

Preparing Publics

The use of network programs for democratic development

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One of the biggest challenges and democratic aspirations of governing is the ability of a city to handle questions. This is quite demanding on a city, because: How do we know what to do together? How are we geared towards all involved? How can we break way from existing, often institutional, practices when a new approach is required? It also asks much of governing, because how do we govern with the strength of the city and how do we support the self-organizing ability of the city?

In recent years we have designed network programs to support urban development in all its diversity, and innovative ways to give it a democratic form. Network programs use the network as an ordering principle through which involvement obtains a physical form and building blocks are provided for a common area of interest.

In this study we explore the effect of network programs on urban development and motivate a contribution to the issue of democracy.

Democracy and development

Obama, the president of the United States, addressed Africa in 2009 about taking on adult relationships (NRC, 10-07-2009). He asked Africa to become a role model for democracy and to take on the challenge of forming and maturing it further. There is something obvious about discussing “adult relationships” as if everyone knows what they are. Essentially we can ask everybody questions about how to approach adult relationships and how to become a role model. And where children are concerned we find this an obvious question. Many educators know intuitively how to deal with it. And usually we can identify someone as an inspiring role model. But how do we guide our children along the road adulthood or on how to take on adult relationships? An interesting observation, within this context, is Maria Montessori (1976) who assumes that a child learns how to build his/her own relationships on the way to adulthood and that we can prepare a supporting environment for the child. 'Help me to do it by myself' as our starting point accompanied by respect for and embracement of the child's self. Maria Montessori explains that if the child in the prepared environment does not act according to our expectations, don't say the child is not doing it right, but prepare yourself again. The prepared environment is the invitation to the child and an access to opportunities on the way to adulthood. The prepared environment connects with the child, but it is not childish and provides ample room for research and experiment.

In-between space

Applied to the development of a city, a prepared environment can provide the necessary in-between space to deal with everything around a social issue. Dewey (Logister, 2005) shows that people who are concerned about a particular social issue form a public and this public forms and matures further.

Task of governing is based on involvement in a social issue and creating an environment where public can form and mature further. That requires a different approach from governments and institutions. In one way or another, we are more concerned about getting people involved with government and institutions, rather than getting governments and institutions involved with the people and their relationships with the world. We abstract social issues and by approaching the issue independently of the relationships that people have with

the issue, we encounter only the problems and we miss the relativity. We forget to use the richness of what people already know in relation to a social issue, we also forget to build with the initiatives of people or we are unable to tap-in to these natural resources. It is remarkable that each person has his/her own relationships, and should we make them accessible to each other, we gain access to unique collections. Anyway, this is gradually being seen by more and more. For example, one of the innovative ideas from libraries to investigate how libraries can make unique collections of ordinary people accessible for a wide audience.

This asks for a different view of democracy. Luijpen (1975) writes in his book on justice that it is about recognizing the relativity of knowing and willing. Actions carry no guarantees, not even a democratic majority. And so in a democracy the minority is not destroyed, but offered the opportunity to form and mature into a majority. It is not about the majority of votes, the so-called consensus of the people. And the biggest crowd-pullers do not fully expose their actual involvement with a theme. Social issues need in-between space, as Dewey said, so that the public can form and mature. And then the first thing is to strike a balance with the reality of the situation.

It is a constant challenge of governing to follow and lead a city in building adult relationships. Ongoing because the reality that appears will continue to confront us with our understanding and the relativity of our knowing and willing. It takes in-between space to explore and experiment with everything involved in a particular issue and then look for relationships. By making everything visible and accessible a wealth of possibilities arises, for us as a city, to develop the ability to handle issues. Through network programs we introduce a method to create this in-between space and to build networks of involvement around important social issues.

The use of network programs

In recent years we have organized network programs around social themes. An example is the network program Deventer Duurzaam in Gesprek (Deventer Sustainable in Conversation). During half a year we have organized in the city the conversation around sustainability (Poorthuis and Hoogerwerf, 2008). In an other example of a network program we are building the accessibility of the city for youth initiatives (2009).

With a network program we bring the conversation around a theme in motion across a broad front. We make contacts, promote existing and new initiatives and networks, carry out network explorations, start to identify relationships and visualize examples. We explore everything related to the theme and allow ourselves to be guided by what we encounter along the way, and every encounter opens up new networks. During the network program we create meeting spaces and search for inspirations as driving forces to keep the conversation going and to provide impulses. We use various forms of web communication to visualize everything around the theme, to share information and to publish. Furthermore, we also utilise interviews and meetings that already take place in the city and which can strengthen the network program. And we make an agenda of everything that happens around the theme.

The city is developing itself as an environment in which we meet and visualize everything involved around the theme. This environment provides an infrastructure and breeding ground where each of us can delve into in support of our own question or assignment, build upon and find our own way. We come to realize that we are not alone, that other people are also involved with the same theme, and that we can share our experiences with each other. This may be both qualifying as well confrontational to start with, but the power lies in the invitation to meet each other, to explore together further and to investigate the consequences for their own action. We round off a network program with a joint event, publish everything we know and finally appoint questions. New themes may emerge from these questions.

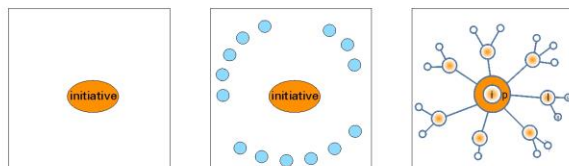
The essence of a network program is that everyone is involved with the theme in their own way and with their own initiative force. The theme is the common starting point and in the

interaction we reflect on our own action. It is about creating awareness around the theme along a broad front, and utilising all available resources involved to create an environment where all can meet, research and experiment. A thorough preparation prior to reaching decisions.

The network as ordering principle

In a network program we use the network as an ordering principle. With the network as an ordering principle (Poorthuis, 2009) we give in a dynamic way structure to relationships. Bruno Latour (2005) assumes that each actor is embedded in and acting within a wider network that accompany him. The network consists entities such as: ideas, people, resources, materials, software and so on. In essence, a network structures around a core that radiates and attracts. It is about involvement. With the network analysis for initiators (Poorthuis, 2006), we analyze this involvement and provide a snapshot of a living network where everything involved is always orderly.

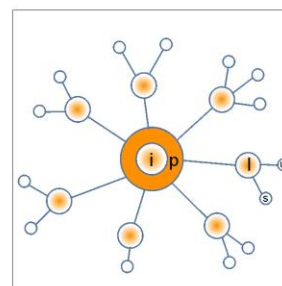
Network analysis for initiators



The steps in the network analysis

- Draw the initiative on a sheet of paper and place it in the centre.
- Place all relevant entities involved, e.g. people, ideas, themes, materials, examples, and so on, in a wide circle around it.
- Explore the positions of involvement in relation to the initiative. Classify the positions from the centre in terms of partner, link, supplier or user. Start with the links.
- This visualises the network. Try make everything as concrete as possible, including proper names.
- The network is dynamic. Involvement can change, and positions shift.

Network analysis for initiators



i = initiator
p = partner
l = link
s = supplier
u = user

Positions of involvement in the network

- An initiator often starts alone. The involvement will depend on the description of the initiative, its appeal and magnetism, and by the connections established.
- Partners support the initiative, they fulfil a role model, and will often approach an initiator. They put their shoulders to the initiative, bear it out, and accept the consequences.
- Links create connections with (re)sources, they guide the process from a particular perspective, they are ambassadors, they help build a knowledge base, and they provide access to information. They establish connections with users and suppliers.
- Suppliers contribute specific specialisations, resources or materials to the network.
- Users take advantage of the network as they seek to find answers to their questions and in their activities.

Figure 1: network analysis for initiators (Poorthuis,2006)

It is extraordinary to see how the analysis of a network leads to the physical forming of the network, and a diversity of nodes and connections come into view. Actors can take different positions of involvement. We distinguish initiator, partner, link, supplier and user (figure 1). Each actor in a network is involved on its own way, can have multiple positions and can shift positions.

The strength of the network is that everything involved is related to the core and each node of the network relates with other networks. The network is an ordering principle and a building

block. If the core is changing, the network changes. If the nodes are changing, the connections change. Through the core, we can start with an individual initiative and through the nodes we can build on relationships around the world.

Maturing public with network programs

Essence of a network program is that we do not rely on the existing political affairs, but use a theme as a starting point and order what's involved. Dewey (1927) called the people involved with a theme the public and every theme has its own public. We bring into action a network program to support the public forming and maturing. During the network program the network evolves, and actors are increasingly visible in positions of involvement. Analysis of the positions in the network around the theme provides a view of strength of the public (partners), access of the public to resources (links), the ability of the public to handle issues (suppliers) and the alignment of the public with everything involved (users). The public as network gains a physical form and involvement makes the network dynamic. Everyone is confronted directly with the consequences of their own involvement, because when involvement changes, then positions shift.

A special feature of a network program is that the invitation to the conversation and everyone meeting through involvement create a neutral environment where everyone in spite of formal functions in government, social institutions, education, business, science and so on, may be present and can exchange with each other. So we create the in-between space in which we, as a network separated from existing relationships, can explore the theme from different perspectives and can investigate and experiment and invent new roles.

The role of governments and institutions

By creating in-between space, using the network programs and operating the public, we support the attention on important social issues and build from involvement to the ability of a city that hold one's issues. This democratic approach is similar to Dewey's theory, not based on the collective. Network programs build from cores and networks to a set of nodes and connections, the diversity in involvement is related to the public. We do not slide each other to a collective mess, but connect to each other and the individuality of each node becomes functional and contributes to the whole. 'In traditional conceptions of democracy, the government shapes a condition for democracy: it provides the institutions the procedures and instruments that make possible the process of collective will formation, that should lead to the formulation and realization of common interests. Dewey reverse this relationship.... he recognizes that the government should serve a multitude of publics ' (Dijstelbloem 2008). Reversing the relationship is exactly what we do with the network programs. We support the ordering of everything involved and the maturing of the publics around a theme and then observe what questions emerge and whether the public has the ability to handle these questions.

The focus on the reverse of the relationship is essential. It is wonderful to see what happens when we invite policy groups to let go of their own focus on the theme, reverse the relationship and explore the networks around the theme in the city and analyse the involvement.

Governments and institutions are from their actual involvement also part of the public and participate in the conversation and the gathering around the theme. This involvement of governments and institutions with a theme is relative. In essence their challenge is always to make themselves redundant, but that requires involvement to start with. In order to make themselves redundant the governments and institutions have an active role in exploring networks around the theme, analyzing and stimulating involvement and creating the in-between space to balance all that is involved.

A maturing public has consequences for the actions of all concerned. The public matures independently of existing relationships and at the same time existing relations will change as a

result of the public maturing. Public governments and institutions mature (on) their way to redundancy. In this way the role of governments and institutions shifts much more towards active attention for the formation of adult relationships rather than towards the content.

What do we do when governments and institutions do not support these democratic starting points? In our country, many governing bodies still have traditional views on democracy and in the world there are still many countries with no democracy. Please note that we can leave the existing relationships for what they are and at the same time take our own initiative to analyze and stimulate the involvement around themes. This makes the public visible and create examples of what could be.

A glowing example of this is Women for Water (2008), a worldwide and by the United Nations recognized partnership of women's organizations, that stimulates initiatives in the field of water and sanitation. Women for Water supports local partners in building networks and organizing regional conferences in which the participants of the networks work together with case studies, explore and prepare solutions. Women for Water assumes that women are not objects but partners and supports the local women to build networks that can help support their partnership, gain access to water and sanitation, handle issues and join forces. Glowing examples of how the public can form and mature around a social issue independently from existing relationships.

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