This narrative of expertise shows that the desire to change the area implied a lot of detailed decisions. Translating a desire such as “We want new green areas” asks for sorting out the *nuts and bolts* of “what kind of green”: should it be closed or open, what should be the opening times if it is fenced, should there be commercial activities such as bars, should there be sport facilities, what kinds of trees and flowers, how much grass, etc. Notice how the respondent makes a *normative leap* by stating that if residents say they want a new green area, “then you

have to discuss with them” the concrete decisions. This narrative prescribes *nuts and bolts* as the most ideal form of expertise, because each single detail could affect how the park will be used and how satisfactory the physical intervention has been. If these details would not be decided on the basis of resident input, the park might in the end not live up to their ideas and needs, leading to all kinds of unanticipated or perverse consequences, and moreover, make the whole operation a waste of money, time, and effort. For local actors, then, discussing *nuts and bolts* avoided situations in which their exchange of expertise got stuck in all kinds of abstract ideas and desires. It concretized the changes they needed to make to the physical appearance, social patterns, and livability of the neighborhood.

The park often featured as an example of the content of the conversations of local actors. The input of residents was not just written down, but was discussed in terms of their motivations, consequences, and quality. For example, facilitators would ask “Why do you want a park?”, “What does it add to the area?”, “What concrete form will improve safety?”. Residents were asked to formulate their perceptions and feelings in terms of current and future problems and opportunities. The facilitators constantly strived to make different ideas concrete and reveal the discrepancies, tensions, and connections between diverging points of view. Respondent B11, an architect and one of the facilitators in *Laboratorio Bolognina Est*, explains how he managed the content of the conversations:

I’ve received at the beginning of the *Laboratorio* the plan ... a technical design... that’s not easy to read for the working woman, um, ... or for the medic or for the barber. So, ... the first thing I’ve done is ... searching to transform it, maintaining the project and to break down ... the single pieces. Um, there’s a park, um, ‘How big is this park?’. **If I say that it is 2000 m² big, nobody, for few this means something. If I say that is has the size of, um, five basketball courts or seven football fields it starts to have a meaning.** In this first phase the main thing that, that I’ve done was, um, preparing the designs like this, ... **simplifying, um, the content**, making nodal points, um, which are the bicycle lanes, these, these, and these, marked in red, um, to explain them which measurements they have, to let them see what this means with respect to the bicycle lanes, um, that are already there in Bologna. **[T]his ... line ... means the bicycle lane like in this image, like this photo made over there, big like two bicycles passing each other at the same time...** I especially had to be present in the *Laboratorio* to say what was possible and understand what was requested... And when the citizens asked if we couldn’t construct a single house and make only one big park, there was a need to say ... that the landowner has an intention to build, to earn money, to invest... And so I had to mediate a bit in this too. (Respondent B11 – Facilitator)

As the participative workshops were part of the urban planning system, the conversations of local actors often referred to cartographic representations of the area in which specific interventions were indicated with lines, symbols, and colors. Therefore, the facilitators helped residents to imagine how these interventions and their proposals would look in real life by giving practical examples, making drawings of the street view, using maps, photos and 3D models, and accumulating proposals in lists and tables. They then reported the results of the discussion to the Municipality without changing the style of the proposals into technically precise indications, so that residents could still recognize their specific input. According to the respondent, the exchange of expertise required “simplifying ... the content” of “a technical design” and “to say what was possible and understand what was requested”. In this narrative, specifying the *nuts and bolts* of the regeneration plan within pre-fixed boundaries is seen as a seamless exchange of different forms of expertise between the life world and system world.

Indeed, public professionals and residents in the PSC managed to exchange expertise that transcended their individual cognitive boundaries. Residents could now better understand the technical and legal considerations of public professionals, who in turn were better able to imagine the area from the lived experiences of residents. For example, respondent B17, a planner who was involved in a project for transforming an old railway track running through the entire neighborhood into a bicycle lane, learned through the meetings about the criminal activities and dog fouling that often happened on several spots along the route. Through his deliberations with residents, the idea was born to transform the railway track into a “linear park” that combined the bicycle lane with a pedestrian walkway, greenery, benches, and street lightening. However, the deeply ingrained barriers between system world and life world all but disappeared. Compare for example these stories of a planner whose role it was to explain the legal rules that the proposals of the residents had to abide by and a resident who was one of the few young and immigrant participants who explains his impulsive way of making proposals:

the discussion was in a way that they rightly looked from their point of view and asked, ... because [according to them] there is a need to construct all this greenery. And so **there was a need to try and explain that nevertheless, um, there are legal rules, there are, um, numerical limits...** They understand ... what the law says. ... in fact, they asked a lot of numbers, because when there could be a need to make 250 parking spaces, fine, there are 250, but [what] if there [would be] 251...? Yes,... they were very attentive. **However, within the limits they understand...** For example, in Bolognina there is also the discussion about the bicycle lanes, ... you can't make bicycle lanes everywhere or, [chuckles] **there's really a need to use some criteria.** It

is better to ask them what their proposals actually are And then see if ... they can be constructed there, ... because **they don't look at the law, they don't even look at the dimensions of a street for example....** The legal rule decides that the street needs to be six meters wide,... and... you can't restrain that... But it is also true that in moments in which you say [this] ... they search for the solution thinking about that which has been said. (Respondent B20 – Urban planner)

One evening I said that, um, the military [area] can be replaced by a university campus. Because all the people said 'There is a problem of [safety] in the night, there [is no street lighting]... And if you will build shops here it will be like now, because in the night all the shoppers go home in the other neighborhood and this neighborhood becomes like a ghost town. So I said 'If you need some human presence there ... [to create] a better atmosphere, ... Bologna is a university town, we've got 100.000 of young people in the winter time. So make another place with, um, apartments with, um, public price, a little bit lower than the private price, it's not so bad. **This is a little strange idea that I said in this [meeting], so I said 'Why not?'. Um, they [wrote it down], but I don't know where it finished** this idea. But, um, I tried to say that, because if you don't ... you can't in the future, um, only say bad words..., **you have to try to achieve something** (Respondent B18 – Resident)

Both respondents valued the exchange of knowledge in the participative workshops, but their narratives express different beliefs about what constitutes legitimate expertise. Respondent B20 appreciates the ability of residents to come up with creative ideas and understand the practical and legal limits of their proposals, but also emphasizes that “there was a need to try and explain that ... there are legal rules ... [and] numerical limits”. This system world narrative is based on the *causal belief* that expertise is only relevant if it follows pre-fixed regulations, technical procedures, and political mandate. However, this belief undermines the creativity and spontaneity needed to deal with complex problems that stretch beyond the fixed limits of the specific project at hand. The life world narrative of respondent B18 illustrates how residents participated by suggesting impulsive ideas which often got lost on the way to making the final plans. Based on the *causal belief* that “you have to try to achieve something”, residents thought freely about how it might be to live in the area in the future rather than “look[ing] at the law ... [or] the dimensions of a street”. Although this latter form of expertise was certainly valued, it was not of the same standing as the professionals' technical expertise.

The primacy given to expertise based on formal procedures, legal rules, and political mandate fits with the nature of expertise in the Italian public sector. Italian civil servants are renowned for having a strong formalistic-legalistic culture (Capano, 2003) that sustains a tendency to favor applying procedures over attaining results. Public professionals primarily have training

in law, engineering, or architecture, are mainly responsible for dealing with a great amount of administrative law and jurisprudence, and often hold

“a dominant view of urban policy based on large-scale projects, which are assumed *per se* to improve the quality of the urban fabric... This dominant culture ... sees the solutions to problems of urban decay and consequent social polarization in the concentration of urban functions... In this view urban welfare results from adherence to specific standards of density and ratio of infrastructure and services, for which adequate space should be allocated (Vicari, 2001, pp. 109-110)“.

To be sure, in the PSC the expertise of residents was not treated instrumentally based on authoritative arrogance. Rather, public professionals had a sincere commitment to enabling the realization of residents' ideas, needs, and desires within the present practical, legal, and political limits. This conformity with the formal boundaries set to the process implied that *struggling* was inhibited. It was out of the question to take the lived experience of residents as starting point or to contest the formal boundaries. Consider the consequences of excluding the experiences with many grave problems in the neighborhood around hidden criminality that respondent B16, who we met in the previous chapter, had:

Currently it is a zone that for its structure, ... and for the buildings like the social housing, ... very cheap, has a lot ... of Chinese a lot of Nigerians, who have almost taken complete rule over some streets, Pakistani, a few Moroccans ... and Tunisians, okay. Then there's the whole Ex Mercato zone where there are shops ran by ... mostly Nigerians... The Nigerians who are in this zone tell me that **almost always shops are forms of cover-up, I mean, drugs, prostitution, and of a reality apparently invisible but everyone knows it**... Then ... there are Pakistan, Indian, Egyptian, and Moroccan shops. **These commercial activities are apparently legal**, ... are normal, also I go there to buy things... Well then, all this is not a peaceful business, this is in my view a business that **escapes all control**. Because around a commercial activity they make their countrymen come, okay, as shop attendants, okay. I give you a working request, you come here as shop attendant in my shop, after six months I get you a permit, and you remain illegally in Italy, ... and you go to do whatever you want, usually expanding the files of the organized crime ... And the horrible thing is that ... there's a unification of the Italian mafia, Sicilian, and this immigrant criminality... A small shop that sells fruits and vegetables that for the largest part of the week doesn't have almost anything, then one day it is stuffed with fruits and vegetables and then you find that he is catching flies all the days. However, he stays there, I mean, he has interests. Well, **who looks beyond the obvious**, and doesn't organize workshops that much about projects, **goes to do something about these things here**. Well, ... **this is the territorial situation, but to understand it you would have to go to get to know it**. (Respondent B16 – Resident)

This narrative confronts us with a completely different type of expertise than *nuts and bolts*. The respondent talks about problems in the neighborhood which are “apparently invisible, but

everyone knows it”. In this narrative, the respondent frames herself as the hero of the story who “looks beyond the obvious” in contrast to other local actors who are only concerned with “organiz[ing] workshops ... about projects”. This sustains the view that “to understand it you would have to go to get to know it”; i.e., going into the neighborhood, especially after dark, and looking critically at what is going on behind the façade of everyday commercial activity and private housing. The respondent explained during the interview that these problems were related to the cheap housing, socio-economic inequalities, a growing foothold of organized crime, absence of control by local law enforcement authorities, Italy having turned over the last decades from a country of emigration to a country of immigration, and lacking systems of social welfare and integration. These issues have not been addressed by local actors and an imminent solution is not likely to follow from the current content of the conversations. To change this, public professionals and residents would require the communicative capacity for *struggling* with the complexities of many grave local problems.

In conclusion, public professionals and residents in the PSC managed to transform different forms of expertise into concrete proposals. This meant that their communication focused on translating broad ideas, plans, and desires into the *nuts and bolts* of plans for the physical regeneration of the neighborhood. The content of their conversations took shape through a structured deliberative process which inhibited *struggling* about the nature and boundaries of knowledge and experiences. As a result, expertise was mainly captured in a system world narrative rather than a life world narrative. However, the complex nature of local problems did require public professionals and residents to extend their communicative capacity to talk about different types of knowledge, experience, and emotions beyond the formal boundaries of their conversations. Therefore, local actors will have to recognize the value of expertise other than what is translatable in *nuts and bolts* and commit to an ongoing process of *struggling*.

Summary and Implications: Communicative Capacity and Struggling

This chapter aimed at explaining the relationship between the content of the conversations that public professionals and residents had, their communicative capacity, and the resulting quality of participatory democracy. In short, the narrative analysis demonstrated that local actors were constantly *struggling* with the many different forms of knowledge and experiences that formed the content of their conversations. Their narratives of expertise tended to be grounded in either

the system world or the life world, or focused on facilitating exchange of expertise between these. Accordingly, the meaning of public encounters, answering the second sub-question of the research, took shape through the process of communicating about exchanging expertise. In Glasgow, public professionals and residents were *taking a stance* to defend their own knowledge and experiences and discard the value of the expertise of others. In Amsterdam, local actors were trying to get *under the skin* of problems and people by emphasizing the value of the details and underlying stories of specific situations. In Bologna, public professionals and residents determined the value of knowledge and experiences in terms of their contribution to the specification of the *nuts and bolts* of regeneration plans. To answer the third sub-question of the research, then, the added value of the public encounters in each case was limited as local actors failed to break through their dominant pattern of communication out of neglect of their communicative capacity for *struggling* with different forms of expertise.

Having shifted the emphasis from the setting to the content of their conversations, this chapter showed that public professionals and residents in each of the cases were all, in different ways, concerned with enhancing the quality of their conversations. However, the differences in the content of their conversations demonstrate that exchanging expertise is a multifaceted and fluid process without an Archimedean point or final resolution. Local actors in Bologna might have managed to jointly articulate and define their expertise through a structured deliberative process, but they were not able to develop their capacity for further delving into the nitty-gritty of local problems. In contrast, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam did show such an ability to get *under the skin* of problems, people, and processes, but from this often did not manage to pinpoint the *nuts and bolts* of proposed solutions. In Glasgow, the goal was to comprehensively cover the particulars of all local problems and recognize the expertise of all local actors, but a clear idea of the kind of capacity needed to do so was absent.

The cases revealed that we should understand the content of public encounters as a process of *struggling*. The exchanging of information, knowledge and experience hinged on the ability of local actors to recognize the content and value of different forms of expertise. When public professionals and residents were talking about local problems such as playground renewal, health inequalities, or hidden criminality, they were not referring to some definitive stock of knowledge that existed external of them and could be learned by putting together all the different pieces of the puzzle until the picture is complete. Rather, they were trying to render

their ordinary and situated knowledge of, and experiences with, the complexities of the local problems meaningful across their cognitive boundaries. The analysis revealed that the ability of local actors to recognize the views, efforts, and feelings of others was mediated by cognitive boundaries which were embedded in their narratives of expertise. As such, local actors were *struggling* with the content of their conversations in three particular ways.

First, the capacity of public professionals and residents to communicate about expertise was practically limited by the interplay between the setting and their cognitive boundaries. Local actors in Glasgow had to take the views and needs of all the “partners” and the “community”, as well as policy objectives and statistics on the urban and national level, into account, but only had limited discretion for actually integrating all this information. As each local actor naturally had *bounded rationality* (Simon, 1945/1997) –cognitive limits formed by individual experiences and influences from the organization or social environment– they were *struggling* to “get their heads round and feel comfortable with” (respondent G4) this discrepancy between policy ambitions and practical possibilities for exchanging expertise. As a result, public professionals and residents tended to retreat behind their cognitive boundaries and consider the expertise of others only relevant if it fitted with their own beliefs, feelings, and practices. In Amsterdam and Bologna, local actors demonstrated greater capacity to communicate across their cognitive boundaries, but also here practical limits such as technical specialization and fragmentation of public agencies inhibited their ability to treat the expertise of others on its own terms. Therefore, public professionals and residents have to be aware of the practical limitations on their ability to cross their cognitive boundaries.

The second influence on the communicative capacity for exchanging expertise was the nature of the barriers between system world and life world. Each of the cases showed that deep-seated barriers continued to exist between the worlds of *Planning* and *Community* (see chapter 4). The expertise of local actors such as respondents G10, B11, and B20 was formed through the “bird’s eye view” (Le Corbusier, 1967), because in their minds general data, technical knowledge, regulative norms, and formal procedures help to avoid unaccountable, arbitrary, or inequitable decisions. In contrast, local actors such as respondents G7, A16, and B16 preferred seeing local problems through the “eyes on the street” (Jacobs, 1961), because according to them personal experiences and feelings offered a more accurate portrayal of the moral, emotional, and contextual nature of these problems. The narratives of respondents A2 and A16

revealed how both belief systems can draw local actors into their internal logic and dynamics. But the analysis also showed that the barriers between life world and system world were not impossible to overcome. For example, the narratives of respondents A12 and B20 explained how public professionals were brought in touch with everyday life and problems in the neighborhood, while residents gained technical knowledge of laws, budgets, and plans. Still, local actors need to stay alert to the *struggling* that might be taking place under the surface of apparently effective exchanges of expertise between system world and life world.

Following on from that, thirdly, is how the definition of relevant expertise affects the capacity for constructive and productive communication. Of the three cases, local actors in Bologna abided by the strictest definition of what counted as relevant expertise. On the one hand, this enabled public professionals and residents in communicating about how they could translate broad ideas and desires into concrete proposals. On the other hand, expertise about many hidden problems was excluded because it could not be captured in formal regeneration plans. Also in Glasgow and Amsterdam, the analysis revealed that stories of successful exchange of expertise concealed the subtle neglect of underlying beliefs, values, and feelings. Local actors have to realize that the process of *struggling* can easily turn unproductive because of relatively small-scale, often hidden, and seemingly erratic and idiosyncratic ways of intentional or accidental mutual neglect, misinterpretation, or misunderstanding. However, this apparently harmless “internal exclusion” (Young, 1996), or “passive resistance” (Scott, 1985), feeds into frustration, engrained beliefs, and antagonism, and, as such, limits the ability of local actors to focus on the content of their conversations.

Thus, if public professionals and residents want to enhance the added value of their encounters by exchanging expertise, something more is needed than advocating a moral imperative for self-interested and autocratic public professionals to better accommodate well-intending and neglected citizens. The content of their conversations is not a straightforward transfer of knowledge between senders and receivers, but, instead, a deeply communicative process in which the nature and value of information, ideas, beliefs, and feelings constantly have to be negotiated and translated across cognitive boundaries (Yanow, 2004; Freeman, 2006; Weber & Khademian, 2008). While confrontation with the knowledge and emotions of others can lift the veils of tacit knowledge and trigger joint learning (Argyris & Schön, 1976; Marcus et al., 2005; Verhoeven, 2009), it can also engender a process in which deeply held beliefs get

further engrained and the personal relationships between local actors are put under pressure. In other words, the communicative capacity of local actors for *struggling* with many different forms of expertise has an important influence on the quality of participatory democracy. As the content of conversations between public professionals and residents is heavily intertwined with the nature of their relationships, the next chapter will discuss how this third process of participatory practice affects their communicative capacity.

To conclude, the chapter demonstrated that the capacity of public professionals and residents to communicate about expertise has a great impact on the quality of participatory democracy. Whether community participation leads to innovative and durable solutions for local problems is influenced by the capacity of local actors for *struggling* with different forms of information, knowledge, and experiences. The chapter has shown that the exchange of expertise between system world and life world is a continuous process of *struggling* with the nature and value of different modes of expertise. *Struggling* with expertise is essentially a matter of the capacity of local actors to communicate the nature, meaning, and value of their knowledge and experience in a way that others will acknowledge, and, vice versa, to be open to recognize the value of others' expertise. Neglecting this communicative capacity leads to unproductive *struggling* for recognition as well as stalemate between oppositional beliefs. Therefore, public professionals and residents need to acknowledge that productive *struggling* is an ongoing process of critically enquiring the ways in which information, beliefs, ideas, and feelings are addressed.

7 Making Connections: Maintaining Relationships

it all depends on the relationships that you build up... There are a lot of actors who each have their own interests. So it's always balancing...how you get those actors into a conversation and keep them talking ~ Area manager Amsterdam

Up to now, the influence of public encounters on the quality of participatory democracy has been found to depend on the capacity of public professionals and residents for communicating about the processes of *work in progress* and *struggling*. The previous chapter showed that the content of their conversations is not a neutral process of connecting the dots between different forms of expertise, but a social process which fundamentally depends on the relationships between local actors. Bringing public professionals and residents together is not sufficient in itself; they have to maintain their relationships by constantly *making connections*. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the research about this third process of participatory practice. We have already seen how several local actors were actively engaged in *making connections* between life and system world. This chapter shows how these, as well as other, local actors try to nurture mutual understanding and trust, negotiate and convince each other, and be open and sincere. *Making connections* helps to explain how maintaining relationships is a continuous process which can only be constructive and productive if public professionals and residents have the capacity to communicate about practical possibilities for adapting their relationships to the needs of the situation at hand.

Relationships: A Process of Making Connections

This chapter reveals that public professionals and residents maintained their relationships by constantly *making connections* between a great number of people, policies, and problems. As the area manager from Amsterdam, who we already met in chapter 4, states in the opening quote, “it all depends on the relationships that you build up ... [and] how you get [local] actors into a conversation and keep them talking”. Maintaining relationships goes far beyond committing to empowerment. To be sure, community participation would be futile if public professionals and residents would not recognize each other as valuable actors and would not be willing to invest in social bonding. However, the research in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna showed that maintaining relationships was far from straightforward, since participatory practice stirred up countless emotional and functional needs that motivated local actors to collaborate, while at the same time bringing about many tensions, barriers, and

misunderstandings that frustrated their relationships. Public professionals and residents faced a wide range of actors and factors that could be connected, while having far less possibilities for actually doing so. Therefore, they should not be obsessed with keeping each other committed to empowerment, but rather give primacy to cultivating their communicative capacity to talk about practical possibilities for *making connections*.

The need for a new type of relationships among public professionals and residents is a third requirement for valuable public encounters. Traditionally, their relationships are characterized by power inequality and distance, as public professionals are vested with the authority to make impartial decisions “without regard for the person” (Weber, 1922/1978). This detached mode of governing often leads to inadequate decisions or even facilitates the interests of political and economical power holders. Therefore, it has been argued that public encounters could only be valuable if all actors are free and equal and interact based on trust rather than authority (Habermas, 1984a; Fung, 2004; Roberts, 2004). As “the key to effective participation lies in human relationships” (King & Stivers, 1998, p. xii), research has examined the barriers and possibilities for establishing “authentic participation” (King et al., 1998). Studies found that public professionals and citizens were increasingly making commitments to collaboration and participation on paper, while their relationships often continued to be determined by structural power inequalities (Innes & Booher, 2004; Stout, 2010a). The instrumental use of participation as a selective technique has to be replaced by a new mind-set of genuine empowerment by “sustained and deep cooperation between diverse parties such as police officers and minority residents, parents and educators, workers and managers, and environmentalists and developers” (Fung & Wright, 2003, p. 282) on problems that affect them.

In a similar vein, public professionals and residents in the cases of this research endeavored to enhance the quality of their encounters by empowering each other to participate in discussions, take decisions, and act on problems. In Glasgow, local actors were trying to improve their relationships by *converting each other* into what each one of them considered to be “genuine” collaboration rather than exploring the actual meaning of their ideals or practical possibilities for adapting these to each other. In Amsterdam, public professionals and residents were *approaching each other* by converging and clashing about the functional and emotional grounding of their relationships, which, as a result, did not often stabilize or yield widespread results. Local actors in Bologna, finally, experienced new types of relationships, but were

keeping a distance from each other by not developing these beyond formal rules and roles. In each case, public professionals and residents limited the maintenance of their relationships to a single pattern instead of nurturing their capacity to communicate about the process of *making connections*.

The code *making connections* emerged at the end of the Glasgow case to emphasize how the local actors had the ambition to connect everyone to everything, while not paying that much attention to the practical dilemmas involved with doing so. This discrepancy is best illustrated by the origins of the code *converting each other*. Already in the first interview my attention was drawn to how local actors expressed a strong belief in rendering their relationships “meaningful”. They wanted others to adopt this belief as well by *enlightening* them about “genuine” relationships. As they were trying to get each other to work in an *enlightened* way, meetings ended up being used a lot for public professionals legitimizing the sincerity of their intentions and residents making clear they did not feel taken seriously. This kind of adversarial practices also occurred in Amsterdam, where a number of residents tried to make sure their problems and efforts were *being recognized* by public professionals. But local actors were primarily concerned with preserving their personal relationships, as illustrated by how they would start *approaching each other* after meetings by mingling and chitchatting. In Bologna, local actors were trying to avoid clashes about the nature of their relationships to overcome their long history of fighting and stalemate. A lot of care was taken in structuring meetings to ensure that participants were *keeping a distance* from each other to be productive. After the comparison of the cases had made me understand that *making connections* embodied these different ways of maintaining relationships, I changed the code *enlightening* into *converting each other* to better capture the attempts that local actors in Glasgow made at changing each others’ minds about their relationships.

The analysis reveals how dominant communicative patterns were kept in place by narratives of maintaining relationships with:

- (1) plotlines, causal beliefs, and normative leaps defining “genuine” empowerment;
- (2) stories of heroes and villains fighting over “authentic” relationships; and
- (3) holistic narratives of practices of *making connections* while facing countless people, problems, and policies as well as emotional struggles.

As such, the analysis shows that the work narratives do for the relationships between public professionals and residents is narrowing down their ability for *making connections* to a single pattern of maintaining relationships. Their narratives neglected the capacity to communicate about practical possibilities for adapting relationships and therefore kept dominant patterns of communication in place. Thus, the final section concludes that the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents for *making connections* has serious implications for the quality of participatory democracy.

Glasgow: Converting Each Other

I want to see people empowered, because I think they're dead disenfranchised... [T]his community should be supported in its aspirations and shouldn't be told what it's aspirations are and then how they're going to do it. (Respondent G7 – Resident)

The relationships between public professionals and residents in the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) were determined by an inclination to focus on strong personal beliefs about the commitment that others needed to make to empowerment rather than on the actual ability to develop relationships towards those beliefs. The statement of respondent G7, the assertive resident who praised the expertise of the community in the previous chapter, that people are “dead disenfranchised” is illustrative of the commitment among local actors to break new ground for a different mind-set to guide their encounters. The code *converting each other* characterizes how they, like respondent G7 above, tried to convince each other to pledge to empowerment rather than exploring the differences in their interpretations of what this would actually mean in practice. By trying to transform their relationships into what they believed was “genuine” participation, local actors devalued their capacity to communicate about concrete possibilities for *making connections*.

To be sure, public professionals and residents in the GCPP were not fighting all the time about their beliefs, and positive personal relationships certainly existed. During meetings I attended, local actors were friendly with each other and tried to collaborate on solving local problems. Before and after meetings, they chitchatted while taking a bite and a drink from the light buffet that compensated for the evening hours in which the meetings took place. Nevertheless, they experienced difficulties in *making connections*; i.e., they had limited ability to link up their practices to yield concrete, visible results as well as to engage in empathy and social bonding to establish a solid emotional basis. Public professionals and residents indicated that they first

had to get others to adopt their own deeply held, and yet ill-defined, ideals of participation before they could turn to exploring the possibilities for solving local problems. These attempts at *converting each other* limited their mutual trust as well as their capacity to communicate about ways for *making connections* between different people, problems, and policies.

As the analysis already showed in chapter 5, about half of the respondents thought that the GCPP was not *doing it right* until everyone had internalized the belief that “the community” had to be properly supported (p. 135). The narratives of active residents such as respondents G5, 7, 8, and 15 supported the view that the GCPP did not bring about “real” or “meaningful” engagement as well as attempts to “educate or re-educate the people away from the way Glasgow City Council has been educating them and telling them how Glasgow City Council wants to do it ... [to] tell them ‘Here’s another way’...” (Respondent G8). Interestingly enough, though, more was going on than just residents fighting to *convert* public professionals into a more empowered way of working. Public professionals such as respondent G6, the somewhat disillusioned manager we met in chapter 5 who says he still believes in community empowerment, and respondent G1, a Community Planning officer who was optimistic about her efforts to enthuse other local actors, were just as well trying to ground relationships in a new mind-set:

What the community wants is empowerment, the ability to make decisions, locality budgeting. Why wouldn’t we give the community now, let’s move it to another level, say we’ll give the budget to another structure that says you can commission and buy in the resources that are relevant to your community. That’s ... what local government should do... [B]ut **it’s a tough one for people to understand**, it’s really, really tough. **I’m a great believer** that we should be ... handing more control to local communities who are properly regulated and can show a responsible attitude towards being able to manage resources. If you give up control, you’ll get more control. (Respondent G6 – Public professional)

I think genuinely that people want to be involved in the decisions that affect them, and that’s the one that **captured their imagination**. When decisions are made about services in their area they want to be at least informed about those decisions and at most collaborated on how those decisions came about. We were very, almost novice, almost slightly naïve in our approach, or certainly I was, in translating the vision for Glasgow on Community Planning to the letter [laughs] when we were telling people that they had an opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them and that they could be involved in the Community Planning process, and ... we have to work harder to bring communities into the heart of that. **And I’m really enthusiastic and passionate about my work, and I really believe in it as well**, so that comes across to people. So **I think that caught people’s imagination**. (Respondent G1 – Community Planning officer)

Both respondents base their narratives on the *causal belief* that productive relationships will only be brought about if the idea of “empowerment” will really catch “people’s imagination”. Respondent G6 indicates that moving “it to another level” is “a tough one for people to understand” if you are not “a great believer”. Therefore, respondent G1 states that the idea of “empowerment” only “comes across to people” if you are “really enthusiastic and passionate” and “really believe in it”. This tendency to *converting each other* is understandable, because ideas and beliefs can provide a much more certain basis for action than “the facts” in the complex, ambiguous, and changeable setting of participatory practice. During the interviews, both respondents stated that lacking factual evidence about the positive effects of community engagement did not affect their belief in its intrinsic value. In other words, for local actors in the GCPP, participation was not about knowing, but about believing.

However, this ideational approach implied that public professionals and residents limited their relationships to a one-sided emphasis on empowerment rather than exploring the concrete meaning of this ideal in practice by dealing with actual problems and collaborative dilemmas. The stories of respondent G12, the manager who told the story of the Stuff Bus in chapter 6, and respondent G8, the proactive resident who explained why Community Planning was not *doing it right* in chapter 5, illuminate the implications of this way of addressing each other:

I think we all still behave quite functionally and quite within our business silos. In terms of coming together at Community Planning, **the funds that we see and decide together how we allocate our Fairer Scotland Funds are just topping in the scheme of things**, you know, several hundred thousand pounds for South. Um, if you take my pot of money on capital investments, ... the budget that I’ll spend this year alone will be over 30 million... I’ll spend another 6 million pounds on ... [specific public service], my staffing budget is 6 million pounds, um. So if you think of the money were talking about at Fairer Scotland Fund level, um, and what we potentially allocate through there extra, ... it was 50,000 pounds we put into that. So in the grand scheme of things... And it’ll be the same, the Health Board’s resources for hospitals, for primary and secondary care in the South, ... [the CHCP] budget is huge, Police budgets are huge. **So we still have our budgets and we still do the things that are suited to our business.** (Respondent G12 – Public professional)

... Oatlands ... had quite a nice distinctive, um, block of flats, ... which, um, the local population reasonably were happy with, because it gave them an identity and so on. **The population were moved out, these flats were knocked down, and modern flats [were] put in that place...** [E]verything was being pushed through, ... because if Glasgow City Council says ‘That’s what’s going to happen, it’s on our plan’, then tough, you know, **the local community has no say...** Now, the trouble was that a lot of the original people thought they were buying back into this new housing... And then it dawned on them that Glasgow City Council had obtained control of some

of these flats and houses for social housing. So, **one old lady** for instance, um, she actually found the next door neighbor was a drug addict. And **the drug addict kicked her door in eventually and pinched her television set and sold it, for drugs probably**. Right? She brought this up at a meeting, and I was supporting her, ... **she wanted the door strengthened to at least keep the junkie out, but she was told that Glasgow City Council didn't approve of that** because doors have to be easy enough to kick in, in case there's fire, and she needed to be rescued. **And she was really angry. And it's that anger, ... and that feeling of alienation that permeated a lot of people** in Oatlands. First of all ... the houses they were proud of bulldozed down, and then the builder got money to build these things and sell them, you know. And Glasgow City Council got what they wanted, their social housing. And the people were left holding what? You know, houses, blocks of flats, full of social, immigrants and so on. There was a lot of animosity there. (Respondent G8 – Resident)

Both narratives communicate that the absence of (sincere) commitment of among local actors is the main cause of the lack of productive relationships. Respondent G12 tells a *story of change is only an illusion*³⁷: while the GCPP on paper might seem to embody a broad and structural effort of all the local public agencies, they “still behave quite functionally and quite within [their] business silos”. Their collaborative budget is diminutive compared to single organizational budgets, so that the GCPP in reality is “just topping in the scheme of things”. Respondent G8 tells a *causal story* that links a concrete situation to larger problems, solutions, and value judgements (Stone, 1989): Oatlands residents (heroes) were proudly living in their housing blocks until Glasgow City Council (anti-hero) came in to demolish and reconstruct them, and put in social housing for their own good and without giving a say to the local community. This plotline leads to a climax of desperation and anger when an old lady (hero) got robbed by a drug addict (anti-hero) and did not get the help that would be expected. Both stories, then, justify the view of the respondents that *converting each other* is the only way to change the course of these degenerate events.

Local actors had limited opportunities for lifting their relationships out of the sphere of beliefs about empowerment. Public professionals and citizens in the UK have relatively unequal and distant relationships because citizens are legally not entitled to take public decisions, do not have any legal grounds to oppose decisions made by local government and private developers (Ellis, 2000; North, 2003), and often lack the administrative structures, expertise, and financial resources to deal with complex decision making processes (Morrison, 2003; Dinham, 2005).

³⁷ “you always thought things were getting ... better. But you were wrong. Let me show you some evidence that things are in fact going in the opposite direction. Improvement was an illusion” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

Voluntary organizations in Scotland are quite numerous (\pm 250.000 bodies³⁸) and 47% of the citizens are active in community or voluntary organization, but 87% of them are not very interested in being involved in policy making (Scottish Executive Social Research, 2005). So, relationships between public professionals and residents run the risk of being frustrated when they are brought together. The narrative of respondent G11, a resident who had become very skeptical by participating in the CRG, explains this situation nicely:

...it's totally upside down to what it should be... [I'm] ... critical of the lack of understanding within the higher levels of Community Planning mostly. And **they're imposing the structures that they want** on, you know, the lower levels, such that the staff, at the kind of lower levels aren't been given much leeway in how they can develop things... So even though the staff in every local Community Planning area might understand how that engagement should really work, they can't implement that because it's not in line with what they've been told to do... Which is unfortunate, because I think **it would work better if it was ... less, um, forced**, you know, kind a, and if there was more understanding about how things work. And I think that's the major problem, that **there's a lack of understanding...** of the Voluntary Sector, of the structures that were in place and need to be in place. And because, and **it's then being forced down**, everything is **coming from the top down** rather than within community structures **it should always come from the bottom up...** And to be honest, the majority of voluntary and community groups ... don't want that, **they automatically resist it if they feel it's being forced on them**. And there's a lot of good work that goes on, and a lot of voluntary and community organizations that do a lot of work in the area, and it's unfortunate that's it's not being, um, fed into somewhere properly. **It's just a lack there in, um, involving people properly.** (Respondent G11 – Resident)

This narrative portrays the nature of the relationships between local actors according to the conventional *metaphor* of top down/bottom up. By treating the “top” (“the higher levels of Community Planning”) and “the bottom” (“the staff in every local Community Planning area” and “voluntary and community groups”) as taken-for-granted categories, the respondent can draw a picture of the GCPP as caught in an impasse between upward and downward pressures. At the moment, policies, structures, and decisions are “being forced down” from the top while “it should always come from the bottom up”. “[V]oluntary and community groups ... automatically resist it if they feel it's being forced on them”. According to the respondent, the relationships between public professionals and residents are under constant pressure because “it's totally upside down to what it should be” and there is “just a lack ... in, um, involving people properly”. Until also the “top” will be *converted*, local actors will continue to have a

³⁸ Listed in the Scottish Council of Voluntary Sector Organizations database (Keating, 2010, p. 92).

very small margin for *making connections*, so that ideas, agreements, and practices will easily be frustrated.

Local actors were mainly *making connections* by having informal meetings to get to know each other, exchange information about their daily practices and local problems, and explore possibilities for collaboration. Respondents G6 and G12 both found this personal contact with other managers one of the more promising, yet ill-developed, aspects of Community Planning. The narrative of respondent G17 is in particular interesting in this respect, because at the time of the research she had just started in a newly created position for the day-to-day management of the Community Reference Group:

...joining the organization **I had to obviously build a relationship** with the CRG members... So, I started to contact them as much as possible, so I would email them, I would phone them, and I would **have little introduction chats with** them, would try and arrange meetings with them to go and see them... I ... would not meet them in any way formal, but make sure it was all very informal. Really to build up relationships..., **talked about myself and my background**, um, asked them what they did. Went out, ... have been doing a lot of visits going out to organizations where they're either working or representing groups. Um, having them in here, explaining to some of the members, ... which, um, are from an ethnic minority background, **who I don't feel have the full understanding of what is going on. Approaching them**, bringing them into the office, explaining, going through the rules and procedures, step by step, explaining the processes, giving them options. And I think by now I think I've got a good relationship with them... **I feel quite confident** because I think I have a good relationship with them... But **some of them do have a number of issues** that have been raised. Either have tendencies of borderline racism, ... **they haven't said it to me directly, but have hinted towards that**. Um, or in some cases maybe just gender ... and maybe they might see me as being young and not understanding too much of the communities. So they've asked me about my role and have asked me about 'Where did you work before and what did you do, what background, what are your qualifications?'. **So I have to maybe clarify myself, you know, repeatedly**..., which is fine, I didn't mind doing that... But **my understanding of that in their body language** was picked up really quickly. (Respondent G17 – Public professional)

Being new at the scene, the respondent invested a lot of time and energy in having "little introduction chats with them", talking "about myself and my background, making "sure it was all very informal", "approaching them", and responding to "their body language". By doing so, she tried to create a sense of trust and familiarity to legitimize herself as being *converted*. As a result, she states that she now feels "quite confident because I think I have a good relationship with them" even though "some of them do have a number of issues" and "I have to maybe clarify myself ... repeatedly". Notice the normative leap that supports this narrative:

“joining the organization I had to *obviously* build a relationship” with the residents. Although the ability to be amenable, honest, and empathic is certainly important for *making connections*, the respondent foregoes the ability to get things done, make deals, open up previously closed opportunities, and restore damages. *Making connections* asks for both emotionally profound relationships and functional actions aimed at helping out people with their problems and bringing about concrete and visible changes. However, because local actors gave such great emphasis to *converting each other*, they limited their attention to convincing each other of the sincerity of their commitment to empowerment.

Thus, the relationships between public professionals and residents in Glasgow undermined their capacity to communicate about practical opportunities for *making connections* between people, problems, and policies. They were primarily maintaining relationships by *converting each other* into their own beliefs about empowerment. They would only fully commit to collaboration if they had the impression that others were properly *converted* into the “true meaning” of participation. This attitude implied that the process of *making connections* became more a matter of striving for recognition and legitimacy than of finding ways to get things done. Therefore, public professionals and residents in Glasgow would benefit from recognizing that maintaining relationships does not just come down to *converting each other*, but is an ongoing process of *making connections* both on a functional and emotional level.

Amsterdam: Approaching Each Other

I was really pleased that despite the resident committee being furious with [my organization] I managed to keep good contact on the relational level. Because I continuously, well, kept on communicating, also was being open about the dilemmas. (Respondent A3 – Housing manager)

Local actors in the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*) tended to invest a lot of time and effort in maintaining their relationships by *approaching each other*. That is, instead of focusing on the “true” meaning of empowerment as in the Glasgow case, public professionals and residents were engaged in a continuous process of converging and clashing as to decrease the distance between them and create more mutual understanding and trust. This made it possible for them to be in a situation as respondent A3, the housing manager from the beginning of chapter 5, who was facing “furious” residents and “managed to keep good contact” at the same time. Local actors were not only physically *approaching each*

other through regular personal contact, but, more fundamentally, in an empathic sense by becoming more aware of others' personal circumstances and answerable about one's own practices. *Making connections* in this way enabled public professionals and residents to bring about small-scale solutions, but also made their relationships vulnerable to misunderstandings, power inequalities, and deep-seated emotions. Thus, their communicative capacity remained dependent on the circumstances of the relationships between specific local actors.

Although maintaining relationships by *approaching each other* did not mean that mistakes, tensions, and conflicts were always avoided, the norm for finding solutions continued to be investing in mutual understanding and trust. Local actors believed that only by *making connections* on the functional as well as emotional level they would be able to *approach* distant persons or invisible problems, resolve or prevent tensions and conflicts, and arrive at small-scale and concrete interventions that could generate unexpected results. At the same time, they indicated that sustaining mutual understanding and trust was very difficult in light of the high turnover of local actors, criticism on mistakes that had been made, and the inability to influence large-scale processes, policies, and budgets. Indeed, public professionals and residents in the AW were striving to empower their relationships to generate more durable, large-scale outcomes, but were *approaching each other* all the same in doing so.

Local actors gave great emphasis in their practices to being *aanspreekbaar*, which literally means the possibility of being spoken to and being answerable for one's behavior, but more broadly signifies a willingness to be open and honest in *approaching each other* through direct personal contact. This was done, for example, by going from door-to-door to invite residents to participate in meetings or activities or to talk with them about their problems, organizing social events and present new plans in the streets or meeting places, regular collective walks through the neighborhood to see what problems needed fixing, having informal chats about mutual expectations about resident initiatives, trying to immediately respond to complaints, questions, and requests, and negotiating with each other to get things done. The nature of *approaching each other* is nicely illustrated by these stories from a middle level manager at a housing corporation about helping out a tenant, and the neighborhood manager who also told us about renovating a playground in the previous chapter:

Last year for example we had a tenant who ... had a very difficult period behind him, was in debt repayment, um, almost had everything back on track and also wanted to

tidy up his house, but of course didn't have any money for that. Then we said 'Well yeah, we'd like to, um, actually sponsor you, pay your paint, but then you have to paint it yourself, or you look for someone to paint it'. And **that's what happened ... via our [neighborhood] manager because after all he is a customary face in the quarter and because of that a bit more intimate**. Hey, he gets in touch with that and ... [he] comes in here with it, like 'Yeah, what can we do with it, what do we want with it?'. Eventually the neighbors offered help, they painted and then I said to him 'Now we have sponsored you, um, you have to do something in return for the quarter, even if it is just serving coffee for a morning in the neighborhood centre'. And with that you get him ... out of his isolation and, um, well, like, out of his house. Um, so ... you hope for some social contacts and a bit more trust in the quarter that he's doing it. And he has a good start again that he, well, yeah, literally I think a little push, um, to get someone again, well yeah, take control of his life again in a good way. **And these are of course very small things and it's made-to-measure and you have to come across it**, because you're not going to ring the doorbell and ask like 'How is it going here and what do you need?'. Um, **but that means listening very carefully**, um, and then I think, yeah, neighborhood managers are very important for a corporation for ... **if you talk to residents, what do you hear, what do you overhear, and what can you do with that**. (Respondent A19 – Housing manager)

But then also when you go with that request [for renovating a playground] to the Department of Maintenance **you immediately get...** 'Yeah, but what is the policy?'. 'Yeah', I say, 'Policy....', they were still lagging behind in that... Well, I think two years ago those playing apparatuses were put there, um, half a year ago the policy was finally finalized. Yeah, **if you have to wait for all that, then it becomes a terrible drag**. And then it comes in handy if you, like, that the residents who supported it, that you visited that [adjacent] school, that you did all the preparation already, which **gives you that extra bit of persuasiveness to realize it**. Plus, well, all right, you have to have finance, but that was ... also taken care of in the meantime. Yeah, in such a situation you notice, yeah, that **it is very difficult because people retreat into their own area**, like 'Yeah, but we are Maintenance, so we only maintain'. I say 'But you place playing apparatuses all the time'. 'Yeah, yeah, we do that, but then you have to follow a procedure'. Well, looked into it, well, procedure appeared to be not really necessary. I said 'Well, procedure is not necessary, looking into the residents is also not necessary, I already did that for you'. 'Um, well, ok, we'll do it then'. But, it was a bit on the border and, yeah, then **you have to ... collect a lot of arguments to make sure that in the end they'll implement it**. (Respondent A2 – Neighborhood manager)

Both stories are based on the *causal belief* that relationships can only be productive if local actors are *approaching each other*. Respondent A19 tells about a colleague who found out about a tenant in social isolation and economic hardship and managed to give "a little push" in the right direction by talking about the situation with his colleagues, the resident, and the neighbors. In her view, they could only "come across" a creative solution for this otherwise hidden problem because her colleague was "a customary face in the quarter" and was also "listening very carefully". Respondent A2 shares his experiences with getting a Municipal

Department to execute a plan he had come up with together with several resident groups to refurbish a playground. He says that he was only able to prevent that “people retreat into their own area” and that “it becomes a terrible drag” by “collect[ing] a lot of arguments and having “that extra bit of persuasiveness”. Thus, local actors were *making connections* between people, problems, and policies by getting in touch with personal situations, convincing each other to collaborate, and improvising beyond policies, procedures, and formal job descriptions.

Approaching each other was a subtle and fragile process. Taking away social barriers and getting people to approach and trust each other was very difficult in a neighborhood in which residents had many serious personal problems and public professionals were overloaded with work because they had to deal with all these problems. Outcomes often hinged on the personal relationships between specific people and the activities of several key individuals. Respondent A10, who already told us about domestic violence in chapter 5, was such an individual: a cheerful woman who arranged a weekly meeting of immigrant women for informal chat and discussion of personal problems, activities such as computer lessons or gym classes, and getting information about services from public professionals who she invited to come along. She explains what made *approaching each other* both necessary and problematic:

I also help people here in the quarter a lot, that's also something **that's very nice**. Um, and **people also come to talk to me a lot about their problems, because they have developed ties with me**, especially the women in the group. And also from outside... But I have to be very careful with that... I'm fine with supporting and listening and if possible giving advice, but for the rest you have to do it yourself, also in terms of paperwork. But ... when it is very personal then I say 'It's better to go to someone who can do something for you, because if I do it and it's wrong then I'll be in trouble'. And then I find someone for them, the Service Centre or the Support Point Women... And I notice that **if someone trusts someone in the neighborhood that it's then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else**. And that's where I often get stuck. It's pretty difficult, I can't always take that role... It really takes a lot of energy, hey, really a lot, because there's a lot of problems. Here in Bos & Lommer there's also a lot of domestic violence. Yeah, **there are really very big problems, but you don't hear about it. It only goes to someone who they truly trust**. And I think **that's really terrible**. Because they're afraid to go to the Police, they're afraid to go anywhere. (Respondent A10 – Resident)

The respondent put a lot of effort in *making connections* between people with problems and the right professional organizations, but was also limited in her personal time and abilities. Her narrative sustains her mixed feelings about this: on the one hand the respondent finds it “very nice” to help a lot of people through her personal relationships, but on the other hand she

thinks it is “really terrible” that trust forms such a crucial factor for solving problems. Personal problems such as domestic violence or poverty are difficult to resolve because residents do not feel comfortable in *approaching* public professionals, as they do not speak the language properly, do not know where to go, feel ashamed or afraid, or have no trust in the Police or a housing corporation to solve their problem. As a result, public professionals found it very hard to get access to the complex and ambiguous stories behind each individual case, to determine what might be the best way to solve the specific problems, or to find the time, resources, and legal possibilities to do actually something. In the case of domestic violence, for example, the Police needed a formal complaint in order to be legally allowed to act. Thus, the downside of *approaching each other* was that “if someone trusts someone in the neighborhood that it’s then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else”.

Local actors devoted a lot of time and energy to *approaching each other*, often without having the feeling that their efforts translated into concrete results. Every local actor constantly ran into a complex and ambiguous array of details that (s)he could not solve personally, but asked for concerted action on several terrains over a longer period of time. This required them to be responsive to each others’ demands, ideas, capacities, and constraints, to be open and patient in negotiating and listening, and to accommodate each other in finding pragmatic solutions. However, their relationships were put to the test, because the ongoing, lingering, and intricate process of *approaching each other* harbored frustrations, tensions, and conflicts about having few perceived benefits. Therefore, some local actors employed a rather dauntless style that bypassed complexities and nuance to strive for more empowered relationships. The narratives of respondents A8 and A9, respectively a young and an elderly proactive resident, illustrate this inclination for *being recognized*:

There’s a renewal area and at a certain moment when the demolition is almost there, then the residents who have to move can put their bulk garbage outside more often. Not once a week, but twice, three times, until the demolition takes place, and it can be increased to daily. **That’s one of the things in the Interim Management Plan. But if the Department of the Environmental Police doesn’t know that that applies to only a few streets, they’ll continue to write out fines.** Happened. Yeah, has happened, sad, utterly sad, utterly sad. At a certain moment **I have, um, made pictures of the controlling officers to be able to prove to the City District ‘Look, this is what’s happening’.** I noted names because they said ‘Yeah, [respondent] everything’s nice and all with your nice stories, but it’s not true’. **I stood there when the head of the Cleaning Services was called by the Environmental Police and ... didn’t pick up, and he docilely continued with his fine.** But, these are things that really need to be coordinated in a plan ... and then of course **you need to check**

whether it works and all parties are in fact doing what they should do. Because that's really the biggest problem. You can write plans to infinity, but ... as long as policy remains policy ... and that residents don't experience what's the impact of the policy, guys, then we don't have a policy (Respondent A8 – Resident)

And **it could be better.** Look, because ... you all have the same goal, which is letting the neighborhood bounce back up, that's actually it. Only, yeah, then I do say 'Corporations, if things emerge during a meeting on which you have to act, then do it'. Nowadays we have a list of action points, we already have that for some years. But we also had an action point that was there for three years. **Well I don't accept that anymore.** So then it's immediately, um, **then they get the red card.** Then we just make sure that it gets to ... the City District Council. Well, that's a nice means of power. **In the open podium you can set them in the pillory. I do that without any problems.** Yeah, **you do disturb the relationship but that will be all right later.** **Because you need each other** and, um, often what you see happening is people want to, but people can't. (Respondent A9 – Resident)

In the first instance, we might be inclined to label these residents power hungry “usual suspects”. However, taking a look at their narratives reveals that both stories use a structure similar to the story of respondent G8 (pp. 188-189) to legitimize their desire for more empowered relationships. Respondent A8 (hero) had an encounter with Environmental Police officers (anti-heroes), who were fining residents for putting bulk garbage outside while they were actually allowed to do so under an exception clause in the Interim Management Plan (plot line). He tried to convince the officers that they were wrong, but they did not believe him and, as they could not reach an official who could confirm that the hero was right, they continued with their fine (climax). The respondent uses this story to justify his skepticism towards public organizations and legitimize his proactive behavior of checking “whether it works and all parties are in fact doing what they should do”. Similarly, respondent A9 narrates how he (hero) was not intimidated by the power inequality between residents and a housing corporation (anti-hero). When the housing corporation did not do what they were supposed to do (plot line), he put external pressure on them by “set[ting] them in the pillory” at the City District Council meeting (climax). Thus, using a confrontational approach that might “disturb the relationship but that will be all right later”, these local actors were striving for *being recognized* and empowering their ability for *making connections*.

However, local actors had limited opportunities for lifting their relationships out of the process of *approaching each other* towards more empowered or effective ways of *making connections*. In the Netherlands, governmental actors are highly interwoven with actors in its political, economical, and societal environment (Van der Meer & Dijkstra, 2000) and the outcomes of

community participation always greatly depend on the relationships between local actors (Van Hulst et al., 2009; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). Public professionals and residents in the AW were therefore inclined to see *approaching each other* as the only way to empower their relationships. Respondent A4, the social worker we met in chapter 5, explains this dynamic with a narrative about giving wrong information to residents and involving them in cleaning events:

So I go to the residents, um, and then I suddenly hear that the housing corporation has decided to postpone the demolition process [for two years]... I don't know absolutely anything of this decision and then ... the residents tell you 'Oh, we've got this letter, actually that relocation working group isn't necessary anymore'. And that while we've worked hard for years to form a working group to arrange the moving process better... **This kind of, all, um, miscommunication... you lose the confidence of the residents. They don't know who to trust...** On three resident meetings I've presented maps ... of the spatial planning of [the area]. And after the third time we found out it was completely wrong. But we got those every time from the City District and every time they've sent wrong information. And if we go to the City District they say that they've got them from the housing corporation. And if you go to the housing corporation they say 'That project manager didn't tell us', and then the constructor says something else... **[So the residents] don't trust the official bodies anymore... They have more trust in their imams, or I don't know who, than in us.** And we have to breach that. So [when] we do cleaning events..., you don't have to bring 2000 letters door-to-door, but **you have to have 20 [key figures] and** then say 'Yeah, guys, we're going to organize a cleaning event, could you bring five of your people?' ..., **just call a day in advance** to, um, to the mosque or an association, a play ground association..., **that's how it works.** But ... then you're dependent on those kinds of people. If those people fall away or go to live somewhere else then you lose that group as well. That's why **we instead have to, the role of those key figures, ... take over. But that's only possible if you win the confidence of people.** (Respondent A4 – Social worker)

The respondent explains how his attempts at *making connections* were limited by the fragility of *approaching each other*. Because of all kind of “miscommunication” between the public agencies, residents “don't trust the official bodies anymore ... [and] have more trust in” local key figures. As a result, the relationships between public professionals and residents were highly “dependent on those kinds of people”. The respondent would like to be more effective in *making connections* between public professionals and residents by taking over “the role of those key figures”, but “that's only possible if you win the confidence of people” which, again, was constantly frustrated by “miscommunication”. The respondent makes a *normative leap* here by stating that finding a way out of this cycle is “*only possible*” by cultivating trusting relationships. As such, he is taking *approaching each other* for granted as the most

ideal way for *making connections*, rather than looking for practical possibilities to break through this communicative pattern.

In sum, public professionals and residents in the AW found themselves entangled in a process of *approaching each other* to maintain open, respectful, and trusting relationships. They considered their converging and clashing about functional and emotional needs the only way for solving local problems, but also lamented that the great amount of time, effort, and energy they invested in the process often proved to be insufficient for overcoming power inequalities or generating wide-ranging results. Frustrations, tensions, and conflicts put their relationships under pressure, so that local actors wanted to become more effective in *making connections*. However, *approaching each other* continued to be the norm for their relationships, as public professionals and residents were trying to improve the quality of their relationships by being accommodating, responsive, and trusting to each other. Thus, although local actors showed awareness of the intricate nature of the process of *making connections*, they limited their communicative capacity to the particular circumstances of the relationships between specific local actors.

Bologna: Keeping Distance

In preparing a meeting we decided together the main scheme ..., selecting the photos and the documents to expose..., the best way of presenting, ... writing the guidelines... So ... every step was, um, coordinated... (Respondent B5 – Facilitator)

The case of Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) did not get stuck in a communicative pattern of contestation about the proper ideal of empowerment or of cultivating personal relationships. Rather, public professionals and residents were *making connections* between broad ideas and desires and concrete solutions without developing their relationships beyond formal rules and roles. This tendency to limit their relationships to the official remit of their encounters has been coded *keeping distance*: collaborating within the granted discretionary room and making decisions by adhering to formal structures, plans, and procedures. Local actors had designated roles and did not set out to further develop these or expect others to do so. Although public professionals and residents appreciated their ability for *making connections* on a functional level, several of them also identified a need to develop this on the emotional level. However, for now their capacity to communicate about relationships remained limited to *keeping distance* based on formal rules and roles.

Public professionals and residents certainly engaged in personal contact, but their relationships did not extend beyond the meeting room. They did not take personal relationships as the basis for determining the nature of problems or the most appropriate solutions. Rather, local actors thought that structured deliberation, supported by facilitators and participative methods, was the ideal way for empowering their relationships. The participative workshops provided a set of formal structures, plans, and procedures that empowered public professionals and residents in formulating concrete regeneration proposals, and were not intended to cultivate personal relationships. As respondent B5, who worked for *Associazione Orlando* and was involved in the preparation and facilitation of *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est*, indicates, “every step was, um, coordinated”. The meetings were carefully prepared as to functionally coordinate the interaction between local actors. Although they tended to see *keeping distance* as a first step in further empowering their relationships, a counter-narrative indicated that *making connections* also requires the capacity to communicate about power inequalities, antagonism, and underlying values and emotions.

Local actors devoted themselves to designing and following formal rules according to which problems in the neighborhood were to be discussed. All meetings were extensively prepared beforehand by the facilitators, who focused on the most optimal procedures, together with civil servants of the Municipality, who focused on the substance of what needed to be covered. Also during the meetings, they guided residents through the discussions and decision making by adhering to this separation between procedural and substantive roles. The civil servants provided information about the political, legal, and technical limitations and possibilities, and had to check the decisions against all legal requirements, while the facilitators mediated the discussions and had to build trust. This enabled residents in *making connections* between different viewpoints among them and the regeneration plans of the Municipality:

for example, ... **the meeting about the green areas and the sustainability, mobility.** Um, it was in a [room] of the Church ... and **there were about 50 persons. And I was the only facilitator** and there were about, um, eight students [to assist me]. Well, **first of all we have all the people in the circle....** And in front they have many panels with the images of the project and with the plan of the PSC. And **the technician [of the Municipality] explained in general what the plan says about Bolognina and the green areas.** And then we have a cartography, a big cartography, but, um, [simplified], ... I mean that, um, ... we chose the ... main streets, the main, um, reference points ..., also the ... public facilities... and ... all the green areas of Bolognina. And, well, we have some white panels with, um, the first, one focused [on] one question about ... [how] they [will use] the green areas. **And in the plenary session we explain the kind**

of work we will do with the people and we asked them to concentrate [on] how actually they live [in] Bolognina ..., the different ways to [use] the parts of the green areas ... and what are the problems that they know and they have actually. **And we divided the plenary session in little groups.** In each group there were about five, six persons, and ... there was also a student and he tried to help the people to read the cartography and to note on the cartography what the people say... **And they have about one hour of time to make this work** and then we altogether in ... **the plenary session we report on the panel all the things the citizens said.** And ... we tried to... understand what the reason of conflicts was. And ... **then we work again in little groups about what, um, people think and want to change** with the transformation of the new area. (Respondent B14 – Facilitator)

the work in small groups favored ... dialogue... **[O]ne issue that came out of the small groups that did not come out in such a strong, clear way during the ... plenary assembly, was the issue of safety,** I mean the fear, also I am afraid. Um, [people] who were afraid, primarily linked to the nightly hours evidently, didn't come forward during the ... plenary assembly, but it came out in the small groups... Then, um, also in the small groups fear and the sentiments that make you afraid were talked about, related to the fact that maybe there are no, I mean, the fear that you can determine if you make several decisions, within the group still. **Then this thing was faced and in some parts I could say overcome.** I mean, it was substantially said that if, um, the new area was to become a place for, um, initiatives, um, to become a place in which persons walk around also the sentiment of fear had to be discussed. I mean,... otherwise it would only be a place, [but] to become a place ... that can overcome the fear, ... there have to be constantly good persons in this area. (Respondent B13 – Resident)

Both narratives are based on the *causal belief* that *making connections* is only possible if all local actors are *keeping distance* while discussing solutions to local problems. Respondent B14, the facilitator we met in chapter 4, gives the example of meetings about green spaces in which civil servants (“technicians”) used maps to explain “what the [urban] plan says about Bolognina and the green areas”, while the facilitators made clear “the kind of work we will do with the people”, “divided the plenary session in little groups” to discuss the issues at hand, and “report[ed] on the panel all the things the citizens said”. Residents abided by the substantive and procedural arrangements “to make this work” and articulated what they “think and want to change”. Respondent B13, the long-time resident we met in chapter 4, tells that residents “who were afraid ... didn't come forward during the ... plenary assembly, but it came out in the small groups”. While plenary meetings served a more general discussion in which people participated who had no problem with talking in public, the small groups created a more intimate environment in which less outgoing people could express their fears about leaving the house after dark. According to these respondents, then, local problems can only be

solved if the content and remit of the regeneration plans are properly understood and their discussion follows procedures which make residents feel comfortable to talk about this.

Therefore, as respondent B5 already stated, “every step was ... coordinated” in order to make the meetings as structured and effective as possible in arriving at consensual outcomes. The division of roles among the public professionals created a certain professional distance to the residents, because they acted as visibly distinct entities with their own competences and responsibilities (either procedural or substantial). Local actors thus managed to maintain a deliberative space for effective decision making by *keeping distance*. The way in which their relationships were grounded on formal rules and roles can be seen in the narratives of, respectively, a facilitator in *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* who worked for *Associazione Orlando* and the planner who talked about the importance of legal rules in the previous chapter:

if during the Laboratorio the rules change, like in our case, for the facilitators, you also have a problem of personal credibility... In this case fortunately it was the fault of a third party, therefore it was understood in the end. Um, ... because the citizens have built all their expectations on something that turns out to be impossible. Um, so, **a facilitator has to be able to work in a situation of certainty**, also of conflict, but of certainty, **within parameters...** [T]he workshops have **to construct trust** in the end between the public administration and citizens. When things like this happen they lose their credibility. So, for the facilitator the personal credibility matters a lot. In this case, for the Municipality it has been greatly important to have the facilitators from this association, because it's an association that notoriously has, in short, has a very strong autonomy, also from the Municipality, which nevertheless funds us. And **some of us have a strong personal authority** so that, how to say, ... we have confirmed that it was true that an error had occurred, not dirty play, right With other things, in other cases the things have ended badly. Um, so, ... with regards to Bolognina Est, **the relationship with the public administration has been a relationship of a certain clarity**, in the sense that we have, ... there have been conflicts, some ambiguities... However, in short, it has been a relationship that we can say **we have been accepted** as the ones who, um, reporting the indications of the citizens, carrying out a function of strong pressure. So, **this has greatly lowered the direct conflict between the administration and the citizens**. (Respondent B15 – Facilitator)

...we participate in the workshops as ... the technicians, the employees, the functionaries, um, that later follow the legal instructions and the evaluations that you are obliged to do in the project. I mean, the Laboratorio ... is attempted to orient the citizens towards the most right decisions, um, a type of work that's a lot more creative. **Our work is more obligatory**, because we, when the project is evaluated in the Laboratorio and if the deposit is decided by the Municipality **for the verifications, we take the laws** and say, um, ‘The project is in accordance with the SIR rules, the project is in accordance with the legal rules for hydraulics, the project is in accordance

with the environmental rules, the project is in accordance with the rules for building density, for the limits in distance, for the minimum number of parking spaces, um, ... for the minimum quantity of greenery'... **The work we do is**, how to say, **already codified**, already, um, where there are already norms, ... that have to be respected by the designers that have, um, created the project, ... and **we don't do anything but verifying these ideas**. It's a, **we can't invent nothing**. (Respondent B20 – Public professional)

Both narratives serve to legitimate *keeping distance* by asserting that formal arrangements enabled local actors to avert instability, spontaneity, or flexibility in their relationships. For respondent B15, “to construct trust” and prevent conflict “a facilitator has to be able to work in a situation of certainty ... within parameters”. The relationship between the residents and the Municipality underwent a serious test when it turned out that several proposals the residents had been working on were not possible (plot line). Because of their “strong personal authority” and “relationship of a certain clarity”, the facilitators (heroes) were able to convince the residents that a sincere error had been made instead of “dirty play”. As a result, the residents accepted this setback and mutual trust was not harmed (climax). Respondent B20 says that he could only participate by not abandoning his formal job to “follow the legal instructions and the evaluations that you are obliged to do”. Making a *normative leap* by stating that “we don't do anything but verifying these ideas” and “we can't invent nothing”, the respondent shuns off any possibilities for maintaining relationships beyond his formal remit. As such, local actors were empowering their relationships by *keeping distance*.

Public professionals and residents valued that the participative workshops facilitated them in *making connections* and breaking with a longstanding pattern of adversarial communication. In Italy, relationships between public professionals and citizens are traditionally characterized by high levels of distrust and dissatisfaction (Koff & Koff, 1999, p. 158; Lewanski, 2000) because the government tended to deem its own interests, legal correctness, and authorization processes more important than reasonableness, public accountability, or social consequences (Furlong, 1994, pp. 79-86, 105). The neighborhood Bolognina used to be characterized by strong personal relationships sustained by local branches of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party, but the situation radically changed with the decay of these institutions, the growth of immigrants and young residents, and the persistent conflict with the Municipality about regeneration of the abandoned areas. Based on this *story of decline*³⁹, local actors

³⁹ “In the beginning, things were pretty good. But they got worse. In fact, right now, they are nearly intolerable. Something must be done.” (Stone, 2002, p. 138)

perceived the participative workshops as a first step for the future development of personal relationships. The stories of respondent B19 and B12, two long-time residents of Bolognina, about the levels of mutual understanding support this storyline of gradually *associating* public professionals and residents (again) to the area, its problems, and each other.

Well, in the meantime I have got to know a lot of persons, [chuckles] I really got to know... For example, **I have met some new citizens who**, um, of an area with new housing, ... that **we didn't know at all**. And moreover it is like, it is a zone of new housing, I thought that there weren't any problems over there. Instead, **we have discovered that we have common problems**. There we have got to know some new persons, um, with whom we have exchanged email and with whom we have really only followed the Laboratorio up to now. Um, and **I have, instead, deepened the contact with other persons who I knew very superficially**... Also with regards to socialization, [chuckles] moreover, we have recently really exchanged ideas about how you can [chuckles] construct places of socialization in the route of the linear park. Um, so, ... it has been a working experience on the whole, where we have had the opportunity to get to know other persons and also to mark several differences, right, with other persons, other, um, and other associations... However, **this is not socialization, it has more been a confrontation**. How to manage the park instead, there already begins, **we begin to put ourselves together in a common project**, in the end, to do, really to do. To socialize among us and to offer occasions for socialization, but in the meantime to depart from us, how we can live together in this park, about what do have still have to think? (Respondent B19 – Resident)

Young people for instance, young people proposed an area for, um, skateboarding area. [chuckles] I remember some old people: 'What is this?' [imitates gasping in amazement]. 'That's skateboarding'. 'What?'. 'Boards with wheels...'. 'And what they want here?'. 'Well, they have some little proposal, I think it's important if they can [chuckles] have this opportunity'. 'Aoh'. [makes disapproving hand gesture] And it was very interesting to see these **little conflicts**, right, in the discussion, [chuckles] little incomprehension. But it was very interesting to organize this negotiation, hey, and I think it was very, very interesting for the organization of Bolognina Est. ... it was a **learning for all people** who participated in the Laboratorio. ... **[it] was a little step, um, forward**. (Respondent B12 – Resident)

Both narratives are framed as a *story of helplessness and control*⁴⁰: whereas the relationships between local actors had seriously declined, now they have established a preliminary but promising basis for more profound and widespread *associating* in the future. Respondent B19 tells that she “met some new citizens who ...we didn't know at all”, “discovered that we have common problems”, “deepened the contact with other persons who I knew very superficially”, and started “a common project” for the management of the new linear park. In her view, this is the first step in going from “confrontation” to “socialization”. Respondent B12 talks about

⁴⁰ “the situation is bad. We always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

how elderly participants really struggled to comprehend and appreciate the ideas of the group of youngsters that suggested the creation of a skate park. Despite “little incomprehension” and “little conflicts”, they arrived at collective proposals and learned about each other. Therefore, it was “a little step forward” in a much longer process of developing personal relationships, maintaining engagement, enhancing mutual understanding, and supporting regeneration.

In contrast, several local actors challenged the idea that *keeping distance* should be seen as a first step towards *associating*. The participative workshops might have been instrumental in *making connections* on a functional level, but have neither touched upon relationships on a profound level, nor did they offer the potential for doing so in the future. This *story of change is only an illusion*⁴¹ was supported, for instance, by the narrative of respondent B8, who we met in chapter 5, which placed the participative workshops in the much wider social history and dynamics of the neighborhood. He told that the traditional inhabitants and the new generation of residents (immigrants and youngsters) have not been *making connections* at all. Elderly residents did not feel comfortable in going out of their house at night because of the lack of meeting places and the loitering of groups of youngsters and immigrants. Although they might have not been causing any problems, their attitudes, manners, and language made elderly residents feel uncomfortable and anxious. *Making connections* between the old and new generation of residents could benefit social relationships as well as the regeneration process. However, little was known about the life patterns and views of these new groups and, despite efforts by the organizers, they also hardly participated in the workshops. The prospects for this to change were slim, because for public professionals to get more deeply engaged in local social dynamics would not fit within their remit of *keeping distance*.

In conclusion, public professionals and residents in the PSC resorted to *keeping distance* in their relationships. Local actors communicated by sticking to formal roles and rules in order to arrive at concrete decisions and build mutual understanding and trust. Public professionals and residents felt empowered in their relationships because decisions were grounded on the pre-fixed substance and procedures of the participative workshops. Although their ability for *making connections* consequently remained circumscribed to the functional level, local actors found that a first step had been set towards a future process of *associating* on an emotional level. However, the participative workshops only covered a small part of the local actors, as

⁴¹ “you always thought things were getting ... better. But you were wrong. Let me show you some evidence that things are in fact going in the opposite direction. Improvement was an illusion” (Stone, 2002, p. 142).

well as a limited number of topics and a short period in time. If local actors want to expand their ability for *making connections* between people, problems, and policies, they will need to develop their capacity to communicate about their relationships beyond *keeping distance*.

Summary and Implications: Communicative Capacity and Making Connections

The goal of this chapter was to analyze how the relationships between public professionals and residents shape their added value for participatory democracy. In a nutshell, the narrative analysis demonstrated that local actors were constantly *making connections* between people, problems, and policies in order to give their relationships meaning. Because a great number of factors and actors outnumbered their actual possibilities for *making connections*, they employed narratives that supported a single pattern of maintaining relationships. The meaning of public encounters, then, in answer to the second sub-question of the research, took shape through the process of communicating about how to maintain relationships. In Glasgow, local actors were focused on *converting each other* into “genuine” empowerment without exploring what their personal interpretations of this ideal implied in practice for their relationships. In Amsterdam, public professionals and residents were *approaching each other* by being responsive, accommodating, and trusting in their relationships, but were often not able to generate concrete results from this. In Bologna, local actors felt empowered by the new type of relationships that had been brought about by the participative workshops, but were *keeping distance* instead of developing these. Thus, the added value of public encounters in each case was constrained because local actors neglected their communicative capacity for breaking through their dominant pattern of maintaining relationships.

After having considered the content of the conversations between public professionals and residents, and the setting in which these take place, this chapter focused on the third process of participatory practice that emerged from the research: the maintenance of their relationships. The research demonstrated that public professionals and residents in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna were trying to improve the quality of their relationships. However, none of the ways in which they were maintaining relationships was without problems. This was especially evident in Glasgow, where local actors nourished a strong belief in the “genuine” form of empowerment that others first needed to be *converted* into before their relationships could become productive. Upholding a single pattern of maintaining relationships limited attention

to exploring the practical possibilities in which they could empower each other to solve local problems. In Glasgow this was mainly because public professionals and residents had to convince others of the sincerity of their commitment, in Amsterdam because they tried to sustain trust and openness, and in Bologna because they were adhering to their official remit. As such, local actors limited their ability for the process of *making connections*.

The cases showed that we should understand the relationships between public professionals and residents as a process of *making connections*. The meaning and added value of their social interactions depended on their continuous efforts to connect people, problems, and policies on a functional level, as well as in terms of empathic understanding of motivations, feelings, and desires. Local actors were maintaining their relationships by trying to convince each other to take a particular course of action, get recognition for their presence, needs, and experiences, and build trust in spite of uncertainties, mistakes, and misunderstandings. *Making connections* proves to be all but a straightforward and stable process, as the range of actors and factors to be connected always exceeded the actual possibilities for doing so. Therefore, the relationships between local actors were dependent on their ability for determining how to connect whom and what in the situation at hand. Three ways transpired from the analysis in which the process of maintaining relationships affected the communicative capacity of local actors.

First, the capacity of local actors to communicate about their relationships was affected by the demeanor of their contact. Especially in the Amsterdam case we saw how easily relationships were distorted when local actors got the feeling that they were not *being recognized* properly. Residents such as respondents A8 and A9 as well as public professionals such as respondent A4 had to go at great length when they noticed that they were not being listened to, taken seriously, or trusted in the course of their efforts to harness problems, amend plans, or improve services. Also in Glasgow and Bologna local actors were concerned with recognition beyond formal arrangements and shallow manners. While in Glasgow this meant they had to convince each others that they had a legitimate role to play in the local setting, in Bologna this was mainly a matter of looking for opportunities for *associating* with each other in the future. Relationships can easily become unproductive if local actors do not uphold the “collaborative etiquette” (Wagenaar, 2007) of taking the time to listen to each other, keeping promises and appointments, and making a sincere effort to do something about the problem at hand. Thus,

public professionals and residents need to be sensitive to recognizing each other in their words and actions.

Second, the fragility of their relationships affected the ability of public professionals and residents for constructive and productive communication. Respondent G12 took the marginal collaborative budget of the GCPP as a sign of the feebleness of the relationships between local actors, while respondent G17 made a lot of effort to build relationships with residents and win their trust by having informal chats, responding to body language, and accounting for her background. Local actors in Amsterdam pointed at the great endeavors taking place behind the scenes to get organizations to collaborate, persuade residents with serious personal issues to seek professional help, and become a trusted figure in the community. These efforts, and the relationships built, were often frustrated by (sudden) practical constraints such as antagonism, resource constraints, misunderstandings, diverging organizational decision making cycles and information systems, or tacit cultural differences, all shaping *work in progress* of participatory practice (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973/1984; Huxham et al., 2000; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Local actors in Bologna managed to insulate their relationships from such pressures during the participative workshops, but afterwards faced a long period in which the resilience of their relationships was nevertheless put to the test. Therefore, public professionals and residents have to keep on talking about the efforts, tensions, and frustrations surrounding their relationships.

Finally, the communicative capacity of local actors was subject to the ways in which certain key individuals maintained relationships. In Bologna, the facilitators played a crucial role in enabling residents and public professionals to make concrete decisions and not ending up in conflict because of unexpected setbacks and misunderstandings between divergent points of view. By preparing the formats of the meetings, managing the discussions, and reporting the results, they engendered a productive process of *making connections*. Although facilitators were absent in Amsterdam, public professionals and residents of various backgrounds still tried to facilitate a process of *making connections* by bringing people into contact with each other, negotiating behind the scenes for certain things to happen, and trying to enhance mutual understanding and trust. The variety in the practices of, for example, neighborhood managers, social workers, and proactive residents enabled tailored responses to situations, but did not always lead to productive dynamics. Also in Glasgow local actors such as respondent G17

were trying to take on such a role, but they did not manage to facilitate a productive process of *making connections*. Hence, local actors have to be aware of who these “facilitative leaders” (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 554) are, how they are connecting people, problems, and policies, and how this affects their communicative capacity.

So, to answer the third sub-question of the research, public professionals and residents can enhance the added value of their encounters by paying attention to the ways in which they communicate about the process of *making connections*. They can adapt the communicative pattern that dominates their way of maintaining relationships by recognizing the demeanor of their contact, the fragility of their relationships, and the role of facilitative leaders. That means understanding empowering as a practical activity that asks for the communicative capacity to determine how local actors can empower each other to do something in the situation at hand. Facilitative leaders can in particular promote such communicative capacity by getting people to talk to each other and keep the conversation going. This comes down to far more than just convening a meeting; facilitative leadership implies the ability to engender a sense of mutual understanding, trust, and interdependence, as well as to create the actual operational leeway for achieving concrete results (Innes & Booher, 2003a; Neaera Abers, 2003; Ansell & Gash, 2007). The concluding chapter will return to this subject.

In conclusion, the chapter demonstrated that the capacity of public professionals and residents to communicate about maintaining relationships strongly affects the quality of participatory democracy. Local actors cannot devote attention to actually solving local problems if their relationships are constantly distorted. Maintaining relationships between public professionals and residents is therefore a crucial process in participatory practice. The chapter showed that maintaining relationships comes down to multifaceted, situated practices of empowering each other to take part in conversations, take decisions, and act on problems. Public professionals and residents are engaged in a process of constantly *making connections* between people, problems, and policies on a functional and emotional level. Their relationships are constantly put under pressure because mistakes, unexpected problems, and misunderstandings inevitably lead to tensions. Therefore, local actors need the capacity to communicate about the demeanor of their contact, the fragility of their relationships, and the practical possibilities for getting things done. Neglecting this communicative capacity seriously limits their ability to sustain productive relationships with an added value for participatory democracy.

8 **Communicative Capacity: Conclusions about Public Encounters in Participatory Democracy**

a strong democratic community ... creates new avenues for collective judgment and action that transcend the boundaries of conventional communication channels

~ Shawn Spano (2001, p. 27)

The aim of this thesis was to formulate an answer to the main research question: *how do the encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?* The first chapters explained why we need a better understanding of the meaning and added value of these public encounters. At the moment, we have no conclusive answers about the question whether the failures of participatory democracy are *because of* or *despite* public professionals and citizens coming together. In order to cast a different light on this, the thesis studied the everyday practices and processes that form the communicative “in-between” of public professionals and citizens in community participation. By examining their narratives in three different cases, the research found that the communicative capacity of local actors is a largely overlooked, and yet imperative, influence on the quality of participatory democracy. After detecting dominant patterns of communication in each case, the analysis explored how processes of participatory practice draw public professionals and residents into these patterns and how they (can) break through them. In this final chapter, the conclusions of the preceding four chapters are integrated to formulate an answer to the main research question, explicate the contributions this research makes, reflect on its limitations, and provide recommendations for participatory democracy practice and research.

The first section recapitulates the underpinnings, argument, and contribution of the research to draw out the contours of the final answer to the main research questions. Here I argue that the thesis forms an important and timely contribution to the debate on participatory democracy, because it presents an original approach to study the communicative in-between (encounter, I-Thou, interaction) of public professionals and citizens. The second section presents the main contribution of the research by integrating the conclusions of the four preceding chapters in answer to the research questions (table 8.1). Here I formulate a theory of communicative capacity based on the findings that: public professionals and residents sustained dominant communicative patterns; three ongoing processes of participatory practice drew them into these patterns; and therefore they require communicative capacity to deal with these processes;

something which can be stimulated by a reflective research-practice interface. The last two sections consider the recommendations for the three cases, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research. Here I reflect on opportunities to act upon the main conclusion that the quality of participatory democracy depends on the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens to break through embedded patterns to solve local problems.

Main research question	
<i>How do the public encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?</i>	
Sub questions	
1)	What happens when public professionals and residents meet in participatory democracy?
2)	How do public encounters in participatory democracy mean?
3)	How can the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy be enhanced?
4)	What does all of this imply for the relationship between research and practice of participatory democracy?

Table 8.2 Main research question and sub-questions

Main Questions, Argument, and Contribution

This section summarizes the first three chapters to recapitulate the main questions, argument, and contribution of this research. In essence, the thesis enquires into a notable contemporary phenomenon troubled by significant problems, questions, and uncertainties: public encounters in participatory democracy. During the twentieth century, Western societies have developed around the notion that the authority to take and enact binding public decisions was reserved to the system of representative democracy and bureaucratic government. But recently this notion has been challenged by a more plural notion of democracy, in which non-elected individuals and agencies affected by public decisions should have actual influence on those decisions and their implementation. A key implication of this development was that public encounters, face-to-face contact between non-elected public professionals and citizens, were no longer seen as inherently problematic, but rather as valuable phenomena. Accordingly, Western governments started to reform their institutions and practices as to facilitate more equal, inclusive, and deliberative encounters that would better solve public problems. However, participatory democracy often did not live up to its promises. As a result, the question has arisen whether public professionals and citizens coming together actually has any added value.

In light of these developments, this thesis aimed at answering the following main research question: *how do the encounters between public professional and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy?* The goal was to determine whether the many problems and failures that accompany participatory democracy are because of or despite the contact between public professionals and citizens. Perhaps it was not such a good idea after all to bring them together; some problems might rather best be tackled exclusively by public professionals, and others by citizens. Or maybe we had too high expectations and we should be more patient with seeing the effects of such an enormous change in our modern welfare system. The great amount of empirical research that has been conducted over the last decade has done much to refine our understandings of what works and under what conditions, but has also identified an emerging gap between theoretical aspirations and actual practice. It remains disputed what is the added value of public encounters amidst the great number of contextual factors that have found to matter. How did this situation come about?

Chapter 2 reviewed the debate on participatory democracy by capturing it in a narrative that developed from a strong story into a weak(ened) version through three generations: a first generation in which participatory democracy was positioned as a radical alternative to representative democracy, a second generation in which the normative basis of participatory democracy was widened and deepened, and a third generation in which the focus shifted to empirical exploration of the degree to which participatory practice lived up to its normative ideals. The quality of participatory democracy was found to depend for in important ways on the added value of public encounters. Whereas the face-to-face communication between public professionals and citizens was traditionally seen as an inherently problematic phenomenon, the interaction between all non-elected individuals, groups, and organizations affected by a policy or problem was redefined as being at the heart of democracy. However, public encounters continued to be an inherently problematic aspect of the complicated story of mixed results that emerged in practice. The meaning and added value of participatory democracy often hinges on what happens when public professionals and residents meet.

A growing body of literature has started to recognize the importance of public encounters and has demonstrated that the added value of public encounters depends on mutual attitudes and behavior, constraining socio-political power configurations, and daily practices of organizing meetings and communicating in action. However, no research has actually used the concept of

public encounters or focused on the encounter as a phenomenon in itself. Doing so requires us to stop seeing public professionals and citizens as separate beings or fixed social positions and adopt a relational ontology in which they are intrinsically connected in ongoing interactional processes through which they are constantly and inescapably “interweaving” into something different by the very *process* of meeting. Grappling with this “in-between” means revealing how communication is not a neutral medium for exchanging information and arguments, but structures the actual opportunities and abilities of public professionals and citizens to make claims and influence decisions. The communicative turn in participatory democracy has up to now focused on the ideal of deliberation to expose undesirable distortions of communicative exchanges by political and socio-economic power differentials. But, as deliberation has been found to be a dispassionate and disembodied form of speech that favors orderly, articulate, and moderate arguments, this thesis aims to capture the multifaceted, relational performative acts through which actors actually express themselves in their daily communicative exchanges. By examining the “in-between” of public professionals and citizens in this way, we might be able to better grasp the quality of their process of knowing-in-interaction.

To examine these everyday communicative practices and processes, the research concentrated on public encounters in community participation. Community participation –the institutions and practices through which public professionals and residents meet in neighborhoods to solve local problems– is an excellent locus for studying the meaning and added value of public encounters for participatory democracy. Structural face-to-face communication between public professionals and residents has become a standard for Western local governments, but faces serious discrepancies between far-reaching ambitions and practical difficulties. Community participation is only broadly defined by normative communitarian theories, so that its wide variety of institutions and practices cannot be measured against clear standards, and outcomes depend to a great extent on what happens when public professionals and residents meet. Thus, the quality of participatory democracy depends to a large degree on the multifaceted, relational performances through which public professionals and residents communicate in the everyday practice of community participation.

Thus, the research was aimed at understanding how public professionals and citizens navigate participatory practice by means of their communicative practices. Narratives analysis was used to reveal how local actors go about narratively in making sense of their everyday experiences.

The analysis teased out how they structured stories about their experiences to contextualize, order, and legitimize their thoughts and actions. This came down to collecting first order narratives through qualitative interviewing of 59 respondents across three cases; interpreting these stories to formulate second order narratives by revealing the work plotlines, characters, signifiers, etc. did; assembling meta-narratives that explicated broader patterns and tensions; and, finally, translating all of this in a theoretical narrative through a dialogue between data and theory. Employing grounded theory heuristics (intensive interviewing, coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling) enabled the research to obtain detailed empirical data of concrete practices and analyze this data by staying close to what people had said as well as relating their statements to broader patterns, tensions, and problems. As such, the narrative analysis exposed how the stories that public professionals and citizens told harbored distinct communicative practices and patterns.

In sum, the current prevalence of participatory democracy, the difficulties with living up to its promises in practice, and the disputed role of public encounters in this instigated the research question: *how do public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy?* The main argument that the thesis developed in response to this question was that we need to grapple with the quality of participatory democracy in terms of the communicative practices and processes that form the in-between of public professionals and citizens. The contribution of this argument is exposing how the narrative of participatory democracy revolves around the meaning and added value of public encounters and developing a novel approach to examining these as a distinct phenomenon. By focusing on the “in-between” of public professionals and citizens, the thesis considers communication in terms of multifaceted, relational performances and examines the work narratives do for harboring forms and patterns of communication in the process of engaging in everyday practice. Based on this research question and argument, the next section discusses the empirical findings and contribution of the thesis.

Main Findings: A Theory of Communicative Capacity

This section integrates the main conclusions of chapters 4-7 into a theory of communicative capacity to explain *how the encounters between public professionals and citizens affect the quality of participatory democracy*. The main answer that follows from the research is that the meaning and added value of public encounters for participatory democracy revolves around

the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens –i.e., *their ability to recognize and break through dominant patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of the conversation to the needs of the situation at hand*. The following sub-sections demonstrate how this conclusion arises out of the answers to the four sub-questions of the research. First, *what happens when public professionals and residents meet in participatory democracy* was that they developed and sustained dominant patterns of communication which limited their ability to solve local problems. Second, *how public encounters in participatory democracy mean* depended on how public professionals and residents responded to the ways the inherent processes of participatory practice were drawing them into dominant patterns of communication. Third, *how the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy can be enhanced* is by cultivating the capacity to animate patterns of communication and the associated processes of participatory practice. Finally, *what this implies for the relationship between research and practice of participatory democracy* is that researchers and practitioners need to collaborate on cultivating communicative capacity.

What Happens When Public Professionals and Residents Meet

In each of the cases, when public professionals and residents met, they tended to develop and sustain dominant patterns of communication. These communicative patterns were not fixed entities, but contingently evolving processes. The narrative analysis in chapters 4-7 led to the following overview of the dominant patterns of communication in each of the cases:

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna
Communicative Pattern	<i>Making it work</i>	<i>Being in touch</i>	<i>Canalizing</i>
Setting	Contesting what are optimal institutions	Immersing in the nitty-gritty of problems	Setting up a safe and insulated space
Content	Defending own view against others	Recognizing the value of multiple perspectives	Circumscribing what is relevant knowledge
Relationships	Focusing on others' beliefs	Pragmatic converging and clashing	Sticking to formal rules and roles

Table 8.2 Communicative patterns and processes of participatory practice

We can read this table both vertically and horizontally. A vertical reading helps to carve out the nature of the dominant pattern of each case. For example, if public professionals and residents were inclined to communicate by *being in touch*, they were *getting to grips* with the complex, ambiguous, and changing nature of their setting by immersing themselves in the

nitty-gritty of local problems, shaped the content of their conversations by recognizing the value of multiple perspectives to get *under the skin* of problems and people, and maintained their relationships by *approaching each other* through a pragmatic process of converging and clashing. A horizontal reading draws attention to the different practices through which public professionals and residents animated the processes of participatory practice. For instance, the content of their conversations depended on their inclination to defend their own view against others, recognize the value of multiple perspectives, or circumscribe what counts as relevant knowledge. I will start with an extensive vertical reading to explain the nature of the dominant communicative pattern of each of the cases and turn to a horizontal reading in the next subsection to explain why it is so difficult to change these patterns.

In each of the cases, public professionals and residents communicated according to a dominant pattern, which unlocked and foreclosed their ability to understand each other, make decisions, and solve local problems in specific ways. The analysis demonstrated that the narratives of local actors tended to sustain rather than confront these communicative patterns. By revealing the storylines, causal beliefs, signifiers, characters, and frames that supported their individual narratives, and explaining how these in turn supported a meta-narrative of the broader pattern of each case, the analysis showed that public professionals and residents were inclined to grasp their experiences with community participation in narratives of institutional design, expertise, and empowerment. Recall, for example, how these respondents upheld a dominant pattern of:

- *making it work* by not delving into oppositional beliefs underlying narratives in which ideal expertise is seen as “you’re giving us information, we assess that information, and this is what we’ve gone back” (respondent G9) or “stand outside a school at three o’clock and seek the opinions of mommies and daddies picking up their kids” (respondent G7) (see chapter 6);
- *being in touch* by nourishing in their narratives keeping “good contact on the relational level” (respondent A3) as ideal for relationships (see chapter 7); and
- *canalizing* by defending in their narratives that having “guaranteed timescales on the implementation of the process” (respondent B6) is an ideal of institutional design (see chapter 5).

As such, these narratives limited attention to a single pattern of engaging with the setting in which they met, the content of their conversations, and the maintenance of their relationships, rather than considering the nature, tone, and conditions of the conversation. The narratives

local actors employed usually affected the course of the conversation with little concern for the style of communicating suitable for the situation at hand, and, thereby sustained dominant patterns of communication. As the quality of their process of communication was determined by their substantive ideals, issues, and goals, rather than the other way around, encounters between public professionals and residents often ran astray. The nature and consequences of this dynamic differed for each pattern.

In the Glasgow case, local actors were engaged in a pattern of *making it work*: overt and tacit disputes between opposed views on the issue of whether “it is working”, which sustained a situation of antagonism and stalemate. Public professionals and residents spent a lot of time contesting the most optimal institutional design, expertise, and relationships rather than having constructive conversations about how to solve local problems. The introduction of the GCPP created a division between those in favor of *starting from scratch* with this new institutional design and those believing that the former group was not *doing it right* (i.e., properly treating, supporting, and empowering “the community” to solve their problems.) Local actors failed to delve into the tension between the belief systems of *Community* and *Planning* underlying this opposition. Public professionals and residents did not enquire into the diverse meanings of floating signifiers such as “community”, “engagement”, and “representative”, the practical limitations of their institutions and their cognitive boundaries, or the emotional barriers for accepting each other. Rather, they were *taking a stance* to defend their own views about what was relevant expertise and *converting each other* into what they believed to be the “genuine” meaning of participation. In this way, local actors in the GCPP sustained *making it work* as dominant pattern of communication.

In Amsterdam, local actors were entangled in a pattern of *being in touch*: extensive personal contact focused on gradually creating mutual understanding, trust, and adaptation to find joint solutions to specific local problems. Public professionals and residents brought many different ways of working and thinking to the scene and were in contact with each other in flexible, spontaneous, and empathic ways. The AW provided extra commitment and resources to the already longstanding contact between local actors, who, as a result, were constantly *getting to grips* with what was going on, who was doing what, and what was supposed to happen. Although they tried to harness local problems by getting *under the skin* of the nitty-gritty of individual people and problems and *approaching each other* on the functional and emotional

level, public professionals and residents often failed to coordinate the multitude of factors and actors effectively as to generate structural and widespread results. Local actors did not look under the surface of their ostensibly good personal contacts to explore the deep-seated beliefs dividing life world and system world, frustrations about the fragility of their relationships, and struggles for *being recognized*. Based on this love-hate relationship with their *Community* approach, public professionals and residents in the AW sustained *being in touch* as dominant pattern of communication.

The case of Bologna was characterized by the pattern of *canalizing*: guided, ordered, and reasoned exchange of arguments within fixed boundaries to make concrete decisions. Public professionals and residents appraised the potential of their institutional design for preventing the process to go astray and leading them to *groundbreaking* results. By instituting the PSC and organizing participative workshops, local actors managed for the first time in their history to have productive conversations about the degeneration of the neighborhood and the specific *nuts and bolts* of the regeneration plans that had to change this situation. Although they had entered into a new type of relationships between public professionals and residents, they were not developing these beyond the formal rules and roles by *keeping distance*. In a similar way, local actors were not able to extend their conversations about local problems beyond the fixed boundaries on the scope, timelines, and topics of the participative workshops. By failing to question the type of talk, language, and expression they had been *creating conditions* for and to wander off into the territory of hidden problems, deep-seated emotions, and personal relationships, public professionals and residents limited their encounters to *Planning*. As such, they sustained *canalizing* as dominant pattern of communication.

Each communicative pattern had distinct benefits and shortcomings and none was suitable for all circumstances. Their multifaceted, relational performances help to illuminate the nature, advantages, and disadvantages of the three forms of communication distinguished in chapter 2 (p. 47): debate, deliberation, and dialogue. By considering their meaning in practice, rather than their theoretical definition (Hummel, 1998), we can develop a better understanding of how these forms of communication come into being, what each form can actually come to look like in the face of practical affordances and constraints, and what their strengths and limitations are for navigating practical situations. Figure 8.1 visualizes how we can think of the trade-offs of the dominant patterns of the three cases:

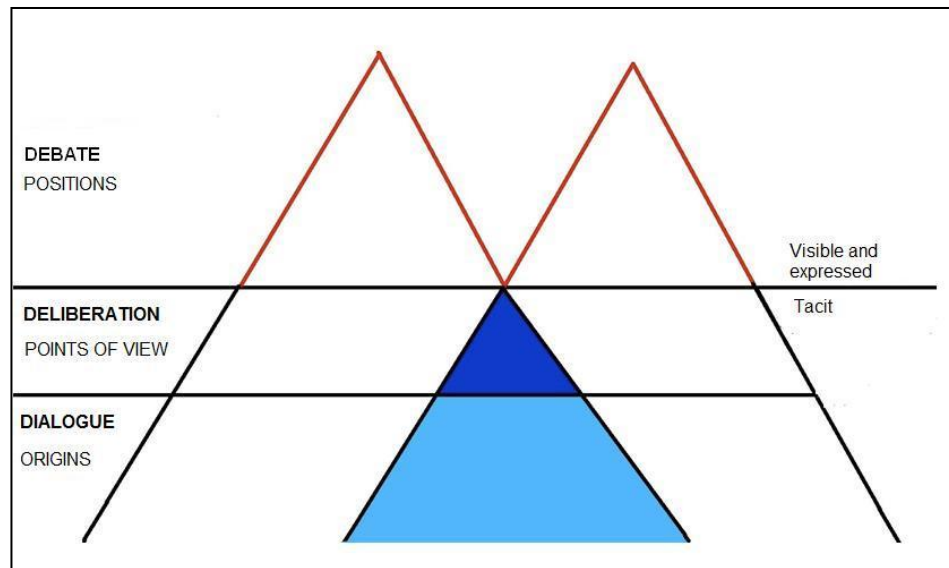


Figure 8.1 The Debate-Deliberation-Dialogue model⁴²

Debate (top level) was illuminated by the communicative pattern of *making it work*. This mode of communication emerged from the Glasgow case, but was, in different manifestations, also present in the other cases. In general, local actors were engaged in *making it work* with regards to the added value of their community participation approach, or specific parts of it. In the Glasgow case, *making it work* helped to draw out two oppositional viewpoints on the ideal nature of participation, while in the other cases one belief system implicitly dominated the other. By drawing out both standpoints through debate, local actors can subsequently turn to working out a practical balance between them. However, the risk of *making it work* appeared to be that local actors were convinced that they “knew” how to do it right, while being unaware of underlying beliefs and tensions. Debate is ill-suited to going beyond standpoints and establishing compromise (dark blue area) or common ground (light blue area), because of the inclination for *starting from scratch, taking a stance and converting each other*. Debating, then, comes down to expressing differences with the risk of getting stuck in “ritualized opposition” (Tannen, 1999, p. 4).

Deliberation (middle level) was illuminated by the communicative pattern of *canalizing*. This form of communication dominated the Bologna case, where local actors were setting up and sticking to clear boundaries which keep opposition between standpoints and deeper emotions

⁴² Amended from (Pound, 2003). Although the ‘Positions-Interests-Needs’ model is one of the classical ideas in conflict resolution (see Ramsbotham et al., 2005, pp. 18-19), the inclusion of the dark blue common ground in Diana Pound’s version constitutes an important innovation. I am indebted to Oliver Escobar for providing me the model in its current format. The insertion of debate, deliberation, and dialogue is mine.

out of the discussion as to focus attention on arriving at concrete decisions and consensus. Its absence in the other two cases fueled the tendency of local actors to get stuck in a pattern of *making it work*. Instead, public professionals and residents in Bologna managed to overcome initially adversarial mind frames through rational deliberation about the merits of different standpoints and possibilities for compromise. Achieving consensus is easier if all local actors are open to express and reassess the motivations for their viewpoints and to work towards decisions acceptable to all. However, *canalizing* also appeared to imply a tendency for not communicating beyond the boundaries and outcomes of the project. Deliberation asks for the rational and cognitive capacities to articulate, criticize, and justify the options at hand, and prohibits emotions and antagonism to lead to critical and divergent thinking. Deliberating, then, boils down to focusing on consensus with the risk of losing sight of the broader context.

Dialogue (bottom level) was illuminated by the communicative pattern of *being in touch*. In Amsterdam, public professionals and residents were, more than in the other cases, concerned with cultivating mutual understanding and trust by recognizing the value of personal feelings and expertise. Although this form of communication appeared to be fragile and dependent on personal relationships, it helped to sustain a setting in which the local actors usually felt safe to speak their minds and listen openly to each other. This enabled a more pragmatic mode of communication than in the other two cases, because the local actors had open and respectful relationships and a common ground of mutual understanding and trust. Simultaneously, *being in touch* is a quite open-ended and unguided mode of communication, and therefore tends to defy a delineated approach oriented towards reaching consensus as in Bologna, or a conflictual approach allowing oppositional standpoints to crystallize as in Glasgow. Dialogue embodies empathic and reflective communication without a predestined goal or direction. Dialoguing, then, amounts to developing profound relationships with the risk of overlooking the need for opposition as well as concrete decisions and actions.

None of these three modes of communication is the most optimal or ideal. One might work well at a certain moment, but does not necessarily need to be adequate for future situations. The dominant mode of communication is always likely to be challenged, because community participation is a necessarily imperfect, unstable process without definite measures to resolve local problems. This fundamental instability of communication results from the irresolvable tension between two indispensable and incompatible underlying belief systems: *Community*

and *Planning*. *Community* refers to the belief that participation works best if local actors are left free to communicate depending on their social interdependencies, common values, and reciprocity. *Planning*, conversely, implies that participation has to offer stable relationships and fixed institutions based on which local actors can effectively channel their knowledge to pre-set goals. Although an ideal balance or final resolution can never be achieved, local actors can temporarily stabilize the tension between *Community* and *Planning* by determining which type of talk is the most appropriate to move the conversation forward.

So how can public professionals and residents do so? The analysis demonstrated that we can learn a lot about beliefs, tensions, and conflicts underlying everyday talk by looking below the surface at what unlocks and forecloses possibilities for moving the conversation forward. If local actors want to change or improve their public encounters, they need the capacity to step back from the immediate issues at hand and reflect on whether their mode of communicating is getting them anywhere. Is debate, deliberation, or dialogue dominant? What is it doing for the situation: sustaining seeming consensus, apparent conflict, or ostensible progress? What is below the surface? What are people actually communicating? Local actors constantly have to ask themselves and each other these questions in response to the continuously evolving needs of participatory practice. What to say or how to address someone is not a set skill to be drawn upon, but hinges on the specific needs of the situation at hand. Participatory practice is not a stable thing with fixed properties that can be mastered by applying knowledge according to rules and regularities, but consists of *processes* of dynamic forces and fluctuating activities. The setting in which local actors meet, the content of their conversations, and the maintenance of their relationships are all processes. Their contingent form and meaning emerges from the in-between, i.e. the interactions between actors and with the situation at hand. The next section discusses how public professionals and residents animated these processes to change or sustain their dominant pattern of communication.

How Public Encounters in Participatory Democracy Mean

From the previous section it follows that the meaning of public encounters depends on the capacity for dealing with the processes of participatory practice which draw local actors into dominant patterns of communication. To understand this dynamic, we turn to a horizontal reading of table 8.2 based on the findings in chapters 5-7. Each chapter zoomed in on a distinct

process of participatory practice to show that changing communicative patterns is inherently difficult because local actors are tempted to focus on the substance rather than the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations. The analysis demonstrated that local actors in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna all faced similar processes –dealing with the *work in progress* of their setting, *struggling* with the content of their conversations, and *making connections* to maintain their relationships– but responded to these processes in different ways. By comparing the contingent communicative practices of public professionals and residents, we can draw out their benefits and limitations as to arrive at an understanding of what capacity they need to recognize and break through dominant patterns of communication.

The first process of participatory practice that emerged from the research was the setting in which public professionals and residents meet. In chapter 5, the analysis showed that local actors narrowed down their ability to deal with the *work in progress* of their setting with narratives that evolved around institutional design rather than modes of communication. *Work in progress* means that the setting consists of a great number of actors, institutions, policies, and problems, which constantly change in form, meaning, and importance and cannot be “tamed” by static drafting of institutional blueprints. Being faced with often uncontrollable, unforeseeable, and even incomprehensible interactions between all these factors and actors, public professionals and residents tried to render the *work in progress* more manageable by capturing their setting in plotlines, causal beliefs, and normative leaps about the right type of institutional design; a vocabulary of signifiers referring to elements of the setting; and holistic narratives about structures, rules, and policies. Altogether, local actors were often unaware of the ways in which their narratives foreclosed their ability to talk in constructive and productive ways about who can say and do what, when, and how.

In Glasgow, public encounters were characterized by contestation of the proper institutional design because local actors were *starting from scratch* with their collective understanding of the concrete meanings and practical conduct of their new participatory institutions for the *work in progress*. A striking example of this mode of communication was their shared vocabulary: while local actors were constantly referring to “the community”, “partnership”, or “groups”, they never explored what they actually meant with those words and how tacit differences in interpretations inhibited their ability to move the conversation forward. In Amsterdam, public encounters were a matter of *getting to grips* with all the activities, details, and interactions of

the multitude of people, problems, and policies of the *work in progress*. By delving into the intricate nature and dynamics of *seemingly small problems*, local actors often felt confused or uncertain about where all of this was taking them. In Bologna, public encounters were focused on establishing a fixed institutional design and sticking to the formal rules and procedures as to be *groundbreaking* in the ongoing *work in progress*. While the majority of local actors embraced this mode of communicating by adopting a *story of helplessness and control*, several of them told a *story of change is only an illusion* to emphasize they felt silenced in expressing their dissatisfaction, frustrations, and concerns.

The second process of participatory practice that emerged from the research was the content of conversations between public professionals and residents. In chapter 6, the analysis revealed that local actors limited their ability for *struggling* with the content of their conversations through narratives of the transmission of expertise that concealed their cognitive boundaries as well as the need to address these. *Struggling* refers to the cognitive difficulties involved with taking onboard new rational knowledge, acknowledging others' emotional expressions of feelings, beliefs, and experiences, being recognized to take part in conversations, and learning to translate the nature and value of others' expertise. Being faced with multiple truths, forms of expertise, and modes of expression, public professionals and residents tried to reduce their *struggling* by resorting to narratives based on frames with deep-seated cognitive boundaries; plotlines, metaphors, and diagnostic-prescriptive stories of what is ideal expertise; and holistic narratives about the confrontation with different forms of expertise. Altogether, local actors often neglected how their narratives inhibited their ability for recognizing, empathizing, and appreciating what was being communicated.

In Glasgow, public encounters came down to local actors *taking a stance* to defend their own knowledge and experiences and discard the value of others' expertise, thereby making the *struggling* often unnecessarily intense. For example, several residents tended to "go in blind down and ... fight" (respondent G5) out of frustration to have been left out of the equation in making plans. In Amsterdam, public encounters were focused on getting *under the skin* of people and problems by engaging in extensive *struggling* with the details and underlying stories of specific situations. But as the different stories about experiences in the life world and system world with refurbishing a playground illustrated, the empathy of many local actors continued to be characterized by tacit cognitive boundaries. In Bologna, public encounters

concentrated on specifying the *nuts and bolts* of regeneration plans, which increased local actors' *struggling* with any other knowledge and experiences that could not directly contribute to this. Public professionals and residents talked about ideas, needs, and problems that could be translated into physical designs and interventions rather than social care and management.

The third process of participatory practice emerging from the research was the relationships that public professionals and residents maintain. In chapter 7, the analysis demonstrated that local actors restricted their ability for maintaining their relationships by *making connections* through narratives that focused on commitment to "genuine" empowerment and downplayed the need to talk about practical possibilities for collaborating. *Making connections* indicates that maintaining relationships does not come down to keeping people to honor a onetime pledge to empowerment, but rather constantly linking a great number of people, policies, and problems on countless emotional and functional needs. Being faced with more actors and factors that could be connected than actual possibilities for doing so, local actors sought to simplify the process of *making connections* by sticking to narratives with plotlines, normative leaps, and causal beliefs that supported an ideal of empowerment; stories of heroes and villains fighting over "genuine" relationships; and holistic narratives of facing many people, problems, and policies as well as tensions, misunderstandings, and emotional struggles. Overall, local actors often downplayed the influence of their narratives on their ability to empower each other to participate in discussions, take decisions, and act on problems.

In Glasgow, public encounters were a matter of local actors *converting each other* into what they considered "genuine" empowerment without exploring what their personal interpretations of this ideal actually implied for the nature of their relationships or practical possibilities for *making connections* with each other. The relationships between local actors were so stuck that when a new public professional entered the scene, she invested a lot of time in talking to residents to legitimize her presence and added value. In Amsterdam, public encounters were concerned with *approaching each other* to sustain responsive, accommodating, and trusting relationships as to facilitate each other in pragmatically *making connections*. While local actors often managed to get things done this way, the stories in which two residents presented themselves as heroes fighting unresponsive public professionals revealed the fragility of their relationships. In Bologna, public encounters were characterized by public professionals and residents *keeping distance* even though they felt empowered by the new relationships they had

experienced. As local actors believed that the key to their relationships were formal roles and stable rules and procedures, the few stories about social bonding remained highly speculative.

Thus, instead of broadening their capacity to communicate about the intricacies and dynamics of the ongoing processes of participatory practice, public professionals and residents tended to limit their communicative practices to one dominant form. As a result, the meaning of their encounters was limited to the same recurrent pattern and the associated problems. Based on an awareness of the inevitability of the processes of dealing with the *work in progress* of their setting, *struggling* with the content of their conversations, and *making connections* to maintain their relationships, as well as of the advantages and disadvantages of different ways to animate these processes, local actors could reflect on the meaning and added value of their encounters for participatory democracy. Public professionals and residents should in particular inquire how following a single pattern of communication affects their ability to solve local problems as compared to adapting the mode of communication to the needs of the situation at hand. That means, for instance, that local actors in Amsterdam could signal that *struggling* with a specific local problem by getting *under the skin* is not taking them anywhere and that they therefore should turn to specifying the *nuts and bolts* of the problem in a clear plan. In other words, the meaning of public encounters hinges on the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents.

How the Added Value of Public Encounters Can Be Enhanced

So, the research demonstrates that communicative capacity is a distinct phenomenon that has to be considered to understand why public professionals and residents sometimes manage to solve problems and why in other occasions they do not. Communicative capacity helps to see, in other words, how and why public encounters can have an added value for participatory democracy. Local problems get only partially solved if local actors get stuck in conflict or a unilateral way of working. Instead, the chance that suitable solutions for local problems are found is enhanced if they have the capacity to recognize and break through dominant patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of the conversation to the needs of the situation. Lacking communicative capacity means wasting a lot of time, resources, and energy, and damaging trust, relationships, and willingness to collaborate. Communication should therefore not be considered as a neutral medium (Rosenberg, 2007): the things public

professionals and residents say, or do not say, and how they address each other, are of significant impact on whether they understand each other and manage to get something out of their encounters. So what is communicative capacity then?

Communicative capacity, is understood as something different than the instrumental ability to effectively achieve set goals (Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2003b; cf. Sullivan et al., 2006). It does not refer to the communicative skills for achieving “ideal speech” (Habermas, 1970a, 1970b, 1984a), i.e. communication which is perfectly clear, sincere, undistorted, and effective. Rather, in contrast to *idealized communication*, communicative capacity refers to the ability to determine what form of *real communication* a practical situation requires. It is practical know-how, tacit knowledge, acquired intelligence, or a knack for the situation: “What should I say now?”. Communicative capacity thus constitutes a type of knowledge which cannot be codified or captured in a final definition (see Schön, 1983; Schmidt, 1993; Scott, 1998; Lee, 2007), and is neither a permanent and universal thing that individuals *have* irrespective of time and place. Instead, it hinges on the in-between of specific people in specific situations. Communicative capacity is social know-how (Wenger, 1998) that *emerges and exists in the interactions between people* while being engaged in the process, or the “eternally unfolding present” (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011), of participatory practice.

For the quality of participatory democracy, then, we need to distinguish between the ability to supply the right kind of formal knowledge and institutions to deal with the immediate issues at hand, and the capacity to attune the mode of communication to the situation at hand. This difference can be understood with the distinction between single loop and double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1976; Freeman, 2006). *Single loop learning* refers to the ability to perform a task better within the given parameters by using new types of institutions or knowledge. *Double loop learning* is the ability to change the conditions under which tasks are performed, which in the case of this research is based on reflection on the mode of communication, the value of different perspectives, and the role of underlying beliefs, experiences, and feelings. That means that local actors do not just need the ability to transmit information from A to B about a specific issue at hand, but also the communicative capacity to apprehend the best way to address each other and keep the conversation going with regards to this issue. In chapter 4 we saw examples of this in the ability of respondent A18 “to make a great effort to get and

stay on speaking terms with [the resident], and ... to explain in a proper way” and respondent B4 for “telling the ... [boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions”.

So how can we recognize communicative capacity and, moreover, distinguish between a moderate, good, or great communicator? Just as instructions on cycling do little to help a child in acquiring the ability to steer, keep its balance, and partake in traffic, we would gain little from a checklist with “principles of good communication”. Rather, we need to understand the meaning of the multifaceted relational performances of public professionals and citizens in concrete conversations. In that sense, the analysis identified the communicative capacity to:

Glasgow

- recognize that “the theory of how you’d plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice” (respondent G4, pp. 88, 98);
- signal that their encounters are stuck because “everybody is feeling the same sense of frustration” (respondent G6, p. 132);
- recognize that “there needs to be that discussion ... [about] what do people actually understand by” the words they use (respondent G16, p. 138);
- signal that “we all still behave quite functionally” (respondent G12, p. 193);

Amsterdam

- call attention to a situation in which they “don’t know who to address for” a problem (respondent A5, p. 106);
- recognize the limits on their conversations and accept that “that’s just the way it is” and focus on “how can you make sure that those two decisions are in fact coordinated” (respondent A1, p. 109);
- acknowledge if they feel “a lot of resistance against ... [something and] go into defence immediately” (respondent A6, p. 169);
- recognize that “it’s not always that easy ... when it’s about putting oneself in someone else’s position” (respondent A12, p. 173);
- recognize the need for “that extra bit of persuasiveness ... because people retreat into their own area” (respondent A2, p. 199);
- acknowledge that “if someone trusts someone in the neighborhood that it’s then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else” (respondent A10, p. 200);
- observe that because of all kinds of “miscommunication... you lose the confidence of” others as they “don’t know who to trust” (respondent A4, p. 203);

Bologna

- determine “what kind of information we needed to show ... [and which] question we used to open a meeting” (respondent B14, p. 116);
- transform stalemate and conflict into concrete decisions by “collect[ing] in an ordered fashion that what the people say” (respondent B14, p. 116);
- “delimitate the field in which you can discuss, um, because otherwise the discussions ... can [go astray]” (respondent B4, p. 117);
- signal that “frustration will grow ... [if] people have been asked for [input] and they don’t see the results” (respondent B7, p. 121);
- question the boundaries of the conversation by asking “what are we talking about?” (respondent B16, p. 151);
- observe that some issues “came out of the small groups that did not come out in such a strong, clear way during the ... plenary assembly” (respondent B13, p. 206);
- recognize that their encounters have been a matter of “not socialization, it has more been a confrontation” (respondent B19, p. 209);

The analysis has demonstrated that the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents was not stable or ideal for all circumstances, but varied both across and within the cases according to the resistances and affordances of the situation at hand. Depending on the needs of the conversation, the performances of communicative capacity listed above can help local actors in making a better judgment about how to deal more effectively with the immediate issues at hand. In this manner, the ways in which substantive issues are addressed emerges from the communicative process, rather than the other way around. Local actors can cultivate their communicative capacity by regularly organizing meetings to reflect on their joint modes of communication, but also by being conscious of their individual split-second decisions about how to address someone else or in what way to participate in a conversation.

Each chapter identified three ways in which public professionals and residents can cultivate their communicative capacity and enhance the added value of their encounters. In general, this implied reflecting on the ways in which they communicated about the processes of *work in progress*, *struggling*, and *making connections*. More specifically, local actors could benefit from reflecting on the following issues:

- 1) who can and should say and do what, when, and how:

- a. in which ways were our participatory institutions introduced and how do these function as reference points?
 - b. what is the content, nature, and meaning of our vocabulary?
 - c. what complexity and ambiguity exists under the surface of *seemingly small problems*?
- 2) recognizing the nature, meaning, and value of others' knowledge and experiences:
- a. what are the practical limitations on our ability to cross cognitive boundaries?
 - b. what is the nature of the barriers between system world and life world?
 - c. how does the definition of relevant expertise generate seemingly idiosyncratic ways of mutual neglect, misinterpretation, or misunderstanding?
- 3) how to facilitate each other to participate in discussions, take decisions, and act on problems:
- a. how does the demeanor of our words and actions affect mutual recognition?
 - b. how do efforts, tensions, and frustrations render our relationships fragile?
 - c. in which ways do key individuals maintain relationships?

What this Implies for the Relationship between Research and Practice

How can researchers and practitioners use the theory of communicative capacity to actually enhance the quality of participatory democracy? This section aims to bridge the above to the recommendations for research and practice in the final two sections by discussing what a process of building communicative capacity might look like and what researchers and practitioners can do to keep the process going. The key point that my research suggests is that researchers cannot simply resort to conventional feedback methods, but have to support local actors in developing their communicative capacity in action. Providing feedback was a central part of my research, but did not generate the impact I had hoped. In each of my cases, I tried to enhance local actors' awareness of the nature and importance of communicative capacity by organizing an interactive workshop and writing a research report. Participants valued the workshops⁴³ and a few respondents communicated that they found the report helpful. But in no way did I get the feeling that it was having any durable impact.

⁴³ Number of participants was 8 in Glasgow, 14 in Amsterdam, and 9 in Bologna.

Therefore, if researchers want to make a contribution to cultivating communicative capacity, they cannot act as external observers and consultants who obtain information from local actors and feed back the results. Presenting recommendations in a report or workshop is not enough for local actors to develop capacity for pattern recognition and transformation. Instead of feedback motivated from the questions and needs of the researcher, communicative capacity asks for regular and continued intervention that is centered on the questions and needs of the local actors and the concrete situations they are dealing with at that moment. Researchers will have to intervene in practice and monitor developments until local actors have recognized and broken through their dominant patterns in communication, actions, and outcomes, as well as demonstrate the capacity for independently cultivating a process of reflection, learning, and doing.

This is not that far removed from what is commonly seen as the role of interpretative policy analysis: to help policy actors to develop their capacity for deliberative judgment in a world of radical uncertainty, practical complexity, value pluralism, and inevitable conflict (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). While some scholars interpret this “democratic” aspect of IPA as normative imperative for defending the interests of underrepresented, marginalized, or suppressed groups against technocratic, authoritative, oppressive government (Dryzek, 1993; Flyvbjerg, 2002), the idea here is a communicative approach which seeks to

improve policy argumentation by illuminating contentious questions, identifying the strengths and limitations of supporting evidence, and elucidating the political implications of contending positions. In the process, the task is *to increase communicative competencies, deliberative capacities, and social learning* (Fischer, 2003, pp. 201-202; emphasis added).

In this view, researchers have to stimulate the formation of “Communities of Practice” or “Communities of Inquiry”: a habit of coming together with local actors to reconsider their practices, assess competing knowledge claims, and examine modes of communication in order to arrive at novel ways of thinking and acting in concrete problematic situations (Lindblom, 1990; Fischer, 1993; Shields, 2003; Schwandt, 2005; Innes & Booher, 2010; Kersten et al., 2010). The task of the researcher is to use research findings to (1) bring local actors together for guided reflection, (2) provide the procedures and methods for doing so, and (3) embed this collective inquiry in the social and organizational context.

How would that work? First of all, researchers have to convince local actors that solving local problems on the long run depends not just on the ability for keeping the conversations focused on reaching practical agreements on the substantive issues at hand (single loop learning), but more fundamentally on the capacity for addressing the communicative patterns and tensions underlying seemingly innocent disagreements, conflicts, and problems (double loop learning) (Argyris & Schön, 1976). Empirical analyses have to demonstrate that underlying patterns and tensions prevent conversations from moving forward and that the mode of communication has real world consequences for problem solving. This research suggests that such studies should identify how 1) the belief systems of *Community* and *Planning* inhibit local actors in breaking through their dominant pattern of communication and pragmatically negotiating intermediate forms; 2) these dominant patterns limit their ability for dealing with the *work in progress* of their setting, *struggling* with the content of their conversations, and *making connections* to maintain their relationships; and 3) focusing on the process rather than the substance of their communication enables them to find practical possibilities to determine who should say and do what, when, and how, integrate different forms of expertise, and connect people, policies, and problems.

Secondly, rather than providing readymade solutions researchers could facilitate local actors in discovering these by themselves through processes of joint inquiry and learning (Laws & Forester, 2007). By creating awareness of implicit tensions, inconsistencies, ambiguities, and dilemmas, researchers can induce local actors to “slow down their mental processes” and start questioning their practices. As they are likely to be confronted with unexpected commonalities and contradictions, local actors need to have the willingness to listen to each other and let go of deeply held belief systems (Shields, 2003). Besides the debate-deliberation-dialogue model (p. 219) and the set of nine recommendation for cultivating communicative capacity (p. 229), researchers can draw on the well documented practices with which facilitators and mediators enable processes of pragmatic adaptation, consensus building, and learning in situations of deep value differences or contested facts (Forester, 1999a, 2006; Laws & Forester, 2007; Forester, 2009b).

Researchers can use a variety of formats depending on the situation at hand: e.g., reframing a policy controversy by using citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, or role playing; exploring the impasse around a *seemingly small problem* by engaging in joint fact-finding; or creating

common ground for future collaboration by developing a shared meta-narrative (Fischer, 1993; Hendriks, 2005; Ryfe, 2006; Hampton, 2009; Innes & Booher, 2010). This thesis shows that storytelling is a helpful approach to reveal (the impact of) underlying beliefs, experiences, and feelings as well as broader patterns of communication going unaddressed or unnoticed. By sharing and reflecting on their narratives, local actors can suddenly start to see how seemingly innocuous details are part of a meaningful pattern. So, researchers can help to focus the conversation on individualized cases and stories. Collective inquiry into these stories can help local actors to expose the series of inferences they made from their personal experiences to their underlying beliefs, values, and feelings to construct their practices (see Argyris et al., 1985). For example, revealing that the dominant narrative in the Bologna case –that rational deliberation formed the best solution for the long term decay, conflict, and stalemate around the neighborhood– is based on a *story of helplessness and control* might help local actors to reconsider the value of the counter-narrative, which was based on *stories of success is only an illusion* (see chapters 4 and 5).

Acting as an interpretative mediator (Fischer, 1993), translator (Yanow, 2000, pp. 90-91), or cognitive bricoleur (Innes & Booher, 2010), researchers should be primarily concerned with foregrounding communication, i.e. focusing the attention away from the immediate issue at hand and raising awareness of the effects of the mode of communication on the ability to resolve issues (Spano, 2001). Based on a deeper understanding of the differences and tensions between different narratives, researchers can facilitate local actors in coming together and telling their stories to each other, understanding the origins and effects of their differences, and identifying opportunities for learning and change. By exercising such *facilitative leadership*, researchers can help local actors to break vicious communicative cycles in which they keep on having the same kind of conversations over and over again while continuing to face the same recurring problems (Forester, 2009b). There is an extensive literature focusing on practitioners exercising facilitative leadership (see Williams, 2002; Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Ansell & Gash, 2007), but up to now little emphasis has been given to the communicative dimension of this work. However, this thesis suggests that researchers and local actors can turn situations around based on the capacity to get beyond defensive routines, recognize what mode of communication a situation requires, and (re)kindle and sustain a constructive and productive pattern of communication. The next sections reflect on the practical possibilities in research and practice to follow up this recommendation.

Recommendations for the Local Actors in Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna

Based on the preceding chapters and conclusions above, this section offers recommendations for each of the cases that tailor the main argument –public professionals and residents sustain dominant communicative patterns which limit their ability to solve local problems; therefore they need to cultivate their capacity for recognizing and breaking through these dominant patterns through regular reflection on the needs of the conversation at hand– to the nature and needs of their local context. The goal is to specify what local actors in each case could do to cultivate communicative capacity and enhance the quality of community participation.

Communicative capacity was mainly absent in the case of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP). More than in the other two cases, in Glasgow, the conversations between public professionals and residents were often unproductive. The communicative pattern that dominated their encounters, *making it work*, indicates that local actors spent a lot of time and energy on contesting whether “it was working” rather than on finding practical agreements to make it work. The analysis demonstrated that local actors could be divided into two groups with contradictory narratives about the meaning and added value of the GCPP. This division was triggered by the way the GCPP was introduced: *starting from scratch* with an ill-defined hierarchically imposed policy which did not facilitate local actors in gradually adapting the new institutional design to the *work in progress* of their setting. The resistance this set off among mainly, yet not exclusively, residents led to a pattern of contestation and strife to dominate public encounters, in which not only the institutional design but also the expertise that formed the content of their conversations and the empowerment of their relationships became subject to opposing standpoints. Public professionals and residents were inclined to defend their own expertise by *taking a stance* and propagate their version of empowerment by *converting each other*.

To change this deadlock, all local actors, including politicians and policy makers, have to recognize that their dominant pattern of communication seriously limited their ability to solve local problems. Secondly, they have to acknowledge the permanent risk of getting stuck in an unproductive communicative pattern because of the irresolvable tension between *Community* and *Planning*. By marrying these two concepts in their policy, local actors have joined two incompatible belief systems: *Community* refers to the belief that participation works best if

local actors are left free to communicate based on their social interdependencies, common values, and reciprocity, while *Planning* is based on the belief that participation has to offer stable relationships and fixed institutions based on which local actors can effectively channel their knowledge to pre-set goals. Here local actors have an advantage over the other two cases, where either *Community* or *Planning* dominated, because in Glasgow both positions and the tension between them are more manifest. However, local actors should try to go beyond these positions to find, always temporal, ways to stabilize the tension between them. This could be done by cultivating their communicative capacity in three ways:

- 1) *Storytelling*: local actors faced deeply engrained barriers between their positions and expressed frustrations about the frail basis of their relationships. To create common ground, local actors could share narratives about their personal experiences with the introduction of the GCPP, the nature of local problems and relevant knowledge, and the conflicts between them. They will not be able to resolve the tension between their contradictory positions, but through open and honest dialogue they can enhance mutual understanding, trust, and empathy.
- 2) *Vocabulary*: local actors had a shared vocabulary of words such as “community”, “partnership”, and “engagement” but did not talk about what each of them meant with these terms. These words do not have permanent or ultimate definitions, but local actors can negotiate practical agreements on working definitions that will enable them to move their conversations forward.
- 3) *Deliberation*: local actors were overwhelmed by the complexity of local problems, knowledge, and relationships. The setting limited their opportunities for talking about this situation and finding ways to deal with it. By negotiating clearer boundaries and remit to take concrete decisions on specific projects, local actors can have more productive conversations.

Researchers, mediators, facilitators, and local facilitative leaders will need to facilitate local actors in giving shape to these recommendations and engendering more constructive and productive communicative processes.

Public professionals and residents in the case of the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*) had less problems in talking to each other. In fact, more than in the other two cases, local actors in Amsterdam were very much used to having conversations

about how they could solve local problems together. The dominant pattern of communication, *being in touch*, refers to their inclination to spend a lot of time on trying to understand, trust, and adapt to each other to find solutions for specific local problems. But despite the value public professionals and residents attached to having good relationships, the analysis showed that these relationships often proved to be fragile, could not always prevent misunderstanding, tensions, and conflicts, and usually did not lead to large scale results. Although some of them upheld a counter-narrative desiring more *Planning*, the majority of local actors nourished a *Community* approach to participation and refrained from strict structures, rules, and plans. As a result, public professionals and residents were constantly *getting to grips* with the *work in progress* of their setting, *struggling* to get *under the skin* of individual people and problems, and *making connections* through a process of *approaching each other* in which they converged and clashed on their functional and emotional needs.

The question facing local actors in Amsterdam, then, was how to keep the positive aspects of their pattern of *being in touch* while also having more oversight in what was happening and who was doing what, a clearer sense of where all their talk was taking them, and more stable rules, structures, and plans to support widespread results. This research suggests that the first step local actors need to take for this is acknowledging that neither their current, nor a future dominant pattern of communication can unambiguously enhance their ability to solve local problems. Although they are right to look for an approach that strikes more balance between *Community* and *Planning*, they should also realize that the tension between these two belief systems is irresolvable, and, consequently, that any intermediate form can only temporarily stabilize this tension. That means that changing their current practices of *being in touch* will inevitably offset certain relationships, foreclose particular cherished solutions, and introduce new tensions and conflicts. But they can cultivate their communicative capacity to deal with these difficulties in three ways:

- 1) *Debate and deliberation*: local actors were entangled in many different conversations while often having the feeling that concrete positions and decisions were not clearly articulated. Therefore, they could organize more structured meetings focused on crystallizing out positions or exchanging arguments on delineated topics in order to negotiate practical agreements and concrete proposals for action.
- 2) *Visioning*: local actors recognized the value of all the different ways of thinking and working amongst them, resulting in a patchwork quilt of ideas about what should be

done to improve the neighborhood. To create more coherence in the activities of this diversity of views, local actors could meet to formulate joint visions of the future and concrete norms and activities needed to achieve this vision.

- 3) *Role-playing*: local actors often felt lost or frustrated because the great amount of energy they put into resolving *seemingly small problems* did not translate into concrete results. The complexity of the setting and content of their conversations lowered their ability for mutual understanding and empathy. By carefully reconstructing with all the persons involved in a specific local problem who is doing exactly what and with which results, local actors can together determine what changes are needed to break the cycle of recurring conversations and problems.

Again, researchers, mediators, facilitators, and local facilitative leaders will need to facilitate these processes.

In the case of Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) local actors had a specific type of communicative capacity. In contrast to the other two cases, public professionals and residents in Bologna had productive conversations about the proposals that had to go into the regeneration plans for the neighborhood. The communicative pattern that was dominant in their public encounters, *canalizing*, alludes to their guided, ordered, rational exchange of information and arguments about all the *nuts and bolts* of how the different areas should be transformed. Despite the great number of local actors who considered this mode of communication, and the participatory institutions that had enabled it, a *groundbreaking* change in the ongoing *work in progress* of the setting, their *Planning* approach had imposed clear limits on the scope, time, and topics of local encounters. Public professionals and residents restricted their process of *struggling* and *making connections* to the formal remit, rules, and, roles that had been fixed in advance. This excluded a counter-narrative of *Community* with strong concerns and frustrations about the lacking autonomy to address local problems on their own terms both during and after the participative workshops.

So the question in this case was how to continue after this apparently positive, yet preliminary, experience with community participation. As public professionals and residents in the Italian governance system are wholly dependent on political mandate to act, the first step to be taken is to have all local actors recognize the benefits as well as the limits on their current pattern of communication. They have to realize that their *Planning* approach is not ideal and that also the

other side of the coin, *Community*, needs to be accommodated by recognizing the underlying tension between both approaches and the value of the counter-narrative that participation also requires more autonomous, spontaneous, and flexible contact between local actors. This will enable them in looking for a more balanced approach that will stabilize the underlying tension for the moment in respect to the needs and possibilities of the current situation. While on the one hand a *Community* approach seems unlikely to find much support in the current system, on the other hand, local actors have demonstrated an openness to experiment with new and innovative forms of participation. They can mitigate the difficulties that will accompany these changes by cultivating their communicative capacity in three ways:

- 1) *Dialogue and debate*: local actors were engaged in a deliberative process with clear boundaries on who could say what, when, and how. This helped them to arrive at joint decisions for specific plans, but also excluded many other narratives. To develop a more broadly shared meta-narrative, local actors could engage in debate to tease out the tension between opposing positions and have open dialogues in which they share stories about their personal experiences with participative workshops, local problems, and living in the neighborhood. Together, this could create common ground for future collaboration.
- 2) *Vocabulary*: local actors used a specific vocabulary with words such as “project”, “neighborhood”, and “participation” during the participative workshops, but did not reflect on the meanings and limitations of these words for grappling complex and grave local problems. Although permanent or ultimate definitions do not exist, local actors can negotiate practical working definitions based on wider understandings of the diversity in connotations.
- 3) *Joint fact-finding*: local actors have talked to each other in terms of the mandate that was provided to them rather than in terms of the actual problems that residents were experiencing. Instead of starting from policy by formulating specific proposals and plans, local actors could start with a concrete (seemingly small) problem and explore its multiple dimensions, complexity, and ambiguity with all those who have experience with it.

Also in this case researchers, mediators, facilitators, and local facilitative leaders will need to facilitate these processes.

Limitations of the Research and Recommendations for Future Research

After having discussed the main analytical and empirical contributions of this research and the associated recommendations for practice, the chapter now turns to a consideration of the ways in which these conclusions could be continued in future research. The main conclusion –the communicative capacity of public professionals and residents is an imperative influence on the quality of participatory democracy– opens up venues for new research projects. While future research could benefit from drawing upon the way this research has used narrative analysis to examine public encounters, it should also take into account the limitations of this approach and the conclusions reached accordingly. I recommend future research to explore the connection between communicative capacity and the local context, by using discursive approaches to study power configurations, ethnographic approaches to examine fine-grained communicative performances, or dialogical approaches to further develop the notion of process, as well as to extend the role of researchers in actively enhancing the quality of participatory democracy.

This thesis argues that more future research on participatory democracy should focus on public encounters, or communicative in-between, as a distinct phenomenon. By using and developing the theory of communicative capacity in other cases, research could widen and deepen our understanding of the multifaceted relational performances through which public professionals and citizens communicate in participatory practice. In the analysis of empirical material, researchers could identify and interpret modes and patterns of communication in reference to the belief systems of *Community* and *Planning*, the debate-deliberation-dialogue model, and the processes of *work in progress*, *struggling*, and *making connections*. In this way, research could further theorize the multifaceted, situated, relational process of knowing-in-interaction related to the irresolvable tension between *Community* and *Planning*⁴⁴.

Narrative analysis forms a valuable approach for future research on everyday communication between public professionals and citizens. The analysis showed that local actors go about narratively in making sense of their participatory experiences, that the work their narratives do is harboring particular modes and patterns of communication, and that analyzing underlying beliefs, values, and feelings reveals a great deal about the implications of these modes and

⁴⁴ As has hopefully become clear, *Community* and *Planning* do not correspond to participatory democracy versus representative democracy but rather to underlying belief systems that are manifest in both of these forms of democracy.

patterns. But even though stories are a common element of everyday reality and have real implications, they are not just out there for researchers to observe and take apart. Getting local actors to talk is usually not a problem, but getting them to tell stories asks for careful use of qualitative interviewing skills (see pp. 71-73). Researchers have to be careful not to ask for generalized information, judgments, and opinions (“What’s the problem?”) but rather for concrete examples and detailed experiences (“What’s the story?”). Local actors are not always used to tell stories (certainly not clear stories with beginnings, middles, and ends) and often consider their personal experiences to be banal and insignificant. Researchers need to comfort and encourage local actors in not hiding their stories behind a wall of information or short and generalized answers. So even though not all communication is narrative, it is probably more so than local actors often realize. Researchers should not go about lightly in studying narratives. A decent training in qualitative interviewing and good preparation of each individual interview is imperative. Each person has a different story to tell and forms a new challenge even to the experienced interviewer.

Narrative analysis also has its limits, in particular in relating the stories of local actors to their socio-political context. During interviews, in particular those early on in the case, I found it difficult not to focus too much on obtaining information about the context when respondents shared unknown events or conditions with me. To be sure, part of the preparation of the fieldwork was to extensively explore the governance systems of the three countries as well as the characteristics and history of the cases. My original intention was to include parts of these analyses in the thesis to provide a background to local practices and to show that my results had wider resonance beyond the boundaries of the local case. However, during the writing process I discovered that providing background information to contextualize findings was not enough, because it raised all kinds of questions and claims about causal relationships and historical patterns that I could not back up with my findings. Although I embedded the narrative analysis in a discussion of the local context, especially in chapters 4 and 5, this only served to paint a more intelligible picture of the cases and not to make any causal claims about the role of broader socio-political configurations. This would form an entire new project in itself based on, for example, process tracing or a discursive analysis such as governmentality.

Another limitation of narrative analysis for examining communication is that it mainly relies on the mental reconstructions of respondents rather than their actual behavior. In my research,

the primary mode of data collection was interviewing public professionals and residents about their everyday experiences with community participation. Although I always encouraged the respondents to give detailed examples of concrete situations, it is qualitatively different data than what would be obtained with participant observation. Part of the research was to attend participatory meetings, but I did not have any particular methods for observation except for taking notes to register what happened, whether specific persons whom I had interviewed, or was to interview, were behaving in line with my interpretations of their narratives, and what my general personal impressions were. I was already too far in the fieldwork process when I realized that I was missing a lot of valuable data about communication in action. Fortunately, I could draw on others' ethnographic observations of meetings in the Glasgow case (Matthews, 2010) and Bologna case (Procopio, 2008). Also, full-fledged ethnographic data collection and analysis would constitute a research project of its own.

The choice for narrative analysis in this research was bound up with the desire to examine participatory democracy by focusing on the ongoing business of everyday practice rather than on policy controversies –which would have made frame analysis more appealing– or on the dispersal and exercise of power in everyday relationships –for which discourse analysis would have been more appropriate. Although controversies and power inequalities were certainly not neglected, the emphasis was always on their narrative functioning with regards to modes and patterns of communication instead of on their diverging conceptions of reality or the broader taken-for-granted structures through which the interplay between power, knowledge, and government takes shape and effect. Narrative analysis is more suited to capturing, in an open-ended way, practice as a dialogical process of generating meaning in interaction (Wagenaar, 2011). Frame analysis carries the risk of not taking us beyond the differences between the frames of public professionals and citizens, as it is troubled by the classical hermeneutical ambition of revealing the daily practices and hidden assumptions, values, and emotions that make up the life-world of people. Discourse analysis is likely to have taken us in the direction of the power inequality between public professionals and citizens in the formation of participatory discourses and governance styles. Even though such types of analysis are valuable in themselves, they would probably not have been as helpful as narrative analysis in capturing the in-between in terms of situated, relational performances.

Nevertheless, a clear limitation of my narrative analysis is that the role of power has not been discussed up front even though it was an important factor in each of the cases. The top-down introduction of the new participatory institutions in Glasgow generated a conflictual situation. Residents in Amsterdam were lamenting about the consequences of, or sometimes actively fighting, the fact that the big decisions about regeneration and funding resided completely with the Municipality and housing corporations. And the participative experiences in Bologna were only possible because of the strict political, technical, and financial mandate provided by the Council and the private landowners. In the analysis I have pointed at the impact of such power inequalities on the communication between local actors. Furthermore, in the previous section I made several recommendations for cultivating the communicative capacity to talk about power and actively make changes to power configurations. However helpful this might be to those local actors involved in community participation, we might remain skeptical about any wider resonance. Despite long term ambitions and evocative rhetoric in policy, the percentage of public professionals and residents actively involved in community participation is shockingly low, community participation often takes the form of temporally and functionally limited “projects”, and community participation remains a small part of wider reforms to the welfare state and representative democracy.

Several other types of research would be suitable for examining the role of communication in participatory democracy. First, by taking a governmentality approach, research could dissect the broader regulatory discourses in which the formulation of participatory policies as well as the enactment of the associated social practices is embedded. Particular attention could be paid to how categories, rationalities, and vocabularies with which local actors communicate have been brought into being. This approach could help to better understand how certain ways of communicating are normalized through discursive structures or internalized in everyday practices, as well as to denaturalize the contingency of taken-for-granted historical practices and discourses of participation. A related approach, secondly, is critical discourse analysis, which could be used to more systematically analyze policy documents and behavior in meetings to reveal how language, context, and social practices are related. This could help to develop a more fine-grained understanding of the tacit background knowledge and speaking styles through which certain local actors are excluded from the discussion.

Third, ethnographic research could be used to conduct micro-analyses of the communicative practices local actors use when they meet each other. Rather than inferring their practices from the stories public professionals and residents tell, approaches such as participant observation (Goffman, 1981) or conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) could be used for “thin-slicing” communicative exchanges. Explicating the ritualized sequences, twists and turns, and framing involved in the performance of detailed speech acts (Austin, 1962) such as greeting, rhetoric, wit, and gossip would be of great contribution to developing our understandings of the importance of communication for the quality of participatory democracy (Young, 2000, pp. 57-77). Finally, statistical analyses of the broader nature and consequences of participation would be very helpful to form an evidence base about the effectiveness of participation. For example, a recent study about the Amsterdam Neighborhood Approach conducted 289 surveys and 64 interviews with residents and public professionals throughout the city to answer questions about the motivations of the former to participate, their background characteristics, and the impact of their initiatives (Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2011).

One particular outcome of this thesis that would deserve more exploration is the concept of “process”. The analysis demonstrated that participatory practice is best understood as process, or composition of processes, with distinct and “unowned” qualities. Communicative capacity was found to be an emergent property of these processes, in the sense that it resides in the “in-between”, i.e. the interactions that local actors have with each other and the situation at hand. Accordingly, the thesis argues that capturing the processes through which public professionals and residents communicate is crucial to grappling the quality of participatory democracy. The concept of process has for long been the focal point of process philosophy (Rescher, 1996) and has recently entered debates in public administration and public policy (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011; Stout & Staton, 2011; Wagenaar & Cook, 2011). The application of the concept of process in both methodology and empirical analysis is still relatively young, and this thesis hopefully makes a contribution to developing it. Still, a central challenge for future research on participatory democracy, as well as policy making and politics more in general, remains the design and application of “methods that enable the analyst to register ... [the] give-and-take between the initial expectations and preconceptions of the individual subject and the way the world talks back to him” (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 62), together with a deeper understanding of the implications of process for social reality and our knowledge of it.

Finally, the thesis concluded, in answer to the fourth sub-question, that researchers have an important role to play in actively cultivating the communicative capacity of local actors and, as such, enhancing the quality of participatory democracy. Future research should devote more attention to exploring how this might be done. To be sure, the relationship between research and practice comprises several inherent tensions that prevent straightforward knowledge transfers (Laws, 2007). For example, during the research for this thesis, I found it challenging to become a legitimate member of the projects I studied. My research was explicitly aimed at providing feedback to the respondents in order to make a contribution to solving problems. To get access to community participation projects and make a durable commitment, I approached contact persons (first at the central municipal level, then at the neighborhood level) with a research proposal which outlined the main goals and procedures and highlighted the added value of the research. After the fieldwork, for each of the cases I organized an interactive workshop and wrote a research report to give direct feedback. Despite enthusiastic receipt by some participants, I did not get the feeling my research was making a big impact. Here the scope of my research –a three year PhD track with three cases in different countries– and the concomitant time and financial constraints definitely played a role. Therefore, researchers should develop an approach that takes the practical possibilities and constraints for actively intervening in practice into account.

Final Remarks

In conclusion of this chapter and this thesis, I would like to reflect on the main contribution this research makes to the debate on participatory democracy. What have we gained from this enquiry into the main research question: *how do the encounters between public professionals and citizens affects the quality of participatory democracy?* In a nutshell, the answer to this question is that the quality of participatory democracy hinges on the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens to recognize and break through their dominant patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of their conversations to the needs of the situation at hand. By formulating a theory of communicative capacity, this thesis aims to make a contribution to the debate on participatory democracy. Up to now, its narrative tells a story of the strong version of participatory democracy, as a radical alternative to representative democracy, gradually changing into a weaker version in which we struggle with a multitude of contingent factors and mixed results. This thesis aspired to again rekindle a strong version of

participatory democracy by showing the merit of Shawn Spano's (2001, p. 27) statement with which this chapter opened: "a strong democratic community ... creates new avenues for collective judgment and action that transcend the boundaries of conventional communication channels".

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