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ARTICLE

Changing Frames: Citizen and Expert Participation in Georgian Planning

KRISTOF VAN ASSCHE, GERT VERSCHRAEGEN & JOSEPH SALUKVADZE

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyze the evolution of the spatial planning system in the Republic of Georgia, from late Soviet times to the present day, with a focus on its capital, Tbilisi. Through a reconstruction of the changing roles of various professional groups and governmental actors, we try to delineate the possibilities for citizen participation at different points in time. By examining the paths of historical dependence in this evolution, we outline the transformation options that are most likely to succeed now. This is relevant, since the current planning system is not very inclusive, making it hard to observe issues and to adjust to changing preferences in society. Using key concepts from social systems theory (Luhmann) and new institutional economics (North), it is argued that, in the current situation, import of western concepts of participatory planning might not be advisable. Participatory planning, direct citizen participation in spatial governance, is more likely to succeed in a highly differentiated society; in particular, one where the representative democracy, with its separation of powers, is already functional. It could even undermine the fragile process of ongoing institution-building, by reinforcing undesirable informal institutions.

Introduction

Planning in Georgia has largely been the planning of Tbilisi, its historic capital (Suny, 1994; Van Assche *et al*., 2009). This paper will investigate how citizen and expert participation have evolved in Tbilisi planning since late communism. It will hardly surprise anyone that Communism has not been beneficial for the development of citizen participation in planning issues. Because the Communist Party-State exercised a quasi-monopoly over planning decisions, there were little or no participatory mechanisms to guarantee citizen participation in the decision-making process (Baburov, 1977; French, 1995; Elster *et al*., 1998). Experts and various governmental stakeholders played a more substantial role in the planning process, but their part as well was heavily constrained by the Communist policy system. In what follows, we will trace the planning legacies of communism, the constraints and cognitive frames that are inherited from the communist regime, and inquire how they could be transformed for greater inclusivity.

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Our focus will be on the evolution of the different roles within the planning system of Tbilisi and Georgia. Before and after communism, different professions, like architects, developers, scientific experts and various levels of administration, played distinctly different roles in Georgian society and exerted a markedly different influence on the spatial organization of Tbilisi and its metropolitan region. What citizens were allowed to do and which role they were allowed to play in matters of spatial organization shifted, in a systemic re-definition, where all the other roles transformed in a competitive process. Citizen participation in current planning practice, or lack thereof, is an evolutionary outcome, constrained by the specific features of the evolutionary environment. Analyzing the options for increased citizen participation in spatial planning, therefore, requires a careful reconstruction of the evolution of the various roles in the planning system.

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Method

We will reconstruct the evolution of the planning system by means of in-depth interviews (35 in 2006, 30 in 2007, 20 in 2008, 30 in 2009) with current representatives of these roles, as well as with critical professional observers. Our respondents included developers, architects, geographers, critical intellectuals, students, planners at city government, Georgian and foreign non-governmental organizations, historians, ecologists, political scientists, historians, journalists, and foreign and Georgian investors. Interviews varied from 1 to 3 hours in length, were semi-structured, and took place in offices, cafés, parks, or at the university. Questions revolved around the evolution of the profession or the organizations respondents were most familiar with, and their framing of the wider changes in Georgian society.

A sub-group of interviews focused on the actual, as opposed to professed, functioning of the old Soviet system. This we deemed essential to the understanding of more recent changes, because unfortunately Soviet planning is still opaque in many respects. Old secrecy and involvement of old players in new games contribute to the difficulties in understanding Soviet planning. We thought it important enough to pay special attention to old practices, in order to establish more firmly a starting point for our analyses. Older developers, professors, political scientists, and architects did help us greatly in clarifying the formal and informal mechanisms of Soviet planning and its local impacts.

Additionally, 200 questionnaires were completed (in 2006) by inhabitants of five Tbilisi neighborhoods, ranging in income levels and perceived architectural quality. Two Georgian geography students assisted in the survey. It consisted of 14 questions, on the quality of Soviet and post-Soviet neighborhoods, on Soviet planning and current planning, on the actual and desirable roles of several professional groups (planners, architects, lawyers, developers, politicians, scientists). We also asked about chief remaining issues in the planning and development of Tbilisi, about possible improvements, and possibilities for increased participation. The survey provides additional insight in lay perceptions of the planning process, the players, and the results. Finally, local and regional planning documents and auxiliary literature have been analyzed to enrich our understanding of the Georgian planning context.

Theoretically, we will frame our analysis by drawing on post-modern planning theory; in particular, approaches focusing on knowledge, power and narrative (Throgmorton, 1996; Soja, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Allmendinger, 2002; Hillier, 2002), and on sociological differentiation theory in the line of Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory (Luhmann, 1995). The application of social systems theory leads to a reappraisal of path dependencies and windows of opportunity to coordinate various function-systems in planning and to increase citizen participation (Teubner, 1993; Dunsire, 1996; Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008). In addition, we will borrow key concepts from new institutional economics (North, 1990, 2005; Greiff, 2007) that can be easily integrated into Luhmann's evolutionary perspective on society.

Roles in the Soviet Planning System

Understanding the evolution of planning roles in Georgia requires some basic insights into the highly centralized spatial planning system in the USSR, of which the present republic of Georgia was a part from 1921 to 1991. It is often thought that Moscow-based planners decided in detail the planning and design of Soviet cities, but in reality, cities in the USSR looked more planned than they were. Despite an officially proclaimed modernist ideal of scientific planning, the uniformity one can still perceive in ex-Soviet cities resulted predominantly from the common adoption of Soviet building standards. In addition to the standardization of building practice, the education of architects, as well as their institutional embedding, was remarkably similar all over the Soviet Union (Frolic, 1972; French, 1979).

In the USSR, planning was coordinated at the federal level by two ministries: Gosplan and Gosstroi, responsible respectively for economic development (*planirovanie*) and construction (*planirovka*). Both ministries had branches in the Soviet republics, and at city level. However, Soviet building standards, the so-called SNIP (*stroitel'nie normi i pravila*, i.e. building norms and rules) determined the real impact of city Master plans (*Genplans*) and other plans. Many aspects of local and regional plans were not implemented, for reasons explained below, but the norms—prescribing how buildings, streets, even neighborhoods, should look—were not often questioned, and consequently did produce a degree of uniformity, a 'planned look'.

SNIP were elaborated in central research institutions, but could hardly be called 'scientific' because most principles and regulations were grounded in Soviet economic and industrial planning policies (Kornai, 1980; Kornai and Rose-Ackerman, 2004). Industrial ministries and their short-term goals were much more influential than the planning ministries and their long-term visions. Most plans were never implemented, and planners continually had to adapt to unexpected interventions by the industrial ministries and the enterprises under their umbrella. Industries of all-Soviet importance could claim space in the city, build their own housing projects, attract more experienced architects, and in many places outmaneuver local Soviets (Huzinec, 1978; Boren & Gentile, 2007). Many experts recalled the old adagium 'the Soviets build for workers, not for people.' Path dependencies, the dynamics of self-reinforcing processes, aggravated the power imbalance between economic and planning institutions and between

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industrialized cities and the countryside. In general, the largest cities (and especially the capitals of republics) had the largest enterprises and branches of the most important industrial ministries. After a while, because of prior investment, a large pool of trained personnel, and an increasingly large body of lobbyists, they became even more unavoidable for future investments (White, 1980; Ruble, 1995). More investment further increased the power of the enterprises and industrial ministries, meanwhile undermining the power of local politics and bureaucracy, as well as the power of the planning ministries and their local subsidiaries.

Scientists often backed the planners and local politicians. Mathematical economists, geographers as well as sociologists—if they were permitted—did try to strengthen the planning system by means of scientific arguments (Frolic, 1970, 1971, 1972; Pallot & Shaw, 1981). Yet, overall, planners played a marginal role in the planning process during the whole Soviet era. They were marginalized in the competition with large economic actors (a situation ironically similar to that in the USA; Hough, 1972; White, 1980), and their responsibilities and mandates were not clearly demarcated. Consequently, planners were perceived to be low on the ladder in the Soviet Union (Frolic, 1972; Hamilton, 1973; Huzinec, 1978; French & Hamilton, 1979). As one architecture professor recalled: 'planners—and architects too—could be quite creative, but most of it remained paper fantasies.'

The secrecy surrounding plans (ministries did not know about each other's plans) and the unclear loyalties of planners (officially subordinate to both republic and union) created a situation of permanent tension, permanent insecurity, permanent scarcity of resources, and an eroding belief in the power of planning (Kornai, 1980; Ruble, 1995; Ledeneva, 2006; Ziegler, 2006). Plans from the Soviet era are therefore best read as fictitious plans, because they consistently assumed a power of coordination that was clearly lacking. Plans were built on scientific findings and projections that were incomplete at best. Broader ideological assumptions, often failing in practice, and competition within the state (between personalities, ministries, enterprises, republics, and regions) further reduced the impact of plans. Even in a context of ideological programming, many people were aware of this situation (as became clear in the interviews; see also French, 1995 and elsewhere). 'They were always scrambling. Targets were most important, at least, looking like the targets were met', several political scientists agreed—referring to production targets trumping planning considerations.

The incentives for competing organizations in the planning system to adapt to changing economic circumstances and new user preferences were slight (Hamilton, 1973; Cattell, 1976; contributions in Andrusz, 1984; Andrusz *et al.*, 1996). Fixed price systems and the systemic opacity of Communist organization order (i.e. its inability to monitor itself and provide reliable information) made it impossible to ascertain real costs, to respond to needs or to adapt to resource constraints. Incentives for higher efficiency could only become real and relevant after an organization had tried to master the desired resources at the expense of other organizations, regions, and so on (Pallot & Shaw, 1981; Ruble, 1995). A more diversified supply, for example, of homes would only materialize after top-level politicians forced some change in the policies of various organizations ('Sometimes, for a while, things improved. Sometimes our men could get some

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things done in Moscow'). Making the planning system more sensitive and responsive to changes in society proved a virtually impossible task in the long run (Cattell, 1976; French, 1995; Andrusz *et al*., 1996). To achieve even modest objectives, people were required to use political sycophancy or to bend the law in a variety of minor but corrupting ways (Wilson, 2005; Ledeneva, 2006). Communism also rendered sterile and disorganized civil society; not only were people forced into a passive and fatalistic 'semi-loyalty' (Elster *et al*., 1998; Nodia, 2006), but there was also little public space in which formal associations could challenge existing plans and practices (Hahn, 1988; Hahn and Freidgut, 1994). 'You needed your own contacts, your own friends, and you needed to use them regularly. Organizing didn't make sense, but you could get things done', a journalist recalls. Mass movements and scientific movements arguing for environmental protection and heritage protection succeeded in altering the planning procedures in several places, but the actual results often differed from the intentions of the new, more inclusive plans, just like before. Other fields of political activism were tricky, so other types of signals in the direction of the planning system, or in the direction of politics regarding the planning system, were scarce (French, 1990, p. 95). 'We paid attention to our heritage, before the rest of the USSR', is an often-hear assertion, and an older architect adds: 'old Tbilisi and the churches were good arguments, things they would want to talk about.'

As already indicated, a free market, an abundant source of price signals that can inform planning practice (e.g. under the form of trends in real-estate transactions), did not exist, as land could not be privately owned, and houses could rarely be sold. Social stratification in housing did exist (Smith, 1986; Gachechiladze, 1995; Szelenyi in Andrusz *et al*., 1996) with distant suburbs and older downtowns often at the bottom of the ladder, but moving up in the housing market was largely the result of moving up in communist society, and improving one's social capital *('It is all about the people you know, that decided where you could go'). Since there was no* free market, the developer as a separate role did not exist. Development was initiated and implemented by the Soviet planning authorities and more local levels of administration, as well as by industrial enterprises. The relation between central, regional and local administrations regarding planning and development was highly variable (Taubman, 1973; Hough & Fainsod, 1979).

Within the Soviet planning narrative, the key characters were economists (for *planirovanie,* economic development planning) and planners, especially planners with an architectural background (for *planirovka,* physical planning). Due to many reasons, including the sheer size of the Union, local variations of the general narrative emerged, including other roles; for example, the artistically inspired architect (possibly a local/regional hero), and the local administrator-turned-entrepreneur.

Tbilisi under Communist Planning and Beyond

Under the Soviet regime, the city of Tbilisi, capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, expanded greatly and quickly, and it industrialized. Ethnically and culturally, Tbilisi became a more Georgian city under Soviet rule (Salukvadze, 1993; Suny, 1994; Gachechiladze, 1995). According to local experts, it also

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became a more rural city, in several senses: less cosmopolitan because of the decline of diversity and connections, less urban in a physical sense since some new urban fringes were not landscaped as city space, and less urban in a cultural sense since many new residents neither had the time nor the social, economic, symbolic capital to acculturate in the city (see, for example, Gachechiladze, 1995; Vardosanidze, 2000; Gachechiladze & Salukvadze 2003). Many Tbilisians still complain that 'they—the peasants—didn't know how to behave in the city. They had no clue', and others complained 'civility disappeared, they brought their old habits'. Similar observations were made in other Socialist cities (Andrusz *et al.*, 1996; Boren & Gentile, 2007), especially in metropolitan areas of smaller republics, with fast growth rates, where new urban residents were still dependent on the countryside because of inadequate infrastructure and service provision, therefore because of inadequate planning (Andrusz *et al.*, 1996; Boren & Gentile, 2007; Czaplicka *et al.*, 2009). In Tbilisi, this situation was aggravated because of the traditional gap between city and countryside, a gap with cultural, economic, and financial aspects. Tbilisi's economy became part of the Soviet economy, and—notwithstanding the increasingly Georgian population composition—its outlook became closer to that of other Soviet cities ('It still kept some character, we still had the old town and some other good neighborhoods, but other than that, pfff', several architects complained, in almost identical wording).

Three Master plans were produced, the first one in Kharkow, Ukraine and Tbilisi (1930), and two others (1953 and 1969) in Tbilisi. Only very recently was a new Master plan approved (2009). In the mid-1980s the third Master plan was revised, however. The very long absence of a Master plan is a source of controversy for many local experts. Underlying the controversy are diverging appreciations of the Soviet Master plans, of the Soviet planning system in general ('It didn't work anyway' versus 'No plan, that's chaos'). There is a consensus that the third Master plan had most practical impact, but even that one was not fully implemented (e.g. an envisioned more circular physical city form was never achieved). An operative land-use plan, the preliminary document for a new Master plan, passed in summer 2008, and was shortly followed by the new Master plan in 2009—yet without impact.

Moscow assigned high importance to Tbilisi as the center of the Caucasus, and located a high number of scientific institutes and universities there (leading to a highly educated population, unfortunately not a very prosperous one; cf. French, 1995). A shared sense of identity and purpose led to effective cooperation between regional elites, using the resources and connections of the official system, as well as grey circuits. In addition, a generally observed 'willingness to pay' (bribe) in the Caucasian republics did resort effect in Moscow (itself the hub of a corruption as centralized as the state). Bribery did often lead to more investment, or increased flexibility. (Nodia, 2006; interviews) Personal connections of city architects and local politicians enhanced this effect, visible in some site-specific urban designs in Tbilisi ('This square would not have been possible without the city architect's friends in Moscow. He could get away with this', a journalist observed). The relative success of local and regional lobbies undermined the trust in the official planning system even more—proving that its intentions could be bent relatively easily.

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All this accounts in large measure for a certain 'planning cynicism' among the population. Planning in the sense of effective long-range visions for city development, or in the sense of balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders, rarely took place. And everyone knew it. The Master plans, although supposed to be comprehensive, were undermined from the start. In addition, these plans were too rigid and too design oriented. It is hardly surprising that citizens became apathetic about collective planning aspirations ('Don't go there. It never worked'). This legacy is important to understand the recent evolutions. Most of the current resistance to Master plans in politics and administration, and among the population (most respondents to our survey were not in favor of more planning or a new master plan), seems to stem from distrust in planning as such, but also from a conception of a Master plan as a blueprint, as overly ambitious urban design ('It's not possible to say exactly how the city will look in 20 years from now,' stated even planning experts when probed about the need for a new master plan). All remember that this did not work, that practice was very different. People also remember the infighting, the tough politicking, and the boring, uniform neighborhoods (a frequent complaint in the surveys) that resulted. Many people do desire some form of planning, in response to the more chaotic and unfair use of urban space under local capitalism ('now, everything seems possible, nobody seems to care about our beautiful city'), but even those people do not want to go back to the Soviet-style planning system.

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Reinvention of Planning in a Reinvented State

Georgian planners had little influence on the development of Tbilisi. Under the Soviets, the actual competition determining the shape and size of the city took place within the state, between ministries and institutes, between union, republic and city. Mostly, the competing actors adopted common standards and responded rather uniformly to the Soviet system they were operating in. After independence, however, the previously non-existent developers took the lead, and most old players were reduced to passive observers. Planning driven by projects defined by developers was new, and the concept of 'project' was redefined simultaneously, acquiring the meaning of a temporary organization, led by a developer, shaped by the taste, knowledge, means, and organizational capacity of that developer. Developers needed to acquire a construction site, where previously land did not have a value, acquire all the materials, previously under-valued, and acquire the knowledge, previously in academia, administration or state enterprises like building companies (Salukvadze, 1999, 2006; Shavishvili, 2003; for the post-socialist construction of 'value', see Verdery, 2004). Among professionals, complaints abound about the skills and competence of many developers: 'They have no idea what they're doing', 'Things might look good on paper, often they don't even know how to build it.'

One of the results was the shrinking of plans: planning became project-planning, undertaken by developers and architects working for them, while the official planners became passive, at the most able to formulate some requirements for the project. With the growing size of development companies, and the banking and mortgage sector (Salukvadze, 1999, 2006; Sulukhia in Van Assche *et al.*,

2009), the size of project plans also grows, and some of the issues generally labeled as 'planning' come back into the picture—outdoor spaces, public space, placement of buildings, provision of services (see Shavishvili, 2003).

Whereas participation under the Communist planning system hardly existed, attempts at interactive or participatory planning remain scarce in the current planning system (Chkaidze, 2006; Nodia, 2006; on political/policy participation in general). Vardosanidze (in Van Assche *et al.*, 2009) analyzed recent Georgian laws, often including paragraphs on citizen participation, and concluded that real citizen participation is rarely produced by them. We argue that this scarcity derives from the lack of interest with politicians in citizen participation (cf. interviews), the lack of interest on the part of citizens (cf. surveys), but also from the difficulties planners have with the concept of participatory planning. Direct citizen involvement would require a change in the self-image of planners, a changing conception of their role. In a situation where planning is generally marginalized, some of the planners in the administrations, and planners in academia and other institutions, cling to ideals and strategies inherited from the communist era, sometimes nostalgically ('We need an old Master plan', 'we need to stick to the norms', 'we need to fight the developers,' and so on). In other cases, they do redefine their role and see themselves more as facilitators of coordination processes, as network brokers ('bringing people together'). Alternatively, they see themselves as producers and advocates of more comprehensive urban design ('It would be very nice if we could develop ideas for larger areas again, not just a square here and a fountain there').

So, partly in response to external forces, partly because of internal innovations, planners are redefining themselves in a number of ways (Forester, 1999), but citizen participation is not often considered. Institutions have not been specifically redesigned to increase and deepen citizen participation in the planning process. Indirectly, satisfaction or dissatisfaction of citizens does creep into political decision-making (e.g. in the recently abated attacks on illegal construction since fall 2007), but this cannot be considered as direct citizen participation in planning ('People got very upset when their store was torn down').

Roles and Social Differentiation

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a re-definition of roles in Tbilisi's planning system, with planners taking the back seat. Since new narratives for society as a whole ('Who are we, what kind of society do we want?') were competing and continue to compete, new narratives for planning compete. Different models of planning, in several variations, have their champions, in academia and in the administration. We did observe a preference for the American model of minimum planning and maximum property rights, in politics and high administration ('We don't need old-fashioned plans, just good and simple rules that work for everyone'). We believe this can be linked to a lingering distrust in planning in general, a strong belief in the 'rule of law' as the best way to temper wild-west capitalism, and a general orientation towards the USA for development models ('We studied everything, this would be best for our development', several governmental experts explained). Experts in Tbilisi often added that the USA was

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'much more active', and more focused in its policies regarding Georgia. Education is one of the relevant fields there, and American academia, through extensive grant programs, is clearly more influential than Europe. Only very recently, the Georgian education system is also slowly being 'Europeanized': the entire higher education system has joined the European Union's Bologna process and orients itself more decisively than before to the distinctive institutions and practices of the European Union.

In terms derived from Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, we can say that the Georgian planning system has become functionally or horizontally *differentiated*. In a democratic society, societal domains such as politics, economy, science, and art, are differentiated in the sense that these different systems all operate according to their specific language, logic, dynamics and external influences. For Luhmann, this functional differentiation brings about major advantages for society as a whole. Most importantly, differentiation allows for a more refined response to change, because it allows for the internal construction of more complex models of environments (Luhmann, 1995; Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008).

A measure of such functional differentiation is the degree of insulation of 'function systems' (economy, politics, law, science, etc.) from each other and the limited convertibility of status attributes from one system to the other. State socialism is an institutional order that systematically obstructs functional or horizontal differentiation and maximizes inter-system convertibility of resources, thereby creating a pattern of 'tight coupling' of systems (Luhmann, 1997 [1988], 843ff; Elster *et al.*, 1998, p. 31). If the state executive can directly mandate investment decisions, or if, conversely, large investors can 'buy' seats in the legislature or positions in the administration, we deal with instances of 'tight coupling' (Seidl, 2005) or 'de-differentiation', which is the opposite of 'loose coupling' in functionally differentiated systems. The latter is a model of functional and institutional pluralism with a rich variety of societal spheres, each of them staffed with professional, competent actors 'that are capable of performing the specific function assigned to them without being under the dictate of, corrupted by, or otherwise subjected to binding premises set by the agents within other sectors or domains' (Elster *et al.*, 1998, p. 31).

In Soviet Tbilisi, a series of de-differentiations had turned law and economy into subsidiary systems of politics (Waters, 2004; Darchiashvili, 2005; Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006), and this affected the planning system directly. Planning, under internal and external influences of high modernism (Scott, 1998), did participate in the scientific system, and the scientific status of planning permitted some independence from political decision-making. Opening of the intellectual horizons of architects after independence created a new stream of ideas (as testified by our interviews and observations), and their enhanced role in the planning system, often via developers, gave an outlet for these ideas, gave a new impetus to artistic influence on the planning system ('before, we had no idea what happened elsewhere, architectural journals were very very hard to get by', several architects complained). New differentiations are taking place, and law, economy, politics, art, and science are redefining their roles in Georgian society. Planning as the coordination of decision-making is changing accordingly ('Before, nobody would listen

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to a lawyer, now all the developers have them, and the city needs better lawyers', a political scientist told us, expressing an opinion shared by many experts).

Georgia on the whole is becoming a more differentiated society. In the case of Tbilisi planning, the new differentiations meant directly that fictions of scientific planning crumbled, that the need for an equitable planning law was generally accepted, and that a central role for a capitalist economy in planning was deemed desirable. Georgian society is still in a process of further differentiation, and the empirical data do not always clarify the equitability of the actions of the planning administration, its balancing of interests (one view of its role) or the protection of rights (another view). There is a pervasive belief among experts and citizens that 'the rich can do whatever they want', that ' if you're close—to the president—you can build whatever you like, if you find the money' (King, 2001; Jokhadze, 2005).

We can say that the planning system produces its roles and *vice versa*. Radical changes in society, such as a move from communism to capitalist democracy, will require a whole new planning narrative (Throgmorton, 1996; Hillier, 2002) based on a new set of differentiations between the function-systems (Luhmann, 1989, 1990). There are limits to the capacity of society to re-design the planning system, however. Besides the sadly traditional lack of resources, resistance to change, and opportunism in chaos, there are path dependencies delimiting transformation options. For Luhmann, democracy entails de-centering, diminishing control of the political system over the other systems (Luhmann, 1990a; King & Thornhill, 2003). Democratization naturally increases the options for citizen participation, one would expect (Whitehead, 2002). Simultaneously, legacies of the past are at play, in shaping the real options for participation (North, 2005; Wilson, 2005; Ledeneva, 2006).

Citizen Participation and the Construction of Citizenship

What are the possibilities for a more participatory approach? Despite widely diverging expectations, some principles for the planning of Tbilisi are generally agreed upon by citizens and experts. Protection of heritage ('save old Tbilisi, it is crumbling, still'), better combinations of old and new architecture (Van Assche, 2006b) ('awful, how they're screwing up the nice neighborhoods'), basic environmental planning ('people can hardly breathe now, there's no light, and no parking space'), and protection and creation of public and green space ('there, that used to be park') are deemed necessary. When asked directly about the importance of planning, most people did not seem to care; but when confronted with a number of issues that could be tackled using planning, the opinions became much stronger. This points in the direction that most people do not know what planning could be, and that some form of planning, assuming governmental planning power, might be required to get results. 'We need more professionalism' is an often-heard outcry. Another one is that the government should 'pay more attention again.' Almost no one, however, considers new forms of active citizenship (e.g. direct participation in planning). So nobody asks the question of who could conceivably organize this, and within which institutional framework.

Planners would be unlikely candidates to organize participatory planning. There are only few planners left within the administration ('which planners are you

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talking about?'), almost uniquely at city level. There is no national planning administration left—a ministry existed for a short while after the Rose Revolution—and regional planning exists only on paper ('ah, regional planning, you're interested in regional planning. Well, let me tell you . . . '). Very few of the remaining planners will actively lobby for more planning, let alone for participatory planning. The re-introduction of 'the planner' as a role, and the accompanying re-distribution of roles, will have to be initiated somewhere else. Several steps in that direction are being taken right now, some originating in academia, some initiated by 'enlightened' developers, rightly considering a rule-bound planning system in their long-term interest ('People will remember that we took away the little park. We do need strong rules, but they need to be clear, simple, and we all have to follow them').

Education and research in planning is also undergoing considerable change. The university system has been under reorganization since 2006, with a new incentive structure oriented towards higher teaching productivity, and western publication standards. Many Soviet-educated scholars have been fired, or retired, and the ones that stay, are often young and western oriented. A new generation of professionals in architecture and landscape architecture, but also politics, sociology, geography, and public administration, is under way, many of which argue for, and would like to be involved in, spatial planning. At this point, there are no signs of emerging planning programs, and the local academics and civil servants interviewed do not expect to see much change. It is assumed that improving and reorienting architecture, political science, and geography (with geographic information systems) will generate all the expertise needed to improve spatial organization. Planning, formerly taught only in Russia, does not require a specialized education.

It is further assumed by most stakeholders interviewed that centralized planning, or planning including visioning, is not necessary, and that an American combination of strong property laws and creative developers/architects will bring out the best possible spatial organization in the most efficient manner. Science is helpful to the extent that it increases the efficiency of the political system and of the administration. In 2009, a new Master Plan was finally adopted, but already it is clear that its impact is limited. As soon as economic or political opportunities arise that contradict the intentions of the plan, it is ignored—as in several new infrastructure projects ('It's not even out, and it's already ignored, thrown in the waste-basket', an older planning professor exclaimed).

Citizen participation is imagined by experts in academia and administration as voting for politicians who will be assisted by civil servants. Scientific experts are useful to define the minimum regulation that optimizes markets, while minimizing social problems. Politicians pass appropriate legislation, and citizens participate by behaving in a disciplined manner, obeying the laws. Very often, the 'boorish behavior of ruralized Tbilisians' was deplored by academics and civil servants alike. The same topic emerged from the surveys, where many citizens were disappointed with the behavior of their fellow citizens, disregarding the law.

In other words, citizen participation is framed as participation in a representative democracy, and working towards a well-functioning representative democracy. Direct participation of citizens in governance (e.g. planning processes) is not considered. Whereas the western literature on participatory governance and

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deliberative democracy (for example, Dryzek, 2000; Haier and Wagenaar, 2003) invokes a second line of power, power by participation, in parallel with the traditional power by representation, the main actors in Georgian planning largely stuck to a representative model. At the same time, the more critical observers did not believe that the current political regime would allow for true representation ('They like it the way it is, whatever they're saying'). Going to the street en masse, is for many critical intellectuals, politicians, and for large groups of citizens, the only trusted way to show disapproval of the regime (Wheatly, 2008). But planning is not important enough to fight for (in both surveys and interviews it did not emerge as a most pressing issue).

More in general, the possibilities to deepen citizen participation in the planning process are highly constrained by a series of path dependencies, many of which have been discussed above. The lack of citizen participation under communism still casts its shadow: the general distrust in communist planning translated into a general distrust in planning and makes it hard to directly engage citizens in the planning decision-making process. The false promises of communism (Bater, 1980) and the chaotic 1990s did produce a strong distaste for big government, while many still expect the security blanket and the strong hand of big government ('Why don't they build factories and give us jobs?'). As said, citizens do not know how they could participate in planning, and in politics in general, other than by voting or by going to the street and ousting the regime (as indicated by the research of Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006; Bader, 2008; and our surveys). On the part of the government, an executive branch suspicious of its own administration ('still full of communists', 'very hard to work with, opposed to change'), of the democratic resume of the opposition and of the un-experienced and unreasonable citizen ('somewhat spoilt. They want everything at the same time, right now') did write laws on strong local government and on citizen participation in planning, but is extremely hesitant in giving them any real content (Vardosanidze in Van Assche *et al.*, 2009; Gallina, 2010).

Because civil society is disorganized and their interests are often closely knit with party politics ('I know where they're coming from . . . '), there is little public space to voice objections to current planning. Party politics is such that a smooth transfer of power is still hard to imagine. One leader—with an assembly of allies labeled 'party'—tends to be followed by another, coalitions are hard to build (Wheatly, 2005; Way, 2009). The various political parties are not geared toward debate of different positions, and formation of consensus; only towards partisan opposition. Citizens are either passive observers, or partisans while there are some creative forms of critical discourse around; Manning, 2007). But not only civil society and the formal political system are tied up with each other; within the political system itself the executive branch dominates the administration at all levels, which has repercussions for the functioning of city planning. Lack of independent judgment, and a lacking demarcation of powers and responsibilities (politics can interfere any moment) is paralyzing for the planning administration ('For bigger projects, they're powerless', was an often heard complaint about the planning administration, acknowledged without too many words by insiders).

Arguing for citizen participation is an unlikely strategy if all parties feel that they are in a struggle for survival (Coppieters and Legvold, 2005; Gallina, 2010);

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such an argument will have to come from academia. But there, the minds are preoccupied with either old-style planning, American-style planning-as-property-rights-protection, or planning as the quest for beautiful architecture. In most cases, old academic (Soviet) networks have been shattered, and connections with the Russian planning schools lost, which means that knowledge in the planning system is lost—without much to replace it. As said, there was never a planning education in Tbilisi, and the new academics generally assume the irrelevance of planning and/or a specialized planning education. Today, the growing influence of developers, often with an architectural background, is reinforcing the primacy of architecture in whatever planning education and planning practice that is left. Very few planners argue for more citizen participation (see, for example, Vardosanidze, 2000; Vardosanidze in Van Assche *et al*., 2009). In the broader field of political and policy analysis, there are pleas for an empowerment of citizens, but mostly in the form of critiques of the current quality of representation, not pleas for more direct participation (Wheatly, 2005; Nodia, 2006; Bader, 2008; Gallina, 2010).

If the stream of ideas from citizens to parties to executive and administration, and the stream directly from citizens to administration and/or executive would have a stable institutional structure, then the role of citizens (e.g. in planning) could be much more varied. In other words: a more meaningful citizen participation in planning will only be possible when the other line of power, representation, is more functional. When the familiar institutionalized forms of citizen representation such as competitive elections and representation through organized groups in civil society (which should be independent from the political system) do not work properly, the mere institutionalization of participatory mechanisms designed to directly engage citizens in the planning-making process will not suffice. Participation and representation, as the two main lines of power in a democracy, will need to find a balance that is functional and acceptable within a specific configuration of social systems (Luhmann, 1990a; Kornai and Rose-Ackerman, 2004; Van Assche, 2004, 2007, 2008; Van Ark, 2005).

Within the system of politics, it seems that new forms of opposition are needed (Devdariani, 2004; Cornell, 2005; Chkaidze, 2006), forms that might inspire different forms of cooperation with the executive branch. New forms of participation that provide citizens with a more substantial role in decision-making within planning (e.g. community meetings, direct legislation, etc.) can obviously help to maximize local influence, refine and hone different policy options, increase legitimacy and generate better-informed decisions. Yet, participatory planning alone cannot replace the tandem politics/administration working on spatial organization based on information that reached them through elections and via forms of political activism.

Georgia was recently called a 'pseudo-democracy' (Gallina, 2010; see also Manning, 2007; Chiaberishvili and Tevzadze, 2005), but we deem this judgment too harsh. Much reform in administration, police, higher education, and environmental policy is more than cosmetic or superficial. Unfortunately, the piecemeal approach, a generally observed lack of consistency, does tend to jeopardize the gains of recent years. A clear separation of powers is not yet in place, and a dysfunctional court system risks to undermine reform efforts in many areas—among which planning. Therefore, we do believe that Georgia will need to

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focus first on larger institutional reform, before participatory planning can be meaningful in any way. Politics is still largely elite politics, power shifts are largely shifts in and between networks of interest groups and privileged individuals, and parts of the institutional reform thus far are for western consumption, destined to remain paper tigers ('Oh, that, yes, that's what the West likes to hear'). The ruling elite does not yet abstain from illegal interference in politics and administration, and this hampers the separation of powers that could make reforms more irreversible (Gallina, 2008).

In Georgia, the communist de-differentiation of law, politics, economy, and administration has given way to a more differentiated society, but the separation of powers that comes with democracy is still in the making (Darchiashvili, 2005; Nodia, 2006; Manning, 2007; Bader, 2008; Gallina, 2010). A clear preference for American-style planning, protecting individual property rights, is translated into law, instilled in administration, citizens. Other preferences, for other planning systems, with different roles for citizens, and different qualities created for citizens, are hard to promote, because of the strong dominance of the political system, the limited autonomy of administration, the legal system, and of the scientific system. In a more fully differentiated society, with truly independent function systems, signals leading to change, to adaptation, come from many directions. In Georgia, law, administration, economy, even science, is to a large extent subservient to the circles around the president. This does not mean that initiative is entirely stifled, and it does not mean that all policies and reforms originating in these circles are meaningless or corrupting, but it does signify that the capacity of society for self-transformation is still low.

Changing Frames for Planning

Very recently, the central government initiated several planning projects in symbolic places outside Tbilisi: historic Sighnagi, religious Mtskheta, autonomous Batumi, 'the second capital'. All these initiatives, however, excluded citizens from decision-making; even local politics was largely ignored (cf. interviews). New forms of citizen participation are desirable, since the present system lacks clear information about citizen preferences.

But how should it be done? Regardless of the difficulties in implementing participatory planning locally, do we have at least one clear target, a final goal? The literature on participatory planning (Sager, 1994; Healy, 1997) does not offer a consensus on recipes, and a close inspection of a transitional country like Georgia deepens the understanding why single recipes for success or 'best practice' approaches cannot be very helpful. The context-specific differentiation of politics, administration, law, economy, education, and the path dependencies marking this evolutionary process of mutual adaptation shape the frames for citizen participation. In other words: the local history of the interactions between law, politics, and so forth, does not only create unique obstacles to participatory planning, it also generates unique goals. What is possible and what is desirable crystallizes in the same history of differentiation and de-differentiation.

In Georgia's turbulent history, representative democracy and civil society do not have deep roots. Since Robert Putnam (1993) and Douglas North (1990, 2005),

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the importance of informal institutions for institutional reform is widely recognized, and, with that, the importance of positive and negative path dependencies, the persistence of civic traditions in one place, of corruption elsewhere (e.g. informal and formal institutions together) will determine the outcome of policy reform, increasing the unpredictability of reform, increasing the need to analyze informal institutions first (Allina-Pisano, 2008; Hann, 2002; Ledeneva, 2006; Van Assche, 2008). We argue that informal institutions, as cognitive and communicative frames that create order in social interactions, and as such can be perceived as 'rules' (Greiff, 2007), emerge in the evolutionary process of the planning system. In Georgia, Soviet de-differentiation left a legacy of distrust in government, distrust in planning, and a conception of spatial planning as urban design. Disappointment with planning and socialism led to overly high—and poorly informed—expectations regarding capitalism and democracy (Grzymala-Busse & Jones Luong, 2002). With that, people still expect the government to take care of many things, and they expect the free market to take care of others. Few people understand that their own expectations will have to be adjusted, and their own rather passive role will have to be revised in order to achieve the kind of society dreamed of. At the same time, Soviet de-differentiation also enabled elites to stay in power, to remain opaque, and for elite groups to compete without affecting elite control as such (Suny, 1995; Higley & Lengyel, 2000; Way, 2009). So, even when people *do* try to assert new ideas and practice new forms of active citizenship, the history of de-differentiation creates formidable obstacles. Within the political system, it is hard to allow for more participation because the citizens are not trusted, because of permanent crisis, because the basic infrastructure of representative democracy requires attention first. (And, for some, because elite control should remain intact.)

Laws and rules, formal institutions and formal institutional reform work better in a highly differentiated society (Luhmann, 1989, 1990a; Elster *et al.*, 1998). Citizen participation is easier to institutionalize *within* a society where the other line of power, representation, is already functional. Finding a balance between participation and representation is more likely when the controls of a differentiated society work. Otherwise, direct participation can reinforce existing tendencies towards de-differentiation (Van Assche, 2006a, 2008). Giving power to local planning initiatives in a situation where property rights are not always clarified or protected, where local stakeholders can be tainted by less attractive informal institutions—like bribery and clan—like power structures, where the administration might not enforce minimum environmental rules, and politics might interfere at any moment, is probably not a good idea. Pilot projects in the countryside, aiming at participatory planning for local economic development (supported by several American organizations), mostly led to paper plans, fake representation and participation, and an increased distrust in planning as such ('another wasteful exercise', 'we were asking ourselves 'what are we doing here?'). In other cases, the government implemented plans (Sighnagi is an example) in a distinctly non-participatory fashion, and collected (invariably positive) opinions afterwards. Often, people do not care, and rank planning low on their priority list (cf. survey and interviews). Material conditions are such that planning is perceived as a luxury. That planning could help in improving these conditions is usually not observed.

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Right now, the form of participation that is deemed most desirable by experts and lay people alike is voting in an upgraded political system, with Tbilisi politics more independent from Georgian politics, law and economy more independent from politics. People do hope for a planning administration that is staffed by independent-minded professionals willing to listen to suggestions or complaints, and willing to make plans that embody the principles people agree upon: preserving old Tbilisi, preserving the parks, protecting the attractive neighborhoods from rampant high-density development, enforcement of building codes and environmental regulations. Tbilisians are highly educated, they love their city, are knowledgeable about its qualities and its problems, and are not entirely cynical about possible improvements. That gives hope for the future.

As for western observers, analysts, and planners, we might do well to re-examine our assumptions on state, society, citizens and planning (Tilley, 1975; Anderson, 1999; Vardosanidze, 2000; Midgal, 2001), before we try to export formal institutions that worked in some western countries, supported by informal institutions in a context of high differentiation. Elsewhere, they might do more harm than good (Ledeneva, 2006; Allina-Pisano, 2008).

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