

TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE, PARTICIPATION, COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP: A MATTER OF NATIONAL CULTURE?

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EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

Cooperation and participation are discussed in this paper as essential elements of territorial governance, with emphasis on participation and the effect of national culture. The experience of European countries is presented¹ and placed in a theoretical context. Use is then made of the example of Greece to discuss the effect of socio-political culture on the adoption of participation and cooperation practices and territorial governance strategies². The impact of a national tradition of patronage and client-relations has a negative influence on the prospects of a governance approach.

Spatial planning and its theoretical foundations are undoubtedly going through a critical and interesting period of transition. The crisis of the comprehensive, rational model (real or alleged is a moot point), has bred an interest in alternative theoretical approaches stressing communicative and collaborative action and an acceptance of the existence of several rationalities, which do not emanate from the official state ideology and the authority of the experts. In this context, broad-based participation, vertical and horizontal cooperation and partnership formation occupy a central position. Public participation in particular is a fundamental prin-

1 For the purposes of the present paper the author used material from the ESPON 2.3.2 research project, in which he was a core group participant (ESPON Project 2.3.2, *Governance of Territorial and Urban Policies from EU to Local Level*, Final Report, European Spatial Planning Observation Network, Lead Partner: University of Valencia, 2006). The material was derived mainly from NTUA/LSPUD 2006, i.e. a synthesis report of national overviews produced for the needs of the project.

2 For this part of the paper the author used material from his contribution to "Katarsis", a current Coordination Action under the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission, coordinated by Global Urban Research Unit, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University.

ciple of governance, which has acquired a normative character, as a substitute of traditional state action.

The much publicized crisis of the state, an ideology which to a large extent has metamorphosed a neo-liberal aspiration into an allegedly inescapable truth, has also transformed the role of planning from providing spatial services and regulating land use into enabling independent action. The post-modern approach of collaborative planning and other similar schools has at the same time intensified the trend of bottom-up planning, in which citizen participation occupies a key position. It is interesting to note that when participation was beginning to be integrated in the planning process in the 1960s it was regarded by a number of planners as a panacea, an exaggeration which invited scathing comments. Although participation is not an end in itself, it is certainly justified both for ideological, democratic reasons, but also on practical grounds. The threat of a democratic deficit and of a loss of legitimacy, to the ultimate detriment of effectiveness, is a strong argument in favour of participation. Environmental concerns and the goal of sustainability have strengthened the value of participation and environmental activism, which relies on the existence of an active citizenship that takes a long time to mature. The rise of an informed, active and alert civil society is closely linked to past history of individual countries. Activism is no doubt important, but is still far from being the universal power that some of its adherents aspire to.

Official attitudes to participation usually limit the latter's role and view it simply as a means for validating the officialdom's perception of reality. The real purpose of participation should be to discover what "real" and "reality" mean to society, but planning agencies usually take "reality" as given or define it according to their own rationality. Practically everywhere spatial planning and land use legislation admit a stage of participation in the planning process, but this can be misleading, depending on whether participation is invited at the plan-drafting stage or is simply a formality after the plan has been finalized, with a grudging acceptance of the right of the citizen to object and appeal to the courts. There are of course important and interesting innovations. These include e.g. initiatives and institutions, which maintain a constant 2-way interaction between public authorities and citizens, or regeneration projects which involve citizens from a very early stage. Undoubtedly these differences reflect diverging perceptions of the meaning of participation.

Participation is more frequent at the local level, e.g. that of an urban district or neighbourhood, because here contact with the individual citizen is more immediate and more experience has been acquired. The accumulation of learning experience and the construction of relations and networks is the ideal form of a participatory culture. Such networking is far more important than the mere creation of advisory bodies on which various social groups are represented. Different participation philosophies are evident in variations with respect to the influence that stakeholders have over decisions or to the way the views of participating actors are assimilated, which depends on the predisposition of the planner to simply "hear" the views of others or really "listen" to them.

In the ESPON 2.3.2 project, national overview authors were asked to report on the existence of "limited" or "extensive" experience with participation and partnership processes. The answers were almost equally divided. Former socialist countries, but also South European ones, have limited experience in public participation and partnership processes, in spite of partnership exceptions in larger Mediterranean countries with autonomous

regions. Experience is affected by past political regimes. Formal provisions are often in place, but real applications remain nominal. It can be assumed that participation is more historically determined, than partnership formation. Historical factors, e.g. struggles for democratization, may explain familiarization with participation, even though there is no practice of formal partnerships.

Experience in participation and partnership formation is not correlated with the constitutional character of European countries. Centralized, but democratic, political structures may well embrace governance practices and show openness to innovative forms of cooperation. Permanent structures facilitating participation are essential because they make participation a more regular feature of daily governance. Equally, a successful partnership record is usually linked to the prior existence of cooperation among government agencies, in a vertical or horizontal sense. The issue of participation was central not only in the national overviews, but also in several of the case studies produced in the context of the ESPON 2.3.2 project. In both cases the conclusions were similar and rather disappointing. Public participation is recognized as vital, but is still a goal to be attained. Naturally, enormous variations exist across the E.U. territory.

Cooperation in public administration is often claimed to be an established practice but is frequently a mere bureaucratic procedure. Not unexpectedly, a greater variety of cooperation arrangements at all territorial levels, can be found in countries with long traditions of government and urban development and administration and are not, as with participation, correlated with constitutional forms. Countries which tend to use only conventional planning instruments do not as a rule produce internationally innovative cooperation arrangements, but they still have examples that are important and pioneering in their national context.

Cooperation among regions, with intense or limited national involvement, is a frequent example of cooperation. The aim is usually economic development, combined very often with technological innovation. Sectoral coordination certainly figures prominently in these initiatives. The use of contracts is established practice in certain countries, but in other countries too, where it is fairly recent, there is evidence of the “contract culture” spreading rapidly, even in the simple form of programmatic agreements. Cities provide the scenery for the largest number of cooperation examples, and perhaps for the most interesting. These examples often exhibit experimental, innovative arrangements, at neighbourhood, city or urban region level. They can take a variety of forms, i.e. cooperation between national states, regions and cities, between regions and cities, between city authorities and / or between intra-city municipalities. In terms of progress, cooperation can take the direction of vertical or horizontal cooperation, or both, or it can evolve towards specific forms of horizontal cooperation. The trend, it would seem, is one of increasing use of contractual schemes, partnership working, regional cooperation, central state – regional coordination and inter-municipal alliance formation.

An established form of cooperation is national – regional and inter – regional, although specific institutional forms and instruments employed vary. There is also a variety of intra-regional forms of cooperation in European countries (e.g. inter-municipal alliances), even when there is little experience of national – regional or regional – regional cooperation. Horizontal cooperation and partnerships occur chiefly at the local level. Large urban regions are a case apart. Important examples exist in Europe of inter-municipal cooperation of a more

ambitious character through the creation of Functional Urban Regions, where a variety of partnerships flourishes.

Horizontal cooperation at the national level usually takes the form of joint councils or committees, but there are also more complex arrangements, with long established agencies like the French DATAR (now DIACT) playing a crucial role. Innovative tools and progressive processes of vertical cooperation mechanisms are to be found usually in federalized or regionalized countries. Partnership working has become a routine matter in more advanced countries.

What makes cooperation work? There is plenty of evidence that both barriers and catalysts exist. Barriers can indeed frustrate partnership formation and cooperation and, equally, catalysts can encourage and accelerate them. It is very difficult to collect empirical evidence concerning their existence as they are often related to elusive cultural parameters.

Where there is a long tradition of parliamentary government, grassroots democracy and cooperation with civil society, the usual obstacles have been largely overcome, although commentators warn that cooperation is not always easy and successful. The most common barriers, particularly in new member – states and some south European countries, are associated with legal complexities, administrative rigidity, persistence of authoritarian structures, bureaucratic procedures, tradition of departmental autonomy, administrative reluctance to change, lack of administrative skills and shortage of resources, especially at local level. Governance processes are occasionally perceived as too complex. The issue of resources and the reluctance of central state administrations to relinquish their control is fundamental. In the national overviews of the ESPON 2.3.2 project there were discreet references to lack of transparency, even of “misappropriation” of resources. The issue of corruption is not usually openly mentioned, yet this is no doubt a key concern in several countries.

National, regional and local political cultures and deeply antagonistic state – citizen relations, marked by mutual suspicion, can be a major barrier to governance, partnership and participation. They are bred by a past of resource scarcity and insecurity, are hard to eradicate and may be perpetuated in conditions of unemployment, confrontation, political polarization, nationalism, conservatism, racism and populist propaganda. Because of that they are not limited to countries at lower levels of economic development and prosperity. This is one more reason for pursuing governance policies with synergies which extend far beyond the territorial dimension. In conditions of polarization, demands for openness and participation are sometimes confronted with suspicion or open hostility. Resistance to reforms can take an ideological character, when there are fears that important values may be threatened, if their traditional champion, a caring state, is weakened.

A new mentality, especially in the field of partnerships, is transmitted by European Union policies. But the reason why the E.U. has had such overwhelming influence is not purely ideological. Partnerships and joint planning initiatives are perceived as, indeed they are, a precondition of access to Structural Funds. Therefore, E.U. policies, sometimes criticized as rigid, bureaucratic, elitist or as discouraging worthwhile efforts, can nevertheless become an inducement or prerequisite for partnership formation.

We emphasized earlier that a crucial barrier to genuine progress towards greater participation, cooperation and partnership working is the national political and social culture of a country. We shall illustrate this problem with the example of a South European nation,

Greece, which was a fundamentally rural country until the 1970s. In the 60s and 70s however, urbanization took place at a very fast rate, and started slowing down in the 80s, when the population of rural areas began stabilizing. Internal migration to the cities was intensive until very recently, which is an indication that urban citizens are still attached to the rural areas of their origin. Their political affiliations and their relation with the state and its administrative apparatus are still deeply influenced by their bonds with the rural world of the country. Their affiliations and political behaviour, which still carries the patterns of the past, affect also their associative habits –or lack of them– in the cities. Relations with state and government continue to exhibit the marks of a model dominated by political patronage and clientelistic connections. This works against the development of a genuine and mature civil society.

The subject of political client relations and patronage received special attention in the sociological and historical literature on Greece. The emphasis was originally on the traditions established in the 19th and early 20th centuries, even after World War II, and on the political culture prevailing in rural Greece. A number of contributions dwelled on rural culture and politics, the role of the extended family, and the values of its members. Personal relations were, and still are, very intense within family clusters, very loose within corporate formations, and strong within linear alliances with more or less distant relatives, patrons and clients, protectors and *protégés*. Family loyalty is dominant, in comparison to loyalty to corporate or cooperative formations. External alliances, through marriage or patronage, with persons of influence are all important. Influential persons, especially politicians, are sought after as best men in marriages or godfathers in baptisms, and thus become *koumbaros* of the family, which carries with it a moral obligation.

This approach tended to ignore class structures that were slowly but clearly emerging in Greece, which are increasingly recognized in more recent research. Historians and sociologists turned their attention to the role of a political oligarchy which first emerged in the 19th century, to the gradual formation of a state bourgeois class, the role of the central state and the growth of a parasitic civil service. The struggle for a share of government-controlled resources reinforced curiously both the hostility towards the state and its adoration, as a general provider. The phenomenon of clientelism was now placed in the context of the relative autonomy of the Greek State in relation to the class structure. The nature and weight of patronage and clientelism, as social practices and as explanatory variables, have naturally changed over the years. The weight of national and international economic factors increased and clientelism became more party-oriented, but personal patronage still survives intact in provincial areas and less so in large cities. The survival of clientelism is bound with the character of political parties and the electoral system of casting personal votes of preference. New social categories emerged as a result of state action, through government employment, the existence of a small capitalist class dependent on government grants, loans and licences and the creation of a class of an obedient and inefficient civil service. The state apparatus stabilizes, protects and guarantees certain private interests, while placing other groups or activities in a marginal position.

Nowhere in all the range of government activity are these problems better seen, than in the field of town and regional planning. Here, patronage affects directly that most sensitive trait of Greek society, i.e. land ownership and use, and the ability of the government to valorize land in accordance with its clientelistic priorities. Spatial planning in Greece has largely

failed to cope with the problems of rapid urbanization and social change. The valorization of private land interests is intimately bound with a complicated land use control system, the provisions of which are often interpreted with a great deal of laxity leaving ample margins of patronage and favouritism. Extensive unauthorized building construction and violation of land use regulations is widespread. This is a social background which renders the adoption of governance practice and of effective participation, aimed at collective benefits, extremely difficult to achieve. Besides, the concept of governance is still practically unknown in Greek administration, notwithstanding the influence of E.U. processes, “trickling down” from the supranational level, and domestic reforms of power devolution and decentralization, sadly bogged down in legal complications. Regarding spatial planning, although there has not been a direct attempt to incorporate the concept of governance in the statute book, several aspects in recent planning legislation reveal a certain progress towards a philosophy of governance, which, unfortunately, is not honoured in practice. Even at the national level development and territorial policies remain uncoordinated and, in the case of spatial planning, marked by the absence of participation and cooperation.

The processes and operations of the state are generally considered by the average citizen static, unchangeable, obscure, secretive and chaotic. Long and complicated procedures, poor coordination and the absence of advance and sincere consultation and participation contribute to the ineffectiveness of spatial planning. “Europeanization” plays a role, but reforms are resisted by inherent characteristics of both state and society, the political culture and relations of mistrust and mutual suspicion between state and citizens. The feelings of the average Greek for the state in general are not much short of hostile, especially in the field of environmental and land regulation, because contemporary culture values more individual lifestyles and land ownership than environmental sustainability and the benefits of spatial planning. Public opinion views environmental problems as the responsibility of the state, or even of the E.U., and not as the concern of society and the individual citizen.

The impasse created by such mentalities has in some, but rare, cases activated local authorities and civil society towards networking and partnership not only to strengthen their position and attain emancipation from central government, but also to address environmental problems. Cooperation and participation to oppose government plans are more frequent, but interestingly there are also some creative examples. There is evidence of this change in the proliferation of movements particularly around environmental issues and in the rulings of administrative courts. In spite of the fact that grassroots movements are often party-dominated, it would be very wrong to dismiss them. The coming of age of citizen movements is certainly a shift which brings governance objectives in the centre stage of current dialogue and allows optimism. The example of citizen mobilization to preserve open spaces in Athens provides an instructive lesson.

The creation of new modes of thought related to the principles of cooperation, participation, transparency and mobilization is dependent on another field, which is probably the most crucial of all, but also a problem in Greek realities, namely education. It would not be a gross exaggeration to claim that any progress will be produced in the long run not by innovations in the content of planning, in the administration and in the system of government, but rather in education, which currently rather stunts the ability to innovate and think creatively.