# Participation,
## local control and collective action[1]

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The purpose of this thematic paper is to elaborate the concept of participation in relation to tenant involvement in open space management in Swedish rental housing areas. The title contains three distinct but partly interlacing concepts. The concept of *participation* is used in many different contexts and refers to different things. Most typically it means that stakeholders without formal power positions are involved in planning, decision-making or implementation processes. In the context of tenant involvement in open space management, a group of tenants participates in what is normally the responsibility of the housing company and its staff. Participation can in this case be understood as tenants' participation in the housing company's management work. However, it can also be understood as tenants' participation in the work of a tenants' group.

The concept of *local control* takes its departure in the fact that power execution in society can always be described in terms of centre and periphery, where the 'local' represents the power periphery affected by central decision-making. Local control is thus a question of power distribution between the local and the central, and in the case of managing rental housing areas it refers to the actual level of influence exercised by the tenants in the area. Participation is one means of enabling or enhancing local control.

The concept of *collective action*, finally, describes a group of individuals doing something together to achieve a common goal. Tenant involvement in open space management as it has been described here is a typical example of collective action. Collective action is not necessarily a question of power distribution, even if it normally leads to local empowerment. Participation is not necessarily based on collective action. When it comes to local community participation processes, however, the concept of collective action is often applicable.

The term *involvement* also deserves to be mentioned here in relation to the other concepts. As the notion is used here, involvement is a form of participation whereby tenants are involved collectively and directly in practical management work.

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Local control and collective action will henceforth be discussed as two perspectives of participation (as well as of involvement). In the first part of the paper, participation is examined from a power perspective in terms of local control and the possibility of citizens or tenants to have influence on decisions concerning their lifeworld. In the second part of the paper, it is looked at from a game theory perspective, analysing the possibilities for and hinders to collective action, in general and in the context of tenant influence. First, however, some possible arguments for why participation is needed will be discussed.

**What is participation good for?**

Participation is normally seen as something essentially good, and it is often argued in general terms that it is needed for society. For example, as stated in Agenda 21, §23.2: "One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making" (UNCED, 1992). A relevant question, though, which is often neglected, is *what* participation is supposed to be good for, i.e. exactly *how* it can support sustainable development. Some general arguments for participation have been suggested, for example:

- It is an ethical principle that everyone should have a say in decisions which concern them and that participation implies more direct influence than does a system of representative democracy.
- The broad participation of many stakeholders brings a broad body of knowledge into the planning and decision-making process. In particular, it has been asserted that local stakeholders may contribute valuable local knowledge (see, e.g., Kain, 2003).
- "[E]ffective change cannot be imposed from outside" (Stiglitz, 1998, p. 20), acknowledging a need for fundamental shifts in the way people think. Through participation, Stiglitz argues, citizens will be owners of the problems and the process of finding solutions and will thereby also be receptive to thoughts of fundamental reevaluation of worldviews and habits. This perspective emphasises participation as a learning process.

However, these arguments are often not made explicit and are rarely scrutinised. One of those who has criticised the unreflected praise of participation is geographer Madeleine Granvik (2005), who has studied hinders to the implementation of sustainable development policies in local communities in Sweden and Russia. One dilemma she mentions is that the late modern lifestyle does not offer people incentives to spend necessary personal resources on participation processes. She also argues that there are no guarantees that people who engage will try to enforce what is sustainable, but that there is a great risk that they will rather fight for their own narrow self-interests which may well be unsustainable.

> The idea about sustainable development, bottom-up perspective, communitarianism, deliberative democracy, Habermas' genuine dialogue, Healey's collaborative planning and Gedde's 'civics' are well intended, but would require a cultural revolution in order to come true.
> (Granvik, 2005, p.99)

While participation in some situations may lead to more progressive politics dealing with emerging problems, it is also likely that it will take a more conservative approach in other situations, resisting social reforms which may be needed for a sustainable development. Sociologist Sophie Body-Gendrot (2000, p. 242) reflects on the traditional republican ideology conditioning a communitarian grassroots movement in the US:

> Empowering residents, neighbourhoods, and territories to compensate for dysfunctional public services is the goal of a participatory democracy. But for what purpose? The stability of the democratic system or its transformation?

Another issue connected to participation is not only that it requires skills and knowledge, but also that it takes time to process. As asserted by Gerard van Bortel and David Mullins (2009, p. 215),

> …demanding a perfect and uncompromising compliance with all rules and norms at all times might seriously damage the efficiency of decision-making. So it is important to find a pragmatic balance between efficiency and democracy.

It can be concluded that it is difficult to establish how much participation is needed in general, but that it must be studied more concretely in context. It is also important to note that 'local' is a relative concept which means that the framing of each situation will influence the outcome of the analysis. In other words, if participation increases a group of tenants' local control in an area, it may still be in conflict with 'larger-scale' interests (such as how to distribute resources between areas in the city district) as well as 'smaller-scale' interests (such as how to distribute resources between groups in the area). In the following sections, participation will be discussed in relation to the perspectives of local control and collective action.

## Participation and local control

As stated above, one fundamental dimension of participation is that it may empower the 'local', i.e. strengthen the power position of individuals or groups who otherwise have little influence over planning, decision-making or implementation. The power relation in the case of any citizen participation can be understood as a relationship between one party constituted by established, central power holders (authorities, landlords, etc.) and the other party which is the people, the grassroots, the local citizens, etc. One notion for the aim of citizen participation, connecting it to the central–local dimension, is to increase the *local control*, i.e. give more influence to those concerned on a local basis.

One of the most classical texts on citizen participation is a 1969 article in the Journal of American Institute of Planners by Sherry Arnstein. In the introduction she proposes that "the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you". Henri Lefebvre has also been a bit sarcastic about the ambiguity of the participation ideology which "enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price". However, he continues, after "a more or less elaborate pretence at information and social activity, they return to their tranquillity and retirement" (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 145). These re-

marks call for the need to go beyond rhetoric figures and aims when analysing participation processes.

In her article, Arnstein (1969) images a *ladder of citizen participation* (see Figure 1) as a hierarchal typology of participation setups. A ladder is to be climbed, and the metaphor disqualifies the lower rungs of 'quasi-participatory' 'manipulation' and 'therapy', as well as different forms of 'tokenism' on the way to the top rung of 'true participation' with 'citizen control'.

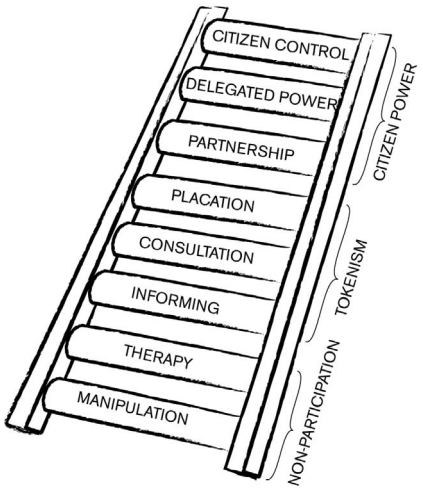



Figure 1. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation has appeared in different versions, adapted to different contexts. Bo Bengtsson has developed a slightly similar model of formal influence over decision-making. According to Bengtsson, formal influence is a 'zero-sum game', which means it is only about the distribution of an absolute amount of power between two parties. Hence, if one party gains more influence the other party loses an equivalent amount of influence. Bengtsson's model of formal influence is symmetrical, with three steps on each side of the equilibrium point; see Table 1.

Table 1. A model of formal influence in a decision-making situation (adopted from Bengtsson & Berger, 2005).

| | **Party A** (e.g., the tenants in a housing area) | **Party B** (e.g., the landlord) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | No influence | Decision right |
| 2 | Right to information | Decision right |
| 3 | Right to consultation | Decision right |
| 4 | Negotiation right (incl. veto right) | Negotiation right (incl. veto right) |
| 5 | Decision right | Right to consultation |
| 6 | Decision right | Right to information |
| 7 | Decision right | No influence |

Bengtsson's model can be understood as valid for all kinds of decision-making situations, but only for the *formal* part of the decisive power, i.e. what is regulated in laws or agreements. *Factual* influence is something different, and a much more complex power relation, which Bengtsson also emphasises. Real influence must be studied in its particular context and situation.

**Local control in rental housing areas: resident influence on housing estate management**

How can local control be understood in the context of rental housing areas? George Galster (2001) suggests that neighbourhoods are produced by the same actors that consume them – people living, working or spending their leisure time there. This is a drastic over-simplification, as will be discussed below. Sten Göransson and Mats Lieberg (2000) establish that the residents are the obvious target group for housing estate management, and although there are other stakeholders and interests involved, it is not a controversial standpoint to put all the focus on the residents. The main consumers of 'neighbourhoods', particularly in the relatively peripheral and mono-functional housing areas from the Swedish million homes programme era, are unhesitatingly those who live there. Housing companies, local authorities, local business-makers and visitors may also be viewed as 'consumers' of neighbourhood attributes, but in a much less direct sense. Are the residents also the main producers of the neighbourhood? This question is actually a central concern for those who promote tenant involvement in open space management or other forms of local community participation. Indeed, the whole 'right to the city' debate is based on a presupposed mismatch between who produces and who consumes urban spaces, and is can be seen as criticism of a situation in which citizens are reduced to mere consumers without real influence on the production of space.

In a previous study of tenant influence through management associations, Per Mogård and Stefan K.A. Svensson (1984) develop a model for analysing and categorising different types of tenant influence, based on four variables:

(a) *organisational level*, i.e. the scale of the scope, ranging from individual apartments to the whole housing company

(b) the *level of influence*, reminiscent of Bengtsson's formal influence model (see Table 1)

(c) *form of influence*, comprising the two dimensions of individual vs. collective and direct vs. indirect influence

(d) which *issues* are concerned by the influence

Although Mogård and Svensson's model provides for a much richer typologisation than Bengtsson's model of formal influence, it still sticks to the formal arrangements and misses a number of conditions which are never regulated in written agreements. Bengtsson proposes some key factors, in addition to the formal arrangements, for the analysis of *factual* resident influence (Bengtsson & Berger 2005):

(a) *decision mandate* on the local level (i.e. how much formal influence the local area staff have in relation to the central administration of the housing company)

(b) the tenants' *insight* into the decision-making processes

(c) the tenants' own *resources* (e.g. networks, skills, time)

(d) the risk for *interest conflicts* (between the tenants and the landlord)

One of the main conclusions from the evaluation of the project 'Democracy and self-management' in one of the public housing companies in Göteborg is that the local area management staff play a significant role in supporting the active tenant groups (Bengtsson et al., 2003, p.235). The company had gone through a reorganisation whereby the *decision mandates* were decentralised, giving more authority to the local offices and the staff there. Similar experiences have been documented from another large project on tenant participation in Malmö (Alfredsson & Cars, 1996). The residents' *insight* into the decision-making processes of their landlords is generally very limited, according to Bengtsson et al. (2003, p. 234). There are examples, though, of local managers at their own initiative informing and consulting with tenants about upcoming decisions, which gives the tenants a certain degree influence. Resident *resources* refer to aspects such as time, money, experience of collaboration and organisation, social networks and different kinds of special competences (Bengtsson et al., 2003, p. 235). The resources needed for gardening and other open space maintenance activities are relatively accessible. There is often no need for high financial investment, the only equipment needed consists of common tools, and most people have basic competences for the tasks. The challenges are more of an organisation character. When it comes to the *risk for interest conflicts*, it can be concluded that such a risk is low regarding participation in management of residential yards (Bengtsson et al., 2003, p. 235). The tenant collective and the landlords often have relatively converging interests in maintaining attractive and functional living environments at a moderate cost.

Another model of how residents' influence can be increased takes its departure in the understanding of that both conflict and cooperation between the parties can be constructive for development. A *conflict* perspective, acknowledging that the residents and the landlord may have contradictive goals, emphasises the importance of the residents organising themselves and taking responsibility, which can be underpinned by education and awareness as well as enforced formal powers and rights. A *cooperation* perspective, acknowledging that there are also common goals, emphasises that long-term collaboration may be mutually beneficial to both parties. Cooperation may be enhanced through the creation of meeting places, forums for discussion, committees, etc. As a third perspective, *support and care* can be added, acknowledging the complexity of the situation and individual residents' different desires; see Table 2. It emphasises sensitive methods for mapping and analysing needs and problems.

Table 2. Three perspectives of how residents' influence may be strengthened [source unknown].

| perspective | **conflict** | **cooperation** | **support and care** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *aim* | increase residents knowledge and power | create forums for meeting and collaboration between residents and landlords | improve methods for mapping and analysing needs and problems |
| *outcome* | collective action, grassroots organisation, local control | long-term cooperation about service provision, order and amenities, etc. | authorities and housing companies consider residents' individual situations |

Rebecca Tunstall (2001) makes a distinction between *participation* and the often inconsistently and overlappingly used term *devolution*. As she uses the terms in her study of tenant involvement in housing management, devolution is the structural component of how the management is organised in terms of relocating responsibilities, powers, and organisational units more small-scale and closer to the tenants, while participation refers to tenants being involved in and controlling different management activities, regarding planning, decision-making and implementation. Both devolution and participation can be analysed in terms of formal organisational setup as well as real practice. From her case study, Tunstall concludes that organisational devolution can be associated with more active participation. She also concludes that real devolution is necessary for many of the outcomes normally associated with participation to take place.

However, she also shows that participation as well as devolution may have both positive and negative impacts on the effectiveness of the management. While devolution outcomes such as greater autonomy for local staff and increased job satisfaction may increase the effectiveness, it may be reduced due to a lack of support or strategic direction. Participation, according to Tunstall, may improve as well as worsen the relations between management staff and residents; it may be efficient due to increased peer pressure, and it may be inefficient due to more variety.

**Participation in interplace and local empowerment**

Another way of approaching the social interplay between actors in a participation process is with Jenny Stenberg's metaphor of the *interplace* (Stenberg, 2004). Stenberg adopts the concept from Bosse Forsén and Lasse Fryk, who have developed a specific model for education in social work in close cooperation with the local community. Forsén and Fryk (1998) write about the need to create 'interplaces' (*mellanrum*) where people can meet in a constructive dialogue on equal conditions. The 'places' are the established spatial, social and cultural contexts where those who are 'familiarised' (*rumsligt orienterade*) feel comfortable and self-secure. It is of great importance, Forsén and Fryk argue, for professionals – e.g., social workers, teachers, planners, etc. – to find their own places and get familiarised with them. Clients, students, residents, etc., also have their familiar places, where they feel comfortable and self-secure. However, to reach each other in a constructive dialogue, both parties must

leave their respective places and seek to meet in the interplace. Interplace, and hence also the place and professional self-consciousness, appear in the ability of self-reflection (Stenberg, 2004, p. 28).

> Without place, no interplace. And opposite. The place and the interplace constitute two sides of the same wholeness. At the same time I hold the interplace as the primary in the sense that consciousness about the place is born in the interplace. Thus the consciousness about what can be perceived as one's own culture is born in the consciousness about other cultures than one's own.
> (Forsén & Fryk, 1998, p. 22)

At Stenberg's disputation, an interesting discussion took place with Murray Stewart, her opponent, regarding the insufficiency of an inclusion approach to an exclusion problem. If exclusion can be described as lack of access (because of, e.g., spatial, social, cultural, economic, administrative, knowledge or time barriers) to the place where decisions are made, inclusion would logically mean that the barriers are removed so that those formerly excluded get access to the decision-making places. However, the idea of interplace proposes something else, namely that both the excluded and included leave their respective places and meet on neutral ground; see Figure 2. The shift from an inclusion to an interplace approach can be motivated by two reasons. First, the inclusion of excluded groups in well-established places may be harder to achieve in practice than meeting halfway. Second, there is no guarantee that the prevailing system is actually the best possible arena for a decision-making process. In the interplace, new procedures and meeting forms can be developed which are better suited to specific situations with emerging challenges.

In many cases, tenant involvement initiatives are developed in a kind of interplace. The company's management organisation is decentralised and responsibilities are handed over to tenants. The tenants adjust by forming associations and learning how to administer the management. However, to a large extent, the studied involvement processes can be said to take place in the local place rather than in an interplace. It is actually a matter of moving responsibilities from the company to the tenants, involving local empowerment rather than meeting in the interplace (see Figure 2).

There is a given space for decisions in a housing management process – rents are set, buildings and grounds are maintained, times and budgets for renovations are defined, etc. Much of the debate about tenant influence concerns the possibilities for tenants to have a say in these decisions. However, another part of the debate concerns the possibilities to develop new spaces for decision – new resources are added, opening for new types of decisions, instead of only distributing decision power between the parties. Through getting together, the collective attains the power to act even if they do not necessarily attain power over decisions. This connects to the discussion on 'power to' and 'power over' (see, e.g., Wrong, 1979/2002), which actually also partly relates to the distinction between informal and formal influence. Tenant involvement in open space management concerns both the formal 'power over' existing management decision spaces and the informal 'power to' do something more and to develop new decision spaces, both of which are examples of local empowerment.

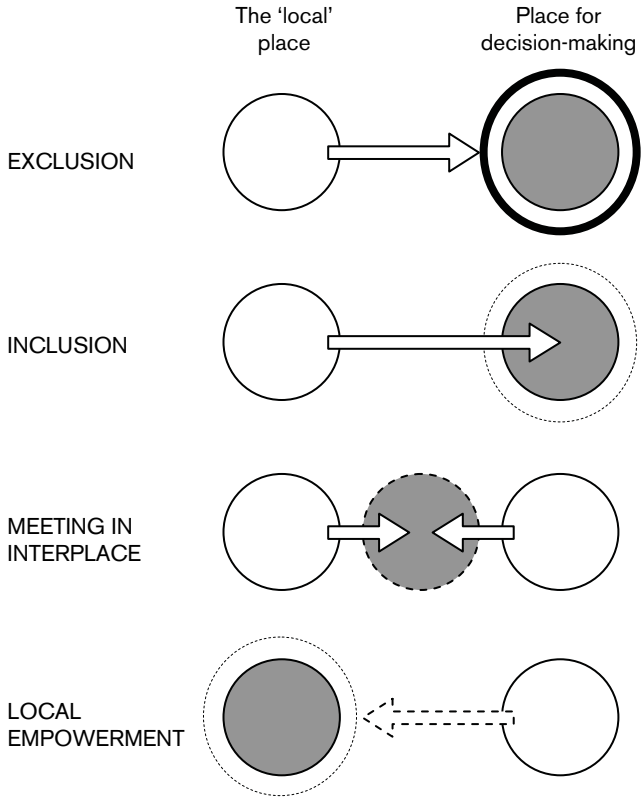



Figure 2. Schematic diagrams of exclusion, inclusion, meeting in the interplace, and local empowerment.

**Self-organisation in the urban periphery**

Another version of local empowerment is when the local community organises itself as a response to an absence of central planning. The concept of self-organisation has been used in many different contexts. In connection to urban development, it has often focused on spatial patterns which emerge in the dialectics between order and chaos (see, e.g., Portugali, 2000), and is often connected to simulations based on mathematical algorithms. Lina Olsson (2008) uses the concept in a quite different way in her case study of corner stores and a football tournament for Somali refugees in a Swedish marginalised housing area. The point of departure in her conceptualisation of self-organisation is that the state has retreated from its general welfare ambitions and largely from taking responsibility for the development of the urban periphery. In response to the lack of services and meeting places in the area she studies, Olsson observes that the inhabitants take their own initiatives. Their activities are self-organised, Olsson argues, as they have not been assigned or designed for (p. 243). In other words, she recognises self-organisation as initiatives on the local level which result in local inhabitants, more or less intendedly, obtaining power to improve their own living conditions.

It should be noted that Olsson's conceptualisation of self-organisation is close to how the concept of self-management is often used: it urges for a society where the citizens are more directly involved in the shaping of the world; where citizens are co-producers instead of merely consumers (compare to, e.g., Lefebvre, 1970/2003; Andersson, 1982; Swedish Government, 2000). Moreover, it turns the focus from the 'general public' to the local and to the local resources. In this way, it connects to the discussions on local social capital and the capability of social mobilisation.

## Collective action and social dilemmas

This section will primarily deal with theories revolving around problems of overcoming what is usually referred to as social traps or social dilemmas. These notions may perhaps be associated with a diverse set of social problems in society, but they in fact stand for a very specific type of problem (at least as long as we stay on a theoretical level), namely that of how to make people cooperate when each individual seems to gain more in the short run by not cooperating. The problem is particularly accentuated when the expected benefits from cooperation are essentially collective, vague or distant in time or space. This is often the case regarding management of shared resources, be it an eco-system or a residential yard. The social dilemmas of collective action are typically addressed as game-theoretical problems. It has been formulated in terms of, e.g., *the free-rider problem* (see, e.g., Kim & Walker, 1984), *the tragedy of the commons* (Hardin, 1968), and *the prisoner's dilemma* (see, e.g., Cunningham, 1967; Axelrod, 1984).

In game theory, society is analysed as a kind of game, in which different actors make strategic choices in order to achieve certain results. The results, however, also depend on the choices of other actors in the game, which makes it intricate. Game theory typically applies a highly rationalistic approach to human behaviour, as it is mainly focused on conscious instrumental action based on what information the actors have collected. Originating as a branch of applied mathematics, it has also gained much attention in the social sciences and philosophy. Although many would argue that in real situations, human behaviour is much less calculable and seemingly 'irrational', game theory can at least point at some very interesting dimensions of the challenge to create a well-functioning society.

According to political scientist Russel Hardin (2003), the *free-rider problem* was recognised and discussed already by Plato and is present in many classical works on society and economy. It describes the dilemma that individuals may enjoy the benefits of public goods without themselves contributing, thus becoming 'free riders'. In the end, as everyone will feel attracted by the opportunity to become a free rider, there will be no willingness to invest in public goods. Another Hardin, ecologist Garrett Hardin, formulated the free-rider problem as the *tragedy of the commons* in a 1968 article in *Science*, mainly as an address to the problem of growing populations in a world with finite resources. Garrett Hardin begins his explanation with a hypothetical story about herders with cattle grazing on common land.

> It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfacto-

> rily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, however, comes the day of reckoning, that is, the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates tragedy.
> (Hardin, 1968)

The dilemma is that as each herdsman adds cattle to maximize his gains, the land will become over-grazed and eventually depleted so that all herdsmen lose. As solutions to the problem, Hardin proposes privatisation of the land or allocation of rights to use it. In analogy with the grazing land example, Hardin also exemplifies with the pollution of the air, which is common to all people on Earth. However, while land may be allocated, it is practically impossible to privatise the air. Furthermore, Hardin finds it difficult to regulate its use, as he concludes that the limits for what is or is not morally acceptable will constantly change from one time to another as well as between places. The only real solution to diverse problems of environmental degradation, following Hardin's argumentation, would be a definite halt in the population growth. His radical message is that "freedom to breed is intolerable"[3].

An even more hypothetical formulation of the collective action problem is the famous *prisoner's dilemma*, which was originally developed by two employees of the RAND Corporation (linked to the US Army) in the 1950s (Kuhn, 2007). In this philosophical exercise, two suspects kept separately are offered the deal to betray the other and go free. If one suspect does not testify against the other, she will be charged for a minor crime carrying a sentence of one year. However, by staying silent she will risk ten years in prison if the other suspect betrays her. If they betray each other, the punishment will be only six years each. The point is that, most likely, each will betray the other if they do not trust each other enough to count on the other keeping silent. This means that both will end up spending six years in prison instead of only two years, which they would have gotten had they cooperated. The game can be graphically presented as a two-by-two matrix to show the possible outcomes depending on what the two suspects choose to do; see Figure 3.

These illustrations of social dilemmas all have one thing in common – they point towards the quite depressing conclusion that rational choice leads to non-cooperation, that collective action is deemed to die out (if it ever existed) and that common resources will be depleted. However, it should be remembered that such conclusions would be based on extremely reductive and hypothetical assumptions of a somewhat more complex social reality. Still using a game theory approach, some alterations of the game setup will give a much more optimistic picture of the possibilities to solve social dilemmas. Let us take a look at one such alteration of the prisoner's dilemma game – looking at it as an iterative process of repeated choices instead of a single-choice situation.

[3] Garrett Hardin expresses an even more cynical view on humanity in a couple of articles published in 1974 in *Bioscience* ("Living on a lifeboat") and *Psychology Today* ("Lifeboat ethics"). Hardin's lifeboat ethics proclaim that the rich world should concentrate its efforts on surviving with preserved living standards and leave starving populations in poor countries without help.

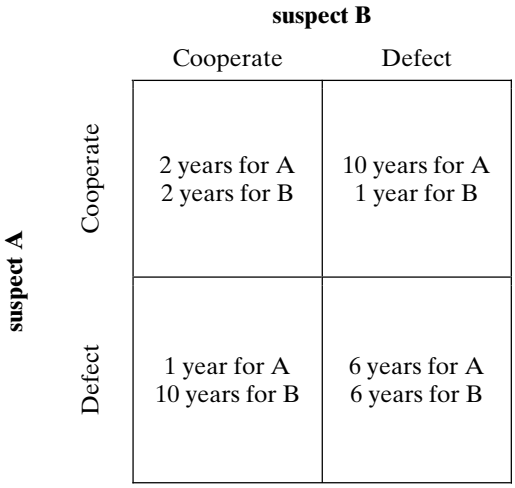



Figure 3. 'Payoff matrix' of a prisoner's dilemma game. Each suspect, A and B, can choose to either cooperate or defect (adapted from Cunningham, 1967).

The prisoner's dilemma is basically a very simple game. However, there are complex aspects already in its theoretical applications, which have been shown in an entertaining way through political scientist Robert Axelrod's computer tournaments of the late 1970s. Scholars from around the world participated in the tournament with their computer programs, defining rules on how to make each move depending on the action of the opponent. All programs were paired with each other and the accumulated outcome after a high number of turns was calculated[4]. The challenge was to find a strategy, a set of rules, which would give maximum gains against different opponents.

The first tournament featured 14 entries by invited academics from different disciplines. A follow-up tournament engaged not only participants from the academic sphere, but also amateur enthusiasts interested in programming. This time there were 62 entries, of which many were quite 'advanced' with different tactics at different stages and calculations of their opponent's strategies. The winner at both tournaments was an entry called 'tit-for-tat'. It was the shortest program of all, containing only two rules: (1) begin with cooperation, and (2) do the same as the opponent. Axelrod (1980) analysed the results and proposed the following general conclusions:

- It is better in the long run to be 'nice', i.e. show a willingness to cooperate, by starting with cooperation and by not defecting without provocation.
- It is wise to be 'provocable', i.e. to not let any 'non-nice' opponents exploit naïve niceness.

[4] In Axelrod's version of the game, the outcomes were 5 points for defecting if the other player cooperated, 3 points if both cooperated, 1 point if both defected and 0 points for cooperating if the other player defected.

- To avoid getting stuck in a vicious circle of mutual defection, forgiveness is an important component, i.e. taking the first chance to go back to cooperation after a defection.

The iterative prisoner's dilemma game has even more interesting implications. Axelrod used the results as an explanation of the evolution of altruistic behaviour among species. Translating the points of the game into chances for survival, he was able to simulate how population sizes after some hundred 'generations' shifted dramatically, whereby the tit-for-tat strategy and similar strategies came to totally dominate (see Fig. 1 in Axelrod, 1980). In a subsequent paper Axelrod, together with William D. Hamilton (1981), aim to prove that the tit-for-tat strategy from an ecological perspective is both robust in different types of environments and stable enough to prohibit invasions from new strategies after being established. The initiation of a cooperative culture in a previously non-cooperative environment is trickier to solve in the prisoner's dilemma game. It is proposed that this happens in groups and situations in which the outcomes of the game are altered so that defection will never be more beneficial than mutual cooperation, which is reasonably a common situation within kin groups (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981).

The process dimension is a very important step in drawing lessons from game theory which can be applied in analyses of real-world situations. Still, there are some essential differences between game theorists' experimental setups and the social interactions of society. A multitude of different types of experimental games have been tested to study human behaviour in relation to social dilemmas. Elinor Ostrom (2005, chapter 3) reviews a number of experiments based on the premise that test persons will earn real money in proportion to how they succeed in different game setups. As in the prisoner's dilemma game, players are tempted to try to cheat each other in the experimental setups reviewed by Ostrom, and rational-egoist choice models would predict no cooperation. However, as the players are real persons, the experiments provide the chance to study more complex choice models. The conclusions drawn by Ostrom (2005) from the experiments include:

- If other players are generous and trusting, fewer are likely to cheat.
- Cooperation will improve dramatically if the players can meet and discuss things face-to-face, even if they do not know how the others will act.
- Unequal setups or setups with hierarchal relationships between players decrease the willingness to cooperate.
- Cultural backgrounds may significantly affect the outcomes, i.e., a player from a low-trusting culture (regarding, e.g., country, values or beliefs) will be less willing to cooperate.
- A group with homogeneous backgrounds tends to develop effective norms of cooperation easier than a socio-economically mixed group.
- There is generally a strong willingness to invest in different kinds of sanctions to reduce the opportunities for free riding.

- However, if sanctions are included in the game setup or imposed from outside, this tends to lead to resentment and reduce the willingness to reciprocate trust.

Ostrom (2000, p. 142) discusses three different individual approaches to iterative social dilemma games: (a) *the rational egoist*, who only does what gives the highest personal benefit at the lowest cost, i.e. without caring about norms of reciprocity or collective goods; (b) *the conditional cooperator*, who is willing to initiate collective action if she estimates that enough of the others will contribute reciprocally; and (c) *the willing punisher*, who is willing to pay personal costs to sanction free riders or to reward individuals who made larger contributions. Rational egoists normally become free riders, and for norms of reciprocity to develop, a minimum number of cooperators are needed. However, a free-riding culture may easily spread and erode norms of reciprocity, which can be countered by willing punishers and sanctions. Therefore, a mixture of conditional cooperators and willing punishers will provide a robust basis for norms of reciprocity to develop and remain. Ostrom points at the importance of information for making a collaboration culture evolve over time. If it is transparent who is and is not trustworthy, cooperation norms will flourish over time as cooperators will gain more and defectors will be viewed with suspicion. If there is no transparency, however, defectors will not be sanctioned but will instead benefit from their egoistic actions, and cooperation norms will not evolve.

**Collective action in rental housing areas: tenant involvement**

The game-theoretical discourse on the tragedy of the commons is a response to a partly different set of problems than what is directly applicable in the context of tenant involvement in open space management. Although the common-pool resource of the residential yard can be over-utilised in some regards, there are few direct parallels to the classical problems of environmental degradation referred to in the common debates on social dilemmas. The rationales for initiating participative open space management processes in rental housing areas are not to protect the yards from depletion or limit each individual's use of them. It is rather the opposite: Common rationales are to develop the environment and increase use.

However, there are also connections between the social dilemmas of common-pool resource management and tenant involvement in open space management. In her critical evaluation of traditional economic theories, through thorough empirical investigation Ostrom emphasises the development of informal social norms and conventions in collective action processes. In her cases, the long-term management of natural resources is at the centre. The development of informal local institutions through tenant involvement in urban neighbourhoods can also contribute to many other outcomes (see, e.g., Castell, 2009).

The social dilemma, in the case of tenant involvement in open space management, is represented by difficulties in recruiting enough tenants to the collective work and keeping the engagement on a sufficient level. According to the game theories, many will avoid working, as they will be able to benefit from the yard improvements carried out by the group of those involved anyway. This is also a theme in the literature on tenant involvement (see, e.g.,

Bengtsson, 1998; 2001). However, some objections can be raised to this hypothesis:

- A large part of the potential benefits accrue exclusively to those who are involved, and even in proportion to the level of engagement. For example, social capital through contacts, means to influence the yard design, means to influence local social norms, etc.
- Tenants who do not become involved will not only risk missing some of these potential benefits, but will also risk encountering other restrictions as the yard may be appropriated by those involved.
- The involvement work itself is not obviously a calculable cost, as many actually see the cooperative work *per se* as directly rewarding.

On the other hand, at least some elements of the free-rider discussion are relevant in most cases of tenant involvement. Someone takes on more responsibilities than someone else, while many do not bother to engage at all. As they are all neighbours, there is a risk for tensions or feelings of being exploited, which will stifle the engagement.

The discussion on personal resources among the tenants is important for analysing the conditions for collective action in housing areas. These resources are seldom distributed equally between different social groups or different neighbourhoods. Tiiu Soidre Brink (1987, p. 144) points at a problem in this regard:

> It has often been argued that collective action is the resource of the poor. That is more of an ideological statement than grounded in factual conditions. All empirical findings show the opposite. It is rather resource-rich than resource-poor individuals who participate in collective action...

Soidre Brink certainly has a point in raising this concern. However, there are no indications that formal involvement processes primarily take place in more 'affluent' housing areas (see, e.g., Castell, 2009; 2010). Soidre Brink's argumentation is based on the assumption that there is a correspondence between what is normally regarded as characteristics of a resource-rich community and what is needed for a successful involvement process. However, aspects such as high incomes and high educational levels are not particularly important in this case. More valuable are, e.g., people with a high interest in local social networking who feel they have time to engage in the neighbourhood.

While Ostrom gives a great deal of attention to the importance of institutions for sanctioning defectors in her cases, the situation is probably different in the case of tenant involvement in open space management. It appears that generally only a minority (often no more than 5-10%) of the residents in an area are actively involved (Castell, 2010). There are probably cases in which some frequent yard users are accused of defection if they refuse to join the involvement group, and many groups seem to be concerned about the difficulties in recruiting more people. However, those who are not interested have a very strong argument, as they do pay rent to a housing company which has the responsibility for managing the yard. Ostrom's discussion of three approaches to iterative social dilemma games could be used to characterise some typical roles on tenant-managed yards:

(a) *the non-interested* – sees no point in being involved and would not bother if the process died out

(b) *the grateful yard user* – does not have the means to take on her own responsibilities, but shows appreciation and supports the intentions, and may occasionally participate in the work

(c) *the conditional joiner* – joins the work on the condition that there are enough others who join to achieve a sufficient result without too much individual effort

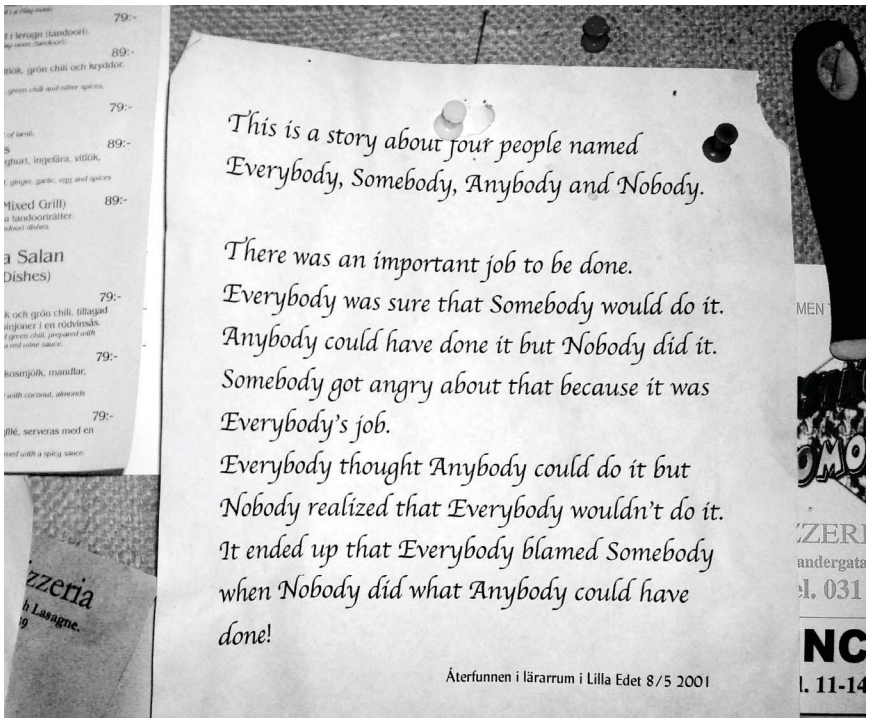
(d) *the real enthusiast* – is glad to take on a quite altruistic role and do more work than others without complaining

A typical involvement group seems to be constituted of one or two real enthusiasts and a handful of conditional joiners, supported by a larger group of grateful yard users who participate in larger events. In most cases, all three positions probably play essential roles for the continuity of the involvement process and there may be a delicate balance between the groups. The significance of real enthusiasts is apparent in the literature as well as in my own investigations. Less attention is paid to the group of conditional joiners and the conditions they raise for joining. Even less attention is paid to the influence of semi-active and non-active residents.

# Conclusion

Tenant involvement in open space management is a type of direct and collective participation processes. One important dimension is that it may contribute to local empowerment by giving tenants more influence over their living conditions, informally and sometimes also formally through the establishment of contracts. However, the empowerment is not necessarily equally distributed among the tenants. The collective of tenants consists of many groups and heterogeneous individuals, and normally does not constitute a cohesive unit. Participation is not only a question of the collective of tenants participating in the *landlord's* decision-making and management, but it is also a question of which tenants participate in the *tenants'* decision-making and management.

The power perspective on the distribution of influence is not the only relevant dimension of participation. Another dimension is that collective action may be an efficient way of managing common-pool resources. The issue of social dilemmas impeding collective action is closely connected to the debates on social capital, about local norms, trust and networking.

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