

Reading Tips and Study Questions: Planning as citizen participation—October 15th

Required reading:

1. **(Case)** A scenario in Curitiba (see below).
2. [Available free online](#): **Sherry R. Arnstein**, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4): 216-224 (1969).
3. pp.309-319 only in **James Scott**, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale, 1998).

Recommended:

4. *RPT* (Chapter 7), **James Scott**, "Authoritarian High Modernism."

Tips and questions

Sticking with the Curitiba context and history to ground our discussion, we're going to focus this session on two powerful arguments for people-led planning and on the implications of those arguments.

The first argument is explicitly a call for "citizen power" atop a hierarchy (ladder) of citizen participation in decisionmaking. The ladder was developed by Sherry Arnstein in response to U.S. government-mandated participation in community development programs in the late 1960s. It's important to understand that that was her context, which were not unlike a newer generation of mandated participation schemes in developing countries, such as the World Bank's "community-driven development" model (see, for example, Cooke and Kothari, editors, *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, Zed Books, 2001). This Arnstein article is the most cited work in the English language on the subject of citizen participation in planning and decisionmaking.

The second argument for people-led planning is more indirect. It is an elaboration of the concept of "local knowledge" or what James Scott, turning to Greek, calls *mētis*. It is knowledge born of experience and centered on particulars, not scientifically derived generalities divorced from lived experience and insight. The background to the excerpt you will read is Scott's very thoughtful and interesting critique of the history of modernism and its

authoritative claim to “order” society, which is modern planning’s ancestry. But you’ve read some of that critique in other sources, at least in broad terms, so we’ve left the background on the “recommended” list above.

Now, let’s construct a scenario, within the Curitiba case, to which we can apply the important ideas in the Arnstein and Scott readings. Imagine that you’re working for the Curitiba city government as a planner and that you’ve been assigned to develop and implement a plan for a new neighborhood. At the mayor’s request, following a meeting with landless people and property owners, the plan will be organized around low-cost housing, safe play areas for children, and the need for neighborhood residents to pursue livelihoods in the city. These are the landless who have “invaded” public and private property in Curitiba, as they have done in many other cities in the developing world where decent, affordable housing in economically healthy places is scarce or non-existent. For simplicity, let’s say that government has purchased a large site from a private property owner, taking her financial interest out of the picture. There a range of other interests. The city planning department has some priorities for the area which include environmental sustainability, avoiding over-crowding, and protecting the rights of abutting property owners. But you’re convinced that there’s a way to plan and develop a community with landless people so as to create sustainability in a wider sense—solutions that are more sensible and that are widely perceived as politically legitimate. There’s a design opportunity here, to be sure, but it’s a tricky political context, given the conflicts, too.

1. In **Arnstein’s** model, how is “citizen power” distinguished from the lower rungs of the ladder, and what justifies the pursuit of participation at that level, according to Arnstein? What limits of the model does she identify, and can you think of others? Which of the limits might be relevant to your Curitiba planning challenge and why?
2. **Scott** warns that “any formula that excludes or suppresses the experience, knowledge, and adaptability of *mētis* risks incoherence and failure” (p.319). He detailed this argument in a lecture at the World Bank recently, with “lively” results. Scott’s main focus is on *why and how what “ordinary” people know is essential for problem-solving, not on citizens’ rights to influence decisionmaking*. But he knows well that power is implicated in this equation. What kinds of local knowledge might be important for the plan you need to create and implement in Curitiba? Who holds that knowledge, and how might it be tapped?