COMMUNICATIVE CAPACITY

public encounters in participatory theory and practice

Koen P.R. Bartels

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 Knowledge Unlatched

To Noemi,
with whom communicating is always easy

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Abbreviations

AW	*Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak* (Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach)
BUP	*Buurtuitvoeringsplan* (Quarter Implementation Plan)
CRG	Community Reference Group
ENC	Engagement Network Coordinator
GCPP	Glasgow Community Planning Partnership
GSB	*Grote Stedenbeleid* (Big Cities Policies)
IPA	Interpretive Policy Analysis
LCPP	Local Community Planning Partnership
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NHS	National Health Service
POC	*Piano Operativo Comunale* (Operational Municipal Plan)
P&SC	Pollokshields and Southside Central
PSC	*Piano Strutturale Comunale* (Strategic Municipal Plan)
SIP	Social Inclusion Partnership
SLIM	Skills and Learning Intelligence Module
SOA	Single Outcome Agreement

Acknowledgements

Introduction: communicating in participatory practice

While most of the people most of the time do not achieve excellence … most of us recognize and admire excellence in others when we see it performed. Capacities for communicating in situations of social difference and conflict can be developed and deepened and a public is always better if more of its members have more developed capacities than fewer. (Iris Marion Young, 2000, p 80)

'So then I'm in a meeting, there's twenty folk there, maybe a wee bit less, maybe fifteen folk, I'm the only normal person, I'm the only resident. Everybody else sitting at that table has qualifications like you wouldn't believe, has senior jobs within Glasgow City Council, … hundreds and hundreds of other agencies. And then there's me, … mum of two, um, wife of one. … That's incredibly intimidating. And lots of people, and I don't know that they necessarily do it deliberately, but they make it much harder for you, because they talk to each other in the language that they understand, … the language of, you know, community development. And they talk to each other using terminology that is exclusive to their jobs. When you're a community resident, you don't know what they're talking about. It's very, very difficult. I kinda work in the sense that I'll just stop the meeting and I'll say "Excuse me, what do you actually mean?" Because if they actually want me to participate, they need to explain to me what they're talking about. It's not because I'm stupid, it's simply because I don't work in their environment and I'm not used to the terminology that they use. I shouldn't be put in that position, where I'm having to say "Go ahead and change your language so that I can understand you." And then, nine times out of ten, for the rest of that meeting it will be toned down. But the next time you come in…' (Mary[1] – resident, Glasgow)

'At the first meeting … there was a lady in the first row who said "I want to see the architect who made this rubbish!" And I wasn't that architect, but it was the guy sitting there next to me. And he

became small, small like this [makes himself small] and he didn't say anything. The lady rose to her feet and said "If I get him, I slit his throat and kill him." And so… there was really violent feedback to this project. … When the participative workshops started, um, … the new renovations were explained and the citizens were asked what they thought about them. And they all immediately asked whether this meant that this [controversial] wall would be gone… From this point on we got, um, collaboration. They understood that this new [project] in the end did this… And for all the participative workshops this lady has been present, and I don't know if she has ever understood that the people who made the first project were also the people who made the second one. … Because now and then … she continued saying that the first project was made by assassins and that this [second] project … was made by persons who knew their business. And that while she … was always facing me or the others. And so, this is something that has struck me greatly, um, the image at the beginning … that it was made by an evil architect.' (Angelo – public professional, Bologna)

'And then there was a meeting here and those [belligerent] boys also came there. Well that was so emotional. … At a certain moment those boys started to yell at the alderman [and others] and then I said "Stop there, now I stand up, now all be quiet, shut up, now I'm going to tell you what I did for you all those years … and that I was busy creating your own [youth] base for you, I was working on that with the City District. And out of appreciation you smash my windows. I still wonder why"… And then those guys started talking and the whole story came out, because I stopped saying hello to them. … I said "How would you feel if your windows had been smashed? After that I'm still supposed to greet you guys? I don't think so."…Well, then we held a break. … I was [outside] and the alderman comes up to me and says "You did really great, there'll be a follow up." So we went back into the room and then one … guy stands up and then he says "I want to make our apologies … because we didn't know about all that you did in the area for us. And now we really would like, I hope you will be willing to greet us again." And then the whole story came out. And I say … "Apologies accepted … But I don't want any trouble any more, also not in front of my door." … I never had any problems anymore, never. So they still say hi to me and I got a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates from them, they

> *paid for it among themselves. So, that was nicely solved. And from that time it just got a bit better.'* (Riet – resident, Amsterdam)

It might seem peculiar to start with three idiosyncratic stories of participatory practice without any background information or measure to evaluate what is being shared. However, there is more to them than meets the eye. These stories are rich narratives about a common but complicated phenomenon: public professionals and citizens encounter each other in participatory practice and face many difficulties in dealing with the problems they come together to resolve. In the first story, a resident of one of Glasgow's most deprived areas expresses her frustration about the obscure language professionals use at meetings and explains how she acts assertively to be part of the conversation. The second story offers a view from the other side of the table where an architect from Bologna is confronted with a radical yet delicate change in the tone with which residents articulate their feelings about his regeneration project. The third story takes us to a meeting in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amsterdam, where the personal conflict between the narrator (a proactive pensioner) and a group of youngsters comes to an emotional boiling point, and is resolved after everyone speaks their mind. In their own particular ways, the stories convey the main message of this book: *The communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens is imperative to the productivity of participatory democracy*.

Over the last few decades, we have witnessed a tremendous increase in participatory democracy, the institutions and practices through which all those affected by a problem or policy are involved in public decision-making and implementation processes. Collaboration between public agencies and other stakeholders and involvement of citizens have become unshakable norms and widespread practices in Western societies (OECD, 2001; Denters and Rose, 2005; OECD, 2009; Hoppe, 2011; Emerson et al, 2012). In the United Kingdom, for example, democratic renewal and public participation were central to New Labour's attempts at *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office, 1998), as well as the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's vision of the *Big Society* (Cabinet Office, 2010). In the United States, President Obama's first executive action was to call for every public agency to draw up plans for more transparent, participatory and collaborative governance (Executive Office of the President, 2009). But also in Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, South Korea, Turkey, and many other countries,

participatory policies and projects have infiltrated all levels and areas of modern governance (OECD, 2001, 2009). As in the three opening stories, nowadays citizens and public professionals around the globe regularly find themselves in complicated situations in which they have to communicate about problems they are facing together.

But while the frequency, pace and diversity of their interactions have increased, more *contact* making does not automatically mean more *sense* making (see Hendriks, 2003, p 405). Collaboration is not enough in itself, because it does not necessarily challenge citizens and public professionals to break with engrained patterns and habits of interaction (Lichterman, 2009). To be sure, intensive communication is crucial to resolving long-standing issues or breaking engrained patterns of interaction, and participatory democracy offers arguably the most valuable framework for successfully doing so (see for example Fischer, 1993; Innes and Booher, 2003a; Wagenaar, 2007a; Forester, 2009). But, as the three opening stories reveal, having productive conversations is a challenging, fragile, and demanding undertaking that can easily go off course. As it happens, in participatory practice, quantitatively more communication often means qualitatively less communication. For participatory democracy to produce its very desirable outcomes, we need a deeper understanding of what it takes for public professionals and citizens to communicate productively.

This book explores how public professionals and citizens communicate, why this is so difficult, and what could lead to more productive conversations. Based on three case studies, I show that public professionals and citizens tend to sustain habitual communicative patterns that limit their ability to talk to each other, make decisions and solve problems. Despite well-intentioned plans and activities, they evoke and perpetuate these habitual patterns as they (1) engage with the *situation* in which they meet, (2) discuss the *substantive issues* at hand, and (3) build and maintain their *relationships*. Public professionals and citizens often do not pay sufficient attention to how their situated performances of these three generic communicative patterns lead to uncertainties about what is going on, misunderstandings about what they can do together, and frustrations that expectations, efforts and feelings are thwarted. Failing to recognise what type of talk they need to handle such unproductive communication and relating in specific situations means that a lot of time, money and energy are wasted in the practice of participatory democracy. Therefore, public professionals and citizens need to foster qualitative changes in their communicative in-between (or: encounter) toward integrative understandings, activities and relations. Doing so requires *the ability to recognise and break through*

habitual patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of conversations to the law of the situation – what I call communicative capacity (see Table 1.1).[2]

Table 1.1: A first look at the theory of communicative capacity

Citizens and public professionals sustain *habitual communicative patterns* that limit their ability to solve the problems they seek to resolve together;
They can enhance the productivity of their communication by recognising and breaking habitual patterns and adapting the nature, tone and conditions of conversations to the *law of the situation*;
They can do so by attending to the ways in which they communicatively enact three **generic patterns**: engaging with the *situation* in which they meet, discussing the *substantive issues* at hand, and building and maintaining their *relationships*.

What does communicative capacity look like? How do you recognise it and how can you cultivate it? When does the in-between have a more productive quality? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to these questions. But the three opening stories help us on our way toward grasping the practical manifestations and theoretical implications involved. Each of the storytellers demonstrate communicative capacity in their own way in their attempts to make their in-between more integrative: Mary makes public professionals change their language to include her in the conversation; Angelo acknowledges how the tone of his encounters with residents is strongly dependent on one delicate issue; and Riet stands up to express her feelings when the meeting is turning into a fight. Each recognises that the situation signals them to change their in-between and enacts a mode of communication that renders their in-between more productive.

We are dealing here with something more than good individual communication skills. Whether these individuals manage to get something out of their conversations depends on several persons enacting various communicative practices *in the process of encountering each other*. For example, Riet stands up and shares her feelings, the boys tell their story and ask her to greet them again, and the alderman ensures they exchange apologies. None of them planned to say and do these things in advance, nor could they have communicated productively without each of them saying and doing what they did. Also, for Mary and Angelo, the appropriate way of addressing the people they are facing surfaces while they are interacting with each other and evolves as others respond. How to address each other, what to say, what gestures to make, which posture to take, how to express feelings; it all happens in the encounter. Communicative capacity, then,

is a practice that resides in the interactional space 'in between' people engaged in concrete situations.

Of course, some general principles of good communication could be deduced from the three stories: use clear language, be respectful and express feelings. But such an approach to communicative action does not necessarily make more contact more meaningful. First of all, it implicitly operates on the view that communication means exchanging undistorted information. This reduces communication to mere instrumental transactions between separate individuals. Second, it comprises a tendency to abstract our understanding of communication from the actual embodied and embedded performances through which communication is enacted. Instead, we need to think of communication as 'a fine-grained communicative learning activity, in which participants encounter each other as people' (Healey 1996, p 214) and should invest in shared understandings of the situation, joint activities, and cooperative relating. Their ability to understand each other and get things done is shaped by the fine-grained communicative practices public professionals and citizens enact to find the right words to address someone in an ambiguous situation (Angelo) or to strike the right tone for moving the conversation forward after exclusion (Mary) or conflict (Riet). In other words, the integrative quality of encounters between citizens and public professionals needs to be *practised* into being.[3]

Thus far, communicative capacity has been defined as the ability to recognise and break through habitual patterns of communication by adapting the nature, tone, and conditions of conversations to the law of the situation. While public professionals and citizens encounter each other in participatory practice more frequently and in more far reaching ways, they do not necessarily manage to communicate productively. They tend to get stuck in unproductive communicative patterns because they fail to nourish the communicative space 'in between' them in the midst of complex and evolving participatory practice. Exercising communicative capacity means that public professionals and citizens practise the integrative quality of their in-between into being to collaboratively solve the problems they are facing together. Communicative capacity provides a robust grounding for understanding the discrepancy between what typically happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory practice from what should happen in such public encounters, as well as why communicative barriers persist. The next section is a brief pointer to the theoretical implications of conceptualising participatory democracy in terms of public encounters and communicative capacity (which will

be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two). The final section provides an outline of the rest of the book, including a brief explanation of the case studies.

Public encounters in participatory democracy

Communicative capacity directs our attention to the communicative in-between, or encounter. Public encounters, face-to-face contact between citizens and public professionals (Goodsell, 1981; Roberts, 2004; Bartels, 2013), have become increasingly important to participatory democracy but are still not very well understood theoretically. In fact, public encounters did not even feature in the work of the first advocates of participatory democracy, as they were mainly concerned with legitimising the influence of non-elected individuals on policy making and implementation as the norm for democracy (Pateman, 1975; Mansbridge, 1980; Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1984a). Direct participation of citizens in fair and consensual decision making, and not collaboration between public professionals and citizens, had to revitalise the elitist, detached and individualistic system that representative democracy had become. However, public encounters started to receive attention when the debate turned to the question of how participatory ideals could be achieved in practice. As it was understood that participatory practice meant dealing with complex problems in a highly pluralistic, politicised and interconnected world (Mouffe, 1992; Benhabib, 1996; Bohman, 1998), participatory democracy started to be conceptualised 'as a process of communication among citizens and public officials' (Young, 2000, p 52), including administrative professionals.

Over the following decades, public encounters were found to be a vital medium for putting participatory democracy into practice. The actual ways in which participatory ideals are implemented depends to a large degree on what public professionals and citizens *do* in practice (Wagenaar, 2007a; De Souza-Briggs, 2008; Lichterman, 2009). Of course, many political, social, legal and economic factors are in play and combine in complex, dynamic and often unforeseen ways, muddying the waters of everyday participatory practice. Citizens and public professionals are entangled in webs of organisations, rules, budgets and political powers, which shape their everyday practices and communication. They continuously face a wide range of contingent institutional constraints and practical dilemmas in dealing with power inequalities and antagonism, designing effective institutions, facilitating knowledge sharing, and so forth (Delli Carpini et al, 2004; Ansell

and Gash, 2007; Hoppe, 2011). But in all this discussion, we have not sufficiently grasped or appreciated the micro processes of what actually happens when public professionals and citizens meet, in other words what happens in the encounter or 'in-between' (Bartels, 2013).

Until now, public encounters have mainly been considered within a macro framework of democratic political theory and its many variations, including representative, direct, deliberative and participatory democracy. In the framework of representative democracy, public encounters are inherently problematic to the responsible and accountable exercise of public authority. Citizens elect officials to take decisions in the public interest and delegate implementation to public professionals. In turn, these non-elected officials, working for the government or other agencies with public authority, are expected to treat citizens impartially based on their professional expertise and legal authority (Weber, 1922/1978). When they encounter citizens face-to-face, there is a risk that the public interest is distorted by unequal treatment, arbitrary judgements and corruption (Lipsky, 1980; Goodsell, 1981). In contrast, in the framework of deliberative and participatory democracy, public encounters are considered valuable for better decision making and problem solving. Public professionals have to develop collaborative relationships with citizens, value their expertise, and empower them to take joint decisions (Habermas, 1996; King and Stivers, 1998; Fung and Wright, 2003). Nevertheless, the inherently problematic nature of public encounters is not that easily overcome, as they often do not live up to standards of authenticity, equality and mutual trust in participatory practice (Roberts, 2004; Stout, 2010b).

Many excellent studies have already explored the importance and problems of communicative practices between public professionals and citizens (for example, King and Stivers, 1998; Forester, 1999; Fung, 2004; Healey, 2006; Wagenaar, 2007a; Innes and Booher, 2010). Following the pioneering work of Habermas (1984a, 1984b, 1996) on deliberative democracy, these studies reveal how participatory design and micro processes of communication can prevent distortions to deliberation among free and equal individuals and their ability to reach mutual understanding and consensus. Because of these institutional principles and micro practices, citizens and public professionals have successfully addressed complex problems that traditional institutions were unable to solve.

However, the value of this communicative approach is limited by its underlying individualist ontology (Stout and Staton, 2011). Individuals are conceptualised as separate beings who try to reach intersubjective

agreements without forfeiting their autonomy. Encounters continue to be the mere transmission and negotiation of knowledge, arguments and emotions, rather than a relational process existing in-between interdependent beings, 'which enables or disadvantages the actual abilities of [individuals] to make claims, influence decisions, and understand each other' (Bartels, 2013, p 476). By insufficiently recognising the qualitative texture of encounters, we are missing out on a lot of activities and potentialities in-between people (Campbell Rawlings and Catlaw, 2011).

To gain a better understanding of public encounters, we need to move away from our reliance on democratic political theory toward an exploration of the quality of the relational processes happening in-between citizens and public professionals. Participatory encounters should not be treated as instrumental means of accomplishing democratic standards, as this renders them vulnerable to manipulation by power holders not invested in genuine participation (Stout, 2010b) or competition between conflicting understandings of the practical meaning of democratic standards (Kensen, 2003). Encounters generate new types of understandings, activities and interactions which challenge established political institutions and theoretical categories (Bogason et al, 2002; Catlaw, 2006). The goals, dynamics, outcomes and legitimacy of these encounters do not derive from established substantive democratic norms, but from the situational logic emerging from the practices through which public professionals and citizens interact. This means we need new theories, methods and standards which do justice to all that happens in the encounter in its own terms.

The work of Mary Follett, recently adapted to contemporary conditions (Stout and Staton, 2011; Stout and Love, 2015) is remarkably helpful here. In brief, Follett's work revolves around the quality of relationships, or what she calls modes of association. People are connected through innate social bonds and are constantly changing each other in the process of meeting. An encounter does not involve two separate, static beings who confront each other and respond to whatever the other says or does. Interacting is a process of 'interweaving' that changes and ties people together as they react not to each other but to their relating:

> 'I' never react to you but to you-plus-me; or to be more accurate, it is I-plus-you reacting to me-plus-me. 'I' can never influence 'you' because you have already influenced me; that is, in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different ...

> Accurately speaking the matter cannot be expressed even by the phrase used above, I-plus-you meeting you-plus-me. It is I plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me meeting you plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me,etc., etc. (Follett, 1924, pp 62–3)

This not only means that we should understand an encounter as an 'in-between' or 'I–Thou' (Buber, 1970) rather than in terms of a separate 'I' and 'You'/'It', but also that people are responding to whatever *emerges* in the circular process of their interactions. Only those decisions, activities and outcomes that emerge from the encounter are legitimate. In contrast to the communicative studies discussed earlier, encounters are not instrumental means for generating compromises between pre-existing preferences; the communicative process should lead participants to *integrate* their ideas, identities and outcomes into new ones which they all consider better than those they started out with (Follett, 1919). In this relational process (rather than substantive norms) framework, *integrative encounters will enhance the productivity of participatory democracy*.

Focusing on the process of communication does not imply that substantive issues are left out of the picture. Communicative approaches are often criticised for paying too much attention to 'process' and neglecting power inequalities as well as context, content and outcomes (Healey, 2007a, p 125). The point here is simply that the nature of power, context, content and outcomes will be unsatisfactory as long as public professionals and citizens fail to recognise the influence of their in-between on their ability to solve the problems they face together. What public professionals and citizens are able to do and achieve is an emergent product of the relational, situated processes through which they interact with each other and the 'push and pull' of the situation (Wagenaar and Cook, 2011). To improve both the process and substance of their communication, public professionals and citizens need to practise the quality of their in-between into being (see p 15).

This means that citizens and public professionals have to be more aware that what they say and do in their encounters influences the *situation*, the *substantive issues* at hand and their *relationships* and vice versa. These are not just stimuli and responses that shape their encounters; citizens and public professionals evoke and sustain particular aspects of them by choosing to pick a fight, ignoring differences in the meanings attached to words, or sticking to the rules of a meeting at all costs. Communicative processes and their productivity are produced in practice. Communicative capacity is not just a skill that can be

learned and applied; it is a social practice that emerges in the course of interacting with each other while working through shared problems in meaningful and competent ways (Lave, 1988; Wenger, 1998; Forester, 2009; Cook and Wagenaar, 2012). This book attempts to capture how citizens and public professionals interweave by enacting embedded and embodied communicative practices, and the capacity that transpires (or fails to transpire) from this relational process.

Plan of the book

The main goal of this book is to provide an answer to the question: *how do public encounters give shape to participatory democracy in practice?* In the following eight chapters, I theoretically elaborate and empirically develop what the in-between of citizens and public professionals looks like, why it is important for the productivity of participatory democracy, and how its productivity can be enhanced by exercising communicative capacity. Chapter Two further deepens and broadens the earlier discussion of public encounters in participatory democracy. The origins of participatory democracy in political theory and policy practice are reviewed and several reasons for past successes and failures in achieving its normative and instrumental purposes are considered. I argue that one important reason that its very desirable purposes sometimes fail to materialise is that the influence of public encounters is often insufficiently recognised. The chapter ends with an explanation of how communicative capacity helps us in understanding and improving public encounters and how this theoretical framework is used to structure the analysis of the case study material in the subsequent chapters.

   Before turning to the case study material, Chapter Three provides some background to the ways in which the research was set up and carried out. In three steps I explain the comparative, interpretive, theory-building approach used to study communicative practices in three international cases and the narrative analysis conducted to make sense of the stories told by citizens and public professionals about their experiences with participatory practice. First, the reasons for taking an open-ended, interpretive approach focused on the everyday practice of community participation are clarified. Second, I discuss how, in each of the three cases, narratives were collected through qualitative interviews with 20 local public professionals and citizens, while observation (of participants) at participatory meetings, document analysis of relevant policy documents, and feedback through research reports and interactive workshops were used as additional methods to

check the reliability of the narratives and my interpretations. Finally, I describe how a grounded theory analysis of all this material led me to identify emergent categories, patterns and metanarratives which formed the building blocks of my theory of communicative capacity. In other words, communicative capacity emerged as the end result rather than the starting point of the research. However, through iterative review of the literature, specific sources were found that confirm and support the emergent grounded theory of communicative capacity.

Chapter Three also contains an explanation of the selection and background of the cases. The cases are three community participation projects which were being implemented in deprived and demographically diverse areas in big European cities: Glasgow (United Kingdom), Amsterdam (the Netherlands), and Bologna (Italy). These cities had all recently committed to far reaching participatory policies, but implemented them according to quite different designs and practices. In Glasgow, Pollokshields and Southside Central included some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland, where the rates for unemployment, crime and hospital admissions for alcohol and drug abuse were twice or, in some cases, three times the national average. The Glasgow Community Planning Partnership introduced the same model of collaboration for collaboration between local public organisations and the community throughout the city to tackle these problems. In Amsterdam, the Bos & Lommer area was a key target of the Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach (*Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*), as one of its six quarters had been labelled the 'worst area in the Netherlands'. A participatory budgeting system was developed to harness or tackle the great variation in the nature and extent of unemployment, schooling, safety, housing and other problems in each of the quarters. Finally, the Bolognina neighbourhood in Bologna, had changed rapidly from a tightly knit factory worker community to a socially and ethnically diverse area troubled by crime, vandalism, prostitution and drug dealing. Residents were engaged in the two most comprehensive participative projects of Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (*Piano Strutturale Comunale*) to formulate regeneration plans for their neighbourhood.

Rather than presenting the case studies individually, the findings of the case studies are presented thematically in Chapters Four to Nine in order to develop the theory of communicative capacity. Giving emphasis to each of the three modes typical of interpretive analysis – empirical, dialogical and critical (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Wagenaar, 2011) – the chapters develop the three parts of the theory as shown in Table 1.1 in the first section of

this chapter. Chapter Four provides a detailed empirical description of the habitual patterns according to which public professionals and citizens communicate and the underlying narratives that perpetuate them. This leads to an initial definition of communicative capacity and why it is important. Chapters Five to Seven provide a dialogical analysis of the three generic patterns public professionals and citizens communicatively enact in their daily practices and interactions. Each chapter explores in greater depth why habitual patterns are sustained and how communicative capacity can be exercised to break through them. Finally, Chapters Eight and Nine critically discuss how public professionals and citizens can enhance the productivity of their communication. Here, empirical findings and theoretical insights are synthesised and translated into concrete recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter Four describes public encounters in a fairly open-ended and empirically detailed way to answer the question, *what actually happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory practice?* We might think we know how public professionals and citizens communicate, but we should first go and find out what they actually do on an everyday basis. What drives them to engage in participatory practice? What are the problems they seek to resolve together? How do they talk to each other? Who does what during meetings? What happens with resulting decisions and plans? The comparison of the cases shows that when public professionals and citizens meet, they tend to develop and sustain habitual patterns of communication. Each case is characterised by a distinct communicative pattern, none of which is ideal because they uphold incompatible participatory narratives. This is how communicative capacity enters the scene: public professionals and citizens need to recognise how their communicative practices perpetuate habitual patterns.

Chapters Five to Seven analyse public encounters as dialogical processes in which citizens and public professionals make sense of each other, themselves and the situation at hand. In line with Yanow's (1996) *How Does a Policy Mean?*, the chapters provide an answer to the question: *How do public encounters in participatory practice mean?* That is, the analysis does not merely reveal the varieties of meanings that people attach to participation, but, instead, the multifaceted ways in which they dynamically generate and convey these meanings within their social context. More concretely: How do citizens and public professionals experience participation? How do they value its potential for solving their problems? How do they strive to create something meaningful out of their encounters? How do their diverging understandings of

participation integrate or conflict? Grounded in the findings of the comparative case studies, each chapter explains *how* public encounters mean by exploring one of the three generic patterns which public professionals and citizens communicatively enact in their daily practices. As such, the habitual patterns from the preceding chapter are broken down into three types of situated practices for sustaining and breaking through them.

Chapter Five shows that the *situation* in which public professionals and citizens meet is a complex, ambiguous and changing **work in progress**. To avoid static ways of engaging with the *situation*, they need the capacity to productively communicate about what has changed, what appears to be affecting what, and what might be the most sensible way of going forward. Chapter Six demonstrates that discussing the *substantive issues* at hand is a continuous **struggling** with how to handle and integrate many bits and pieces of knowledge, experiences and emotions. If they want to act jointly on shared understandings of the issues at hand, citizens and public professionals need the communicative capacity to acknowledge the nature and value of various forms of expertise in constructive ways. Finally, Chapter Seven reveals that building and maintaining *relationships* comes down to constantly **making connections** between many people, problems and policies. In order to have cooperative rather than conflictual or coercive relationships, citizens and public professionals require the capacity to communicate productively about how they can empower each other to take part in conversations, make shared decisions, and solve problems together.

The last two chapters approach public encounters with a critical perspective to answer the question: *How can public encounters become more productive?* Whatever citizens and public professionals do (and do not do), their meeting is inescapably political, in the sense that there are direct and indirect social and economic consequences for those affected by the problems being addressed. We do not want only to describe and analyse encounters, but also to reveal problems in encounters and identify possible solutions. How do misunderstandings and conflicts emerge? Who is being excluded from encounters? How is power exercised? Whose interests are served? To what degree are problems addressed? What could be improved and how? Communicative capacity, it will be argued, is crucial to answering all these questions.

Chapter Eight summarises the findings of the preceding four chapters and formulates their theoretical implications for communicative capacity, public encounters, and participatory theory and practice. It is argued that public encounters in participatory practice should be understood

in terms of the communicative in-between and the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens. Illustrated by the three case studies, I show that they tend to sustain habitual patterns of communication which limit their ability to solve the problems they care about. Failing to recognise how they communicatively enact and uphold these patterns decreases the likelihood that their encounters will lead public professionals and citizens to integrate their understandings, activities and relations. That means they will not cultivate shared understandings of the **work in progress** of the *situation*, joint activities through their **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand, and cooperative relating by **making connections** to build and maintain *relationships*. In other words, citizens and public professionals need to develop and exercise communicative capacity to make their encounters more *integrative* and participatory democracy more productive.

Chapter Nine further develops this conclusion and translates it into recommendations for practice and policy. I argue that citizens and public professionals involved in participatory practice should recognise how they sustain habitual communicative patterns in-between them which impact negatively on their relationships and their ability to solve the problems they face together. Substantive problem solving will improve when they break through habitual communicative patterns by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of conversations to the *law of the situation*. They need the capacity to observe the habit inducing pattern through which they are talking to each other, understand whether their mode of communicating is getting them anywhere, and practise more productive conversations into being. Failing to do so increases the likelihood that public encounters go off course and bring about failing reforms, waste of resources and frustrations. Several policy implications follow from this. Most importantly, if policy makers want to successfully manage participatory processes and solve problems, they need to recognise that the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens is crucial to successful participation and provide them with adequate resources, time and recognition to work out and sustain a meaningful and productive communicative practice. Indeed, we all need to start paying more serious attention to communicating productively in participatory practice.

Public encounters in participatory democracy: towards communicative capacity

[R]eality is in the relating, in the activity-between … (Mary Follett, 1924, p 54)

This chapter reviews the theoretical debate on participatory democracy and develops a focus on public encounters. This leads to an explanation of the theory and practice of communicative capacity and how this framework is used to analyse the case studies. A review of the theoretical debate reveals that public encounters did not feature in the work of the first advocates of participatory democracy, but evolved over time as an important medium for putting it into practice. However, public encounters have mainly been considered within a framework of democratic political theory, either in critique of representative and direct democracy or in normative theories of participatory democracy, primarily within the deliberative democracy literature. Although many excellent studies have already explored the communicative practices of public professionals and citizens, this particular literature is of limited help in appreciating and understanding how participatory encounters generate new types of practice which challenge established political institutions and theoretical categories. The work of Mary Follett[4] provides a framework for understanding public encounters on their own terms: the communicative process should generate new ideas, identities and outcomes which everyone considers better than those they started out with. Such integrative encounters will not necessarily happen organically; citizens and public professionals need to communicatively enact the quality of their encounters in a shared, evolving practice. The theory of communicative capacity provides a theoretical and practical framework for doing so.

Participatory democracy: from democratic political theory to practice

Participatory democracy can be defined as *the institutions and practices involved with the direct participation of (semi) public agencies, nongovernmental organisations, civic associations and citizens in decision making about and implementation of public policies that affect them* (Fung and Wright, 2003). While encounters between public professionals and citizens are integral to participatory democracy in this definition, they have not always been considered as such. Following Elstub's (2010) distinction between three generations of debate, this section reviews the political theoretical framework from which participatory democracy emerged as well as the idea that public encounters were necessary for putting participatory ideals into practice.

Participatory democracy has its roots in many centuries of democratic thought and practice. Its modern meaning came into focus towards the end of the twentieth century through initial experiences with direct democracy – using voting mechanisms to provide limited citizen engagement in policy making – and more ambitious participatory reforms implemented with significant inauthenticity (Held, 1996, pp 209-16). From the 1950s, public participation gradually became accepted in Western societies. Pertinent to the case studies in this book, the British Ministry of Housing and Local Government launched Community Development Projects in 1969 to regenerate deprived urban areas, involving excluded, disadvantaged groups in the process (Gyford, 1991). At the same time, many Italian municipalities established neighbourhood councils to provide links between the local population and the city councils (Dente and Regonini, 1980), and a similar institution was granted legal status in the Dutch Municipal Law of 1964 (Coenen et al, 2001). While these democratic innovations cannot yet be counted as manifestations of participatory democracy, their often disappointing outcomes stimulated its emergence. Public authorities and private stakeholders typically used participation in instrumental or symbolic ways to further their own interests rather than increase the influence of citizens on public policy (Hain, 1980; Boaden et al, 1982; Tops, 1998; Edelenbos and Monnikhof, 2001). However, failures were not ascribed to the notion of participation itself but to undemocratic tendencies deeply embedded in the system of representative democracy. In response, citizens developed a deeply felt resentment of the misappropriation of public decision–making powers and the lack of genuine inclusion of citizens in the process (Arnstein,

1969). This led to the development of normative principles intended to guide reform toward authentic participatory practices.

In the *first generation* of debate, therefore, participatory democracy was developed as an antithesis to the masquerade that was passing for democracy (Barber, 1984). This literature argued that the aggregation of preferences through indirect representation, direct voting mechanisms, and inauthentic attempts at citizen involvement sustained an individualistic society ruled by power-hungry elites. It was argued that a 'thin democracy' like this needed to be replaced by a 'strong democracy', a self-governing community in which consensual and fair decisions are taken jointly by all citizens affected by the issue at hand. It was thought that democracy could only reach its full potential when the realisation of this participatory ideal supplanted the representative system as the dominant model of democracy (Pateman, 1975; Mansbridge, 1980; Habermas, 1984b). Thus, a fundamental change in the meaning of democracy was at stake in these theoretical arguments. Whereas democracy traditionally meant that the authority to take and enact binding public decisions was reserved for elected politicians and mandated professionals (Weber, 1922/1978), the influence of non-elected individuals was no longer seen as undemocratic but rather as a key requirement for democracy (Hoppe, 2011, pp 167-8). However, public encounters did not feature in this citizen-centred conception of participatory democracy.

Key to the emergence and functioning of a strong democracy was the 'deliberative turn': 'a critical orientation to established power structures … [which] requires that communication must induce reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion' (Dryzek, 2000, p 162). Decisions were no longer to be taken based on hierarchy or debate in which power inequalities distort the communicative process, but through a fair process of deliberation defined as the rational exchange of ideas, information and arguments among free and equal citizens (Bohman, 1996). According to Habermas (1984a), the quality of democracy should be evaluated by analysing the circumstances under which individuals communicate their preferences, judgements and justifications. Decision making about public or collective affairs could only be truly legitimate under ideal speech conditions in which individual preferences are transformed into a collective agreement based solely on the power of the best argument. Taken together, then, a new normative framework for democracy was born: collective decision making through deliberative processes in which all affected citizens could participate freely and equally.

This framework was further developed during the *second generation* of debate. Having accepted the primacy of participatory democracy over representative democracy, scholars started to explore how this ideal could be achieved in a world defined by difference, intractable problems and a flawed institutional architecture (Mouffe, 1992; Benhabib, 1996; Bohman, 1998). Initially, criticisms were lodged against the view that ideal procedures alone were sufficient to enable fair public reasoning and collective choice. Citizens would first need to hold certain values to enable them to judge whether the procedures were actually legitimate. Moreover, these values were also required to guide them in evaluating the arguments. Advocates of this more substantive view argued that values such as inclusion, equality and liberty were needed to guarantee that diverse people would accept both the procedures for deliberating and the substance and outcomes of the decision-making process. In turn, advocates of the procedural view replied that without prior procedures it would be difficult to come to an agreement about the exact substance of these guiding values (Cohen, 1996, pp 101–102).

Some found the debate about this philosophical dilemma too narrow to buttress strong democracy in practice. Several political philosophers developed a 'thicker' definition of participatory democracy constituted by value pluralism. In their view our society is defined by differences, often negotiated across deep divides (Benhabib, 1996), between 'competing languages, discourses, worldviews and truths' (Escobar, 2010, p 49). In contrast to the framework of the first generation, which assumed, or strived for, shared understandings and unity, participatory democracy needs to accommodate pluralism and bridge divisions. According to Mouffe's (2000) theory of radical pluralism, for example, contestation and power inequality cannot be avoided because dealing with differences is inevitably a political struggle between competing values. However, antagonism can and should be turned into 'agonism' by recognising each party as legitimate adversaries. It is at this point that participatory democracy was first conceptualised in terms of public encounters. Most famously, Young wrote of 'democracy as a process of communication among citizens and public officials' (2000, p 52) which facilitates differences in modes of expression and listening to those differently situated.

Encounters between public professionals and citizens became even more central to participatory democracy during the *third generation* of debate. Around 2000, a massive increase in the number of participatory policies and initiatives (see for example Stoker, 1997; Lowndes et al, 2001a; OECD, 2001) caused attention to shift from normative debate to daily practice. Around the globe, participatory policies with more

far-reaching ambitions became widespread (Denters and Rose, 2005). To illustrate, the then incumbent New Labour government developed a new governance philosophy in which participation was a central element (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 2000; cf. Newman, 2001) and launched a great number of policies aimed at a 'joined up' approach to democratic renewal, public participation, neighbourhood regeneration, social cohesion and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic competitiveness.[5] At the heart of these policies, citizens were depicted as 'an *integral* part of the governance process and their active involvement is considered *essential* in the substantive decisions facing a community' (Roberts, 2004, p 322; emphases added). While citizens and politicians already had a history of interaction, the main innovation and thrust of participatory democracy was the regular contact between citizens and *non-elected* officials or public professionals.

Public encounters thus became a key feature of public decision making at all levels of government, as citizens and public professionals started to meet in areas as diverse as water management, environmental policy, health care, food regulation and spatial planning. Citizens and professionals were now encountering each other for longer and with greater intensity than before (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Innes and Booher, 2004). This required them to develop new skills, behaviour, organisational formats and mindsets about what to say and do, going beyond existing practices of ordinary political participation, technical bureaucratic decision making, or adversarial civic activism (Fung and Wright, 2003; Cooper et al, 2006). In other words, the realisation of participatory ideals now depended 'upon sustained and deep cooperation between diverse parties such as police officers and minority residents, parents and educators, workers and managers, and environmentalists and developers' (Fung and Wright, 2003, p 282) about concrete everyday problems.

The focus of research in this third generation has been to investigate 'how to achieve ... deliberative theory in practice' (Elstub, 2010, p 291). Driven by first and second generation participatory ideals, the goal is to explore their practical feasibility in different sociopolitical contexts. Studies of deliberative and participatory innovations such as mini-publics, deliberative polls, citizen juries, participatory budgeting and neighbourhood councils (Bohman, 1998; Elster, 1998; Fishkin and Laslett, 2003; Fung and Wright, 2003; Goodin, 2008) have expanded our understanding of the circumstances under which public professionals and citizens meet, the institutions and practices shaping their encounters, and the many factors contributing to the success or failure of their efforts. This expanding empirical literature provides

strong support for the claim that through deliberation and participation, public professionals and citizens can tackle public problems in more effective and legitimate ways than through representative democracy (Fung and Wright, 2003; Wagenaar, 2007a; Innes and Booher, 2010). Moreover, it has led to ever more sophisticated theories and models as well as a deeper understanding of the design, skills, dilemmas and complexities involved in facilitating 'authentic' participation and 'genuine' deliberation (Saward, 2003; Fung, 2006, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2009).

Nevertheless, 'there are serious concerns about an emerging gap between the rhetoric of hoped for or taken-for-granted benefits and their materialisation in reality' (Hoppe, 2011, p 163). Case studies typically report 'a story of struggles with mixed results' (Spiegel and Perlman, 1983, p 125), while participatory outcomes are often disappointing (for example, Carley et al, 2000; Beaumont, 2003; Edelenbos, 2005). Public professionals and citizens face a number of recurring practical dilemmas and structural problems which in many cases prevent participatory democracy from becoming more than an add-on to representative democracy (Lowndes et al, 2001a; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Sinclair, 2008; Hoppe, 2011). Ironically, participatory democracy is being implemented and hampered by the very system it was intended to replace. Moreover, the practical skills needed to effectively organise and manage participatory processes are not that widespread or easily acquired (Hastings, 2002; Beresford and Hoban, 2005; Ray et al, 2008). Thus, the actual ways in which participatory ideals take shape depend to a large extent on what public professionals and citizens *do* in participatory practice.

However, the literature is far from conclusive about what public professionals and citizens should actually do when they get together to resolve concrete problems. Comprehensive reviews struggle to provide more than 'partial and mixed answers' (Burton et al, 2004, p 43), as the dynamics and outcomes of participatory processes strongly depend on contextual factors (Delli Carpini et al, 2004; Ansell and Gash, 2007; Thompson, 2008). In Table 2.1, based on my own review of the British, Dutch, and Italian literature, I have assembled a list of 36 factors that influence the success or failure of participatory encounters, highlighting several recurrent cross-contextual factors including: structural political and legal power inequality (Ellis, 2000; Cento Bull and Jones, 2006; De Vries, 2008); how representative participants are of other citizens (Lowndes et al, 2001b; Skidmore et al, 2006; Barnes et al, 2007); intra- and interorganisational processes (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005; Healey, 2007b); and the design of projects with adequate political mandate,

Table 2.1 Factors that influence the success or failure of participation (my overview)

Legal rights and responsibilities	Physical setting	Embedded routines and expectations
Distribution of financial resources	**Timelines**	**How representative participants are of other citizens**
Institutional design	Degree of discretion	Nature and intricacy of problems
Urban policy context	Attitudes to government	On the spot improvisation
Administrative traditions	Willingness to participate	Sudden events
Number and nature of local quangos	Composition of community	Degree to which problems are solved
Central government control mechanisms	Administrative categorisation (ie, labelling neighbourhoods, social groups, citizens, etc.)	Leadership
General policy criteria	Social conflicts	Organisational culture
Funding process and power	Identities and perceptions	Individual values and preferences
Professional expertise	Social exclusion	**Interagency coordination**
Professional networks	Local elites	Communicative skills
Formal rules, structures, and standard operating procedures	Socioeconomic inequality	Pre-existing agendas

funding and timelines (Cognetti and Cottino, 2003; Dente et al, 2005; Bifulco and Centemeri, 2008). Obviously, there are too many factors to take into account and handle well within the scope of participatory encounters. Whether public professionals and citizens live up to the ideals of participatory democracy, then, seems highly contingent on what they do when they encounter each other in practice.

So what *do* public professionals and citizens do, and what *should* they do when they meet in participatory practice? I argue that the answer lies in-between them. That is, understanding what is the best thing to do can only emerge through the process of encounter rather than from a substantive democratic framework. This requires that we understand public encounters on their own terms. In the next section, I explain how we have come to interpret public encounters within a substantive framework of democratic political theory, and how this has limited our ability to see what actually happens and what is really possible when public professionals and citizens meet.

Public encounters: the in-between of public professionals and citizens

Public encounters, the face-to-face communication between public professionals and citizens, have traditionally been understood within the framework of representative democracy and bureaucratic organisation. Although research on street level bureaucrats and front line workers reveals that public decisions, services and outcomes are produced in the process of encountering citizens in daily practice, current research still does not fully grapple with public encounters on their own terms, as they happen in practice. Instead, they are interpreted within a new substantive (participatory) framework, which limits our grasp of the situated performances by which public professionals and citizens practise participatory democracy into being. Drawing on the work of Mary Follett, this section advances an understanding of public encounters as the relational processes in-between public professionals and citizens.

As modern government took shape around the turn of the twentieth century, public encounters became subject to strict regulation and ethical norms (Wilson, 1887/2004; Weber, 1922/1978; Finer, 1931). When meeting with citizens, public professionals were expected to act in the public interest instead of (ab)using their position for private gain, power accumulation or unequal treatment. Democratic government postulated that social ties and personal motivations and values would not sully or corrupt the rule of law and decisions made by elected representatives of the people. Bureaucracy offered an organisational structure for public professionals to treat citizens impartially: decisions were to be made based on formal responsibilities, written rules and procedures, specialist expertise and hierarchical control. Although this bureaucratic framework was intended to safeguard citizens from the whims of those in power, its rigid structures, rules and procedures could constrain or even force them, as well as those working in organisations, to act in contrast to their ideas or will (Weber, 1922/1978; Albrow, 1980; Du Gay, 2000; Bartels, 2009).

In consequence, research has mainly focused on the negative effects or dysfunctions of public encounters within this framework of democracy and bureaucracy. Democratic and societal values often suffer in public encounters characterised by depersonalised communication, an unequal concentration of power and restricted discretion (Katz and Danet, 1973). The iron cage of bureaucracy turns public professionals into self-referential, inhumane and unreflective beings (Denhardt, 1981; Hummel, 1994; Fox and Miller, 1995; Farmer, 2005) as devotion

to formal rules and procedures, hierarchical control and impartial treatment become goals in themselves (Merton, 1952), a phenomenon perpetuated in the digital age (Zuurmond, 1994; Bovens and Zouridis, 2002; Jorna and Wagenaar, 2007). On the other hand, where public encounters are not overly bureaucratised, clientalism and corruption thrive as a means of getting things done (Heidenheimer, 1970; De Zwart, 1994; Miller et al, 2001). Hence, the general sentiment is that bureaucracy does not offer a satisfactory framework to ensure public encounters produce effective, fair and legitimate outcomes.

Around the 1980s, this sentiment was further fuelled when it was discovered that public decisions and (un)democratic outcomes are 'actually made in the crowded offices and *daily encounters* of street level workers' with their clients (Lipsky, 1980, p xii; emphasis added). Encounters with street level bureaucrats such as administrators, policemen, teachers and social workers had started to have a pervasive influence on the daily lives of citizens (Katz and Danet, 1973; Goodsell, 1981). However, these encounters were not found to be fundamentally structured and constrained by the bureaucratic framework of political decisions, organisational policies, and formal rules and procedures – nor did they still respond much to individual needs and circumstances. Instead, their interactions and outcomes turned out to depend greatly on the ways in which street level bureaucrats make use of their discretion to interpret and enact this framework. Although street level workers might aspire to an ideal balance of rule application and individual treatment, the very nature of their work is to deal with often vague or contradictory policies, huge caseloads and limited resources. In effect, the decisions they take, the routines they establish, and the techniques they invent to cope with work pressures in everyday practice strongly shape public encounters and their societal and democratic outcomes (Lipsky, 1980).

Street level bureaucracy research has undeniably and irrevocably demonstrated that the daily practice of public encounters is key to modern government (Lipsky, 1980; Vinzant and Crothers, 1998; Durose, 2011; Brodkin, 2012) and has serious implications for socioeconomic inequality among minority groups, the poor, and in deprived neighbourhoods (Lipsky, 1971; Rice, 1981; Hastings, 2009b, 2009a; Dubois, 2010). Moreover, it has greatly expanded our understanding of the actual working conditions under which public professionals encounter citizens (for example, Katz et al, 1975; Kahn et al, 1976; Nelson, 1980; Brown, 1981; Hasenfeld and Steinmetz, 1981). However, it has not led us to examine public encounters on their own terms, free from the clearly dysfunctional framework of substantive

democratic norms. Even though a new framework was developed for public professionals to shape their encounters with citizens according to collaborative, deliberative and participatory ideals, this has mostly neglected the perspective and experiences of citizens (see Elías, 2010 for an exception) or what happens in the encounter itself.[6] It no longer negatively frames discretion as a problem for representative democratic control, but as an inevitable and welcome space for responsiveness to the particulars of the situation at hand, balancing contradictory values and producing desirable outcomes (Harmon, 1995; Vinzant and Crothers, 1998; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Hill and Hupe, 2007).

Ensuing street level (or front line) research has concentrated on how public professionals struggle with upholding the norms of this new framework. A great many recent studies explore the personal narratives and everyday practices of public professionals who encounter citizens or clients in the course of law enforcement, teaching, welfare distribution, immigration and participation in planning and policy making. These studies aim to grapple with the values, rules, policies, emotional struggles and know-how that shape public professionals' discretionary space and judgements (Vinzant and Crothers, 1996, 1998; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000; Sandfort, 2000; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Proudfoot and McCann, 2008; Durose, 2009; Dubois, 2010; Van Hulst, 2013). Public professionals are not depicted as immoral beings ruthlessly applying rules and procedures, nor as 'people-processors' coping through objectionable routines. Rather, they are shown to be committed and knowledgeable practitioners struggling to make fair decisions in relation to clients' circumstances, legal requirements, personal beliefs, political discourse and institutional arrangements. This teleological approach is evident in recent appraisals of 'exemplary practitioners' who stand out in handling politically sensitive and socially complex situations (Van Hulst et al, 2011).

In their encounters with citizens, public professionals are now expected to aspire to collaborative, deliberative and participatory ideals. The framework of representative democracy and bureaucratic government alienated public professionals and citizens from each other (King and Stivers, 1998; Fung and Wright, 2003). Therefore, the framework of participatory democracy seeks to repair the damage done by prescribing 'authentic participation' (King et al, 1998) in which common meanings and shared solutions emerge from the encounters between public professionals and citizens (Innes and Booher, 2004). For this to happen, they need to establish stable personal relationships

based on mutual respect, honesty and transparency (Vinzant and Crothers, 1998; Innes and Booher, 2003a; Elías, 2010; Stout, 2010d; Bell and Smerdon, 2011). Public professionals also have to value the knowledge citizens have of their everyday life situation as key to a better understanding of problems and creative solutions (Hummel and Stivers, 1998; Wagenaar, 2007a; Elías and Alkadry, 2011). Moreover, they need to create institutional conditions that empower citizens to take decisions and action (Fung, 2004; Roberts, 2004) and foster mutual accountability (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Fung and Wright, 2003; Hill and Hupe, 2007).

Although contributors draw from a variety of theoretical sources and empirical experiences, this framework remains rooted in the deliberative turn (discussed in the previous section) and in particular Habermasian (1984a, 1984b, 1996) notions of communicative action and the ideal speech situation. With the notion of communicative action, Habermas sought to preserve the core value of liberal pluralism (the individual right to live free from constraints) while overcoming its pathology of collective decision making (individuals seeking to maximise their own goals without regard for one another). Communicative action would lead individuals to reach intersubjective agreement about common concerns superseding subjective interests without restricting their individual autonomy (Healey, 1993; Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). This requires individuals to exchange rational arguments in a deliberative process free from prevailing power inequalities. Habermas (1996) therefore proposed that reforms should aspire to create ideal speech situations guaranteeing that all individuals can participate freely and equally in *undistorted* communication or *sincere* transmission of reasons and intentions (Forester, 1993a; Bohman, 1996; Dryzek, 2000; Innes and Booher, 2003a; Healey, 2006). In other words, public encounters were to be unrestricted by the use of obscure jargon, exclusion of specific individuals or groups, or withholding of information.

As in the general participatory democracy literature, the degree to which public encounters actually live up to the ideals of this framework turns out to be highly contingent. Mutual attitudes depend on personal prior experiences and many contextual factors, such as citizens' (dis)trust of government, organisational cultures, and established agendas and structures (Weissert, 1994; Lowndes et al, 2001a, 2001b; Alkadry, 2003; Yang, 2005; Bryer and Cooper, 2007; Yang and Callahan, 2007; Bryer, 2009). What gets said, by whom, and how during meetings depends on the ways in which these meetings are structured and facilitated (Hajer, 2005; Gastil and Kelshaw, 2007; Kelshaw and Gastil, 2008; Black et al, 2009). Furthermore, whether public professionals

and citizens remain committed to the collaborative process strongly hinges on personal know-how and communication skills for addressing each other, dealing with tacit barriers, and solving small yet significant problems (Beresford and Hoban, 2005; Maguire and Truscott, 2006; Wagenaar, 2007a; Ray et al, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Elías, 2010; Durose, 2011). Finally, public professionals and citizens need to find clever ways to carve out space for their encounters in light of the power inequalities embedded in the democratic and economic system (Forester, 1999; Peters and Pierre, 2000; Roberts, 2004; Skidmore et al, 2006; Stout, 2010b).

Unfortunately, the deliberative framework provides only 'a partial remedy' (Rosenberg, 2007, p 335) for handling these contingencies. Deliberation continues to exclude people from the possibility of influencing the thinking of others, even when they have access to participatory processes (Young, 1996; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000). The concern with overturning power inequalities with a superior, untainted mode of communication obscures the presence and value of various forms of communication in actual practice. More concretely, the deliberative framework neglects the fact that the ability to articulate logical, rational and reasonable arguments is strongly related to social inequity. For example, disruptive, emotional or personal modes of expression commonly used by marginalised groups are often excluded due to the primacy given to dispassionate and disembodied speech, or orderly, articulate and moderate arguments. Communicative practices can thus exclude people from participatory forums or ignore, dismiss, or patronise them when they are part of the conversation. Therefore, public encounters should not be approached from a substantive framework but from actual practice, from the embedded and embodied experiences of public professionals and citizens expressing themselves and addressing each other (Young, 2000, pp 53-5; Elías, 2010).

In other words, the ideals of deliberation, participation and collaboration are valuable, but are not meaningful in and of themselves. Moreover, they limit our understanding of how participatory democracy is actually performed and constituted in practice. Public professionals and citizens now meet on a more regular and intensive basis, but having more contact and interdependence does not automatically mean that they understand each other and collaborate well (Hendriks, 2003, p 405). The shape, meaning and outcomes of their encounters are unpredictable and strongly dependent on how public professionals and citizens communicate in concrete situations. Participatory democracy is thus not guaranteed by rational deduction from prior principles or policies, but takes shape as a shared practice in

which new meanings and patterns of interaction are produced in the course of encounters (Bogason et al, 2002). Frameworks and ideals do not create authentic participation in practice; this needs to be practised into being in-between public professionals and citizens implicated in 'the rough ground' (Mouffe, 2000, p 98) of participatory democracy (Campbell Rawlings and Catlaw, 2011; Bartels, 2013).

This means that we must start considering public encounters on their own terms. That is, to see the encounter, or in-between, as a distinct phenomenon which has real world consequences. What citizens and public professionals are able to do and achieve is a product of their encounter (Campbell Rawlings and Catlaw, 2011; Stout and Staton, 2011). The in-between is not a neutral space for transmitting information, but consists of situated, social practices which enable (or inhibit) citizens and public professionals to say something, exert influence, or reach mutual understanding (Fischer, 1999; Anderson et al, 2004; Pearce and Pearce, 2004; Rosenberg, 2007; Escobar, 2010). This interpretation of 'democracy as a process of communication among citizens and public officials' (Young, 2000, p 52) is associated with earlier work on the 'encounter' (Goffman, 1972a), the 'I-Thou' relationship (Buber, 1970), or the 'in-between' (Arendt, 1998, p 52, 2005, p 95). However, it is developed here based on Mary Follett's (1919, 1924, 1934, 2004; Stout and Staton, 2011; Stout and Love, 2015) work on 'modes of association', as this offers the most comprehensive and integrative framework for transforming the philosophical assumptions that guide our approach to public encounters in participatory theory and practice (Morse, 2006; Elías and Alkadry, 2011; Stout, 2012a).

To (re)conceptualise public encounters in terms of 'modes of association', perhaps the best place to start in Follett's work is her relational process ontology and the notion of 'circular response'. In contrast to the individualist static ontology underpinning the deliberative framework, Follett asserted that the world is not made up of separate individuals but of relationships between constantly evolving, interdependent beings. If we take a close look, we cannot properly distinguish between 'I' and 'you'; the very process of meeting has already changed me into I-plus-you and you into you-plus-I, implying an endless process of interweaving[7] that we can simply call the 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1970), relation, or encounter. This is not a linear, consequential, causal process of external stimulus and internal response, because 'as we perform a certain action our thought towards it changes and that changes our activity' (Follett, 1924, pp 61-2). Think of all 22 players who start running, kicking and shouting simultaneously in a game of football, or of new ideas and excitement being born in

a creative brainstorm: interweaving takes place so fast and naturally that we cannot really pinpoint how a certain outcome came about or attribute it to any single participant.[8] It is the shared process, the encounter, which brought it about – and which has ontological status. We therefore never respond to a fixed, separate other, but always to the relations in-between us (Follett, 1924, pp 60–4; Morse, 2006, pp 5–6; Elías and Alkadry, 2011, pp 878–80; Stout and Staton, 2011, pp 274–5; Stout and Love, 2015, chap. 2).

Interweaving does not just happen between individuals, but also with their environment, or what Follett (1924) calls 'the situation'. Rather than physical, social and organisational factors existing side by side, all these factors are interconnected, constituting the situation through their relations with each other. Through circular response, the situation evolves with us as we act and interconnects with other situations (including prior relatings, everything and everyone absent from the encounter, and the potentialities of the future) into the 'total situation'. In this dynamic, holistic and contextual environment we should constantly strive to find and follow the 'law of the situation': that is, collaboratively discovering what is integral to a particular situation and being responsive to this rather than personal interests, sudden impulses or formal rules. For example, if particular persons appear to be best qualified to take the lead in organising an activity, they should do so, even if they do not have the formal position and authority to do so. All those involved in the situation should develop a shared sense of when the law of the situation has been found and constantly re-evaluate it in light of the eternally unfolding total situation (Follett, 1924 [2004]; Stout and Love, 2015, chapters 7, 9 and 12).

Although we constantly and inescapably interweave, the process of 'integrating' does not necessarily lead to the 'unifying of differences'. Indeed, Follett (Follett, 1919, 1924) admits that differences and conflict abound and can hinder our innate social bond. However, conflict need not imply impasse as long as we consider it a struggle within our relationship in need of a better way of integration. Differences can be integrated or unified through 'creative process' or 'constructive conflict' into something new that all consider better than their initial views or preferences. Integration is not the same as compromise, as the latter would involve separate entities reaching an agreement on portions of pre-held preferences.[9] Instead, individuals are evolving, multifaceted beings interweaving their biological, emotional, intellectual, psychological and spiritual threads with their environment in an ongoing process of becoming. Recognising this evolving sense of self, we need to be responsive to (equally evolving) others and situations,

constantly relating ourselves anew through the 'yoking' (Abbott, 1995) of the inchoate differences that we bring to the encounter. We can only aspire to our potential and progress through the community or group process, through the fullness of our relations, by learning how to join thoughts and actions with those of others so that the process is productive (Follett, 1919; Morse, 2006, pp 6-8; Stout and Staton, 2011, pp 275-7; Stout and Love, 2015, chapters 3, 6, 7 and 12).

The practice of unifying differences 'has the effect of generating a sense of group identity and group-spirit that fosters a consciousness of oneness stemming from direct experience rather than impositions from external sources' (Stout and Love, 2015, p 62). Rather than aspiring to pre figured concepts and norms set outside of the relational process, participants derive their understandings, purposes and activities from the law of the situation. By learning what the situation requires everyone to do, the group process of integrating differences enables the group to exercise 'power-with' rather than 'power-over' one another. In that way, no position, authority or responsibility is tied to a person, only to its function in the situation and its meaningful and competent performance. Hence, both the group ethic and its practical manifestations grow through shared, embodied experiences of coming together to address common concerns (Follett, 1919, 1934, 2004; Morse, 2006; Stout and Staton, 2011, pp 275-7; Stout and Love, 2015, chapter 9), or the 'actual group association – the *practice* of community' (Follett, 1919, p 587).

On a general level, this reconceptualisation of public encounters has clear implications. Over the past decade, the financial and economic crisis, mass immigration coupled with ethnic and cultural tensions, climate change, and the rapid depletion of natural resources have inexorably stressed the (fragile) interdependence between countries, economies, social groups, the environment and individuals (Beck et al, 2003; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012; Stout and Love, 2015, chapter 13). The philosophical assumptions developed by Follett suggest we transform our political economic system by making this interdependence work to our advantage and preventing further systemic breakdown and crises (Stout, 2010a). This not only turns public encounters into a key medium for the functioning of participatory democracy, but also implies that public professionals and citizens recognise and productively enact their innate relational bond. However, it is less clear how public professionals and citizens can actually do so in daily practice. What constraints and affordances do they run into when they encounter each other and how do they deal with them? This is what the theory and practice of communicative capacity explains.

Communicative capacity: theory and practice

We have seen that truly authentic participatory democracy requires that we let go of a substantive framework and instead, from a relational process ontology, let it take shape through the situated encounters of public professionals and citizens. But how does that actually work? How can we see whether participants in the encounter are actually integrating their ideas and practices into something new? What problems inhibit them in unifying their differences? And how can they nevertheless energise their innate social bond? The research for this book shows that public professionals and citizens can practise more integrative encounters into being by exercising communicative capacity. As their interweaving (and hence their ability to tackle the problems they came together to resolve) is constrained by habitual patterns of communication, public professionals and citizens need to adapt the nature, tone and conditions of their conversations to the *law of the situation*. This requires them to recognise and change the shared practices through which they engage with the *situation* in which they meet, discuss the *substantive issues* at hand, and build and maintain their *relationships*. In this way, the theory and practice of communicative capacity helps us to understand how we can practise more authentic and productive participatory democracy into being.

The theory of communicative capacity is developed in the ensuing three subsections. While the sections follow the basic structure of Table 1.1 (see the first section of Chapter One), here I go a step further by detailing all the generic patterns, theoretical concepts and ideal typical constructs, and explaining how they fit together. Table 2.2 differentiates between the **shared communicative practices (bold)** and the *ideal typical quality (italicised)* of public encounters when public professionals

Table 2.2 Generic patterns and communicative capacity

Generic patterns	Communicative capacity
Sustaining *habitual communicative patterns* grounded in narrative of **Community/Planning**	Adapting conversations to the *law of the situation*
Engaging with **work in progress** of the *situation*	Integrating the **ongoing business** with the *total situation*
Struggling with *substantive issues* at hand	Integrating **actionable understandings** to *unify differences*
Making connections to build and maintain *relationships*	Integrating **regimes of competence** for *cooperative styles of relating*

and citizens are engaged in a habitual pattern (lefthand column) as opposed to when they are exercising communicative capacity (righthand column). Chapter Three explains how this theory and its various empirical and theoretical elements were developed through a grounded theory analysis, including an iterative literature review that confirmed and developed the emergent categories of the fieldwork.[10] Here I concentrate on making clear what kinds of habitual patterns of communication there are, what I mean by communicative capacity, and how generic patterns and communicative capacity are practised into being in-between public professionals and citizens.

Habitual patterns of communication

According to Follett (1926/2004), 'unless you change the habit–patterns of people, you have not really changed your people' (p 64). Habits are easily born and hard to get rid of. The more you are addressed in a certain way (for example, being told you are stubborn when not taking someone's advice), the more your thoughts and activities will take place within that pattern (no longer being willing to take any advice from that person, hence being labelled as having a stubborn character). The self-reinforcing loop of this patterned behaviour can only be broken when we are triggered to reflect on the existence, origins and consequences of the pattern (Argyris and Schön, 1976). This is no mean feat; a lot of hard work is involved in the process of becoming aware of the problems of our own behaviour, accepting the need to change, and learning how to think and act differently. Unfortunately, participatory democracy does not necessarily induce such a process. To be sure, when practised well, it holds an unmatched potential to resolve intractable problems involving deeply divided stakeholders (see, for example, Fischer, 1993; Forester, 2006; Healey, 2006; Innes and Booher, 2010). However, bringing citizens and public professionals together is not enough in itself, as it does not automatically challenge them to break engrained patterns and habits (Lichterman, 2009).

Instead of breaking them, public professionals and citizens actually tend to perpetuate habitual patterns of communication. How they address each other, who says what and when, and what they talk about is all strongly determined by the pattern they have grown accustomed to rather than by the *law of the situation*. By failing to recognise or change these patterns, public professionals and citizens limit their ability to address the problems they came together to resolve. Each pattern uniquely opens and closes options/possibilities for those participating in conversations, what decisions are taken and how participants understand

each other. The benefits and shortcomings of different patterns can be clarified by distinguishing between three modes of communication: debate, deliberation and dialogue (see Fischer, 1999; Yankelovich, 1999; Kelshaw, 2007; Kim and Kim, 2008; Forester, 2009; Escobar, 2010). Although deliberation and dialogue are commonly advocated as superior modes of communication, Figure 2.1 visualises their trade-offs to enable us to determine which form of communication is most appropriate to the situation.

First, debate is a confrontational form of communication in which participants articulate and defend their positions through the use of arguments aimed at winning over other participants (or the audience). It presumes fully linked desires and methods – what participants want and how they want it to be achieved are both fixed in their positions. Participants try to convince and criticise rather than establish common ground. This helps to draw out differences between standpoints and identify weaknesses in each other's arguments, but also runs the danger of dramatising conversations into 'ritualised opposition' rather than 'genuine disagreement' (Tannen, 1999, p 4). Moreover, the desire to prevail over others is likely to result in domination rather than integration (Follett, 1924, 1934, 1942/2013b; Stout and Love, 2015, pp 100–2). Debate is ill-suited to going beyond standpoints and establishing compromise (black) or common ground (grey). Debating thus comes down to expressing differences while neglecting similarities in views and possibilities for unifying.

Figure 2.1: The Debate-Deliberation-Dialogue model
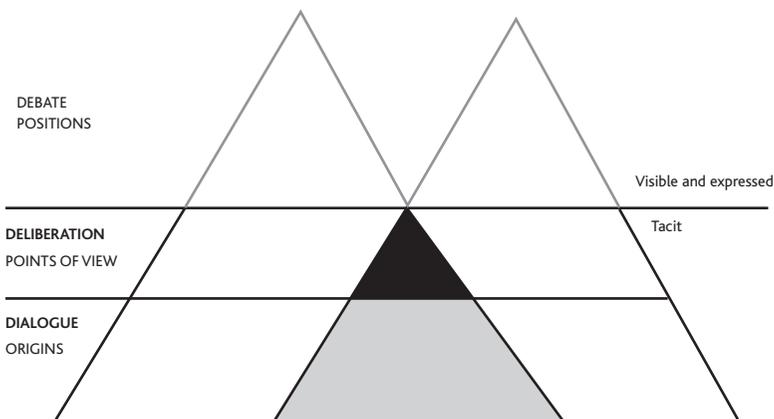
Source: Amended from Pound (2003, p 12) and Acland (1995, p 50)

Second, as previously explained, deliberation refers to rational communication aimed at collectively exploring the reasons for different viewpoints and the potential for agreements. It implies a search for compromise on methods while holding on to desires. Participants have to move from their subjective desires to objective claims by formulating clear, logical and rational arguments. While this can enable them to reach a compromise, it requires participants to stay within the boundaries of the conversation (that is, stick to preset goals, roles and procedures) and refrain from personal or emotional forms of expression. Deliberation requires rational and cognitive capacities to articulate, criticise and justify the options at hand, and prohibits embodied speech and antagonism to produce overly critical and divergent behaviour. Although compromise – masked as 'consensus' – is often glorified as a triumph over domination, it still creates a form of mutual domination as each participant sacrifices or loses something rather than revaluating and integrating their wills into something new that everyone wants (Follett, 1924, 1934; Stout and Love, 2015, pp 100-2). Deliberating thus boils down to striving for consensus with the risk of losing sight of the 'total situation' and ending up with mere compromise.

Third, dialogue is an open ended mode of communication that does not aim for agreement per se, but, rather, forms a social bond and mutual understanding as a basis for thinking and acting together, from which shared ideas and agreements may follow. In contrast to debate and deliberation, it requires the disintegration of desires and methods in order to explore them with others. Participants reflect on the undercurrents of their thoughts by inquiring into personal experiences, tacit assumptions and emotional attitudes. By creating a safe space in which they feel comfortable enough to share deep feelings and thoughts, they can stimulate honesty, empathy, mutual understanding, reflexivity and respectful relationships. But as dialogue is communication without a predestined goal or direction, it does not immediately help to identify or move towards solutions to pressing problems. It can certainly precipitate organic change in participants' quality of thinking so that nobody is coerced or sacrifices what they really want, but this does not come about as a matter of course or without adequate practice or facilitation (Follett, 1924, 1934, 1942/2013a, Stout and Love, 2015, pp 102-5). Dialogue thus amounts to developing profound understandings and relationships but it does not always utilise the constructive potential of confrontation or achieve concrete decisions and actions.

Due to their respective trade-offs, none of these three modes of communication is ideal for all situations or purposes. One might

work well at a certain moment, but is not necessarily adequate for future situations. So we might say that public professionals and citizens should simply adapt their mode of communication to what is suitable in the current situation. However, doing so is not that easy and all too often this does not happen because modes of communication tend to take a habitual, patterned form. Habitual patterns of debate, deliberation or dialogue – with the former two often dominating public encounters – not only result in public professionals and citizens having the same kinds of conversation over and over again but also inhibit their awareness of the way in which they are communicating and the prospects of changing this. Their daily communicative practices are entangled in a self-reinforcing loop with deep seated, preconceived underlying narratives of how public professionals and citizens *are* and *should be* communicating.

Based on the case studies and an iterative literature review, I developed two ideal typical participatory narratives: **Community** and **Planning**. **Community** can be defined as together change, shared by all (based on the Greek *ko-moi-mei*), quality of fellowship, or community of relations or feelings (based on the Latin *communitatem*). According to this participatory narrative, public professionals and citizens (should) communicate out of a mutually felt willingness to convey information or feelings to each other (Taylor, 1982). A **Community** narrative thus upholds a pattern of dialogue. Alternatively, **Planning** means a ground plan or (drawing on) a flat surface (deriving from the Greek *plano* and the Latin *planum*). In this participatory narrative, public professionals and citizens (should) communicate out of an innate sense of obligation to transmit knowledge and comply with authoritative arrangements (Peters, 2001, pp 238-40). Despite an aversion to authority in the deliberative democracy literature, a **Planning** narrative upholds a pattern of deliberation because it is often highly rational, structured and standardised in practice (see the previous section). A pattern of debate, finally, results from opposition between both narratives.

The difficulty of changing habitual patterns has to do with the indispensable (they both form one side of the coin) and incommensurable (they cannot be reduced to one another) nature (Stout and Salm, 2011) of these two underlying narratives. In other words, **Community** and **Planning** are both logical and valuable ways of thinking about participation, but exist in direct tension with one another. If public professionals and citizens adhere to formal structures, plans and procedures to communicate in stable, certain and clear ways (**Planning**), this comes directly at the cost of the autonomous, flexible and spontaneous communication which emerges in the absence of a

system in which plans, rules, structures and roles are strictly specified (**Community**). The tension between **Community** and **Planning** is comparable to the tension between freedom and equality in liberal democracy: to guarantee equality among all individuals, a liberal democracy sets in place a system of sovereign power based on the rule of law, which by definition limits the freedom of individuals. Hence, like liberal democracy, participatory democracy is necessarily imperfect, in the sense that it will never be able to realise a single ultimate ideal (Mouffe, 1992, 2000; Staniševski, 2011). Instead, it is an ongoing process of 'becoming' in which public professionals and citizens need to constantly integrate their understandings, activities and relations anew (Follett, 1919). This requires, first of all, the ability to recognise and break habitual patterns of communication.

At a basic level, then, public professionals and citizens need the capacity to step back from the immediate issues at hand and reflect on whether the way in which they are communicating is getting them anywhere. Is debate, deliberation or dialogue dominant? How do participatory narratives of **Community** and **Planning** uphold our communicative pattern? What is the mode of communication doing for the situation: sustaining seeming consensus, apparent conflict, or ostensible progress? What are people actually saying? What might be other and more appropriate ways of communicating? But recognising and breaking habitual patterns is more difficult than it might seem. It is not something that can be done single-handedly, by reflection only, or through a one-off intervention. Instead, it requires public professionals and citizens to engage in sustained and shared efforts to adapt the situated practices that they enact in their daily encounters. In other words, it requires communicative capacity.

Communicative capacity

Communicative capacity refers to *the ability of public professionals and citizens to recognise habitual patterns of communication and break through them by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of the conversation to the law of the situation*. Whether public professionals and citizens exercise communicative capacity helps to explain why they manage to solve problems on some occasions but not on others. This, in turn, clarifies how public encounters give shape to participatory democracy and affect its productivity in everyday practice. Local problems can only be partially addressed if public professionals and citizens get stuck in a habitual mode of communication. The likelihood that suitable solutions are found is enhanced if they are able to break free from their

habitual patterns of communication (Forester, 2009) and adapt the conversation to the *law of the situation*. Lacking communicative capacity means wasting a lot of time, resources and energy, and damaging trust, relationships and the willingness to collaborate. Communication is thus not a neutral medium (Rosenberg, 2007): what public professionals and citizens say, or do not say, and how they address each other, has a strong impact on whether they understand each other and manage to get something out of their encounters. In other words, their in-between shapes the purposes, dynamics and outcomes of participatory democracy.

An obvious criticism of this emphasis on the in-between is that it offers little help in addressing or assessing the substantive issues at play. If participatory democracy can only legitimately take shape through the interweaving of situated individuals, how can we be sure that what they are doing is good (enough)? How can we guard participatory democracy against the whims or perversities of a small group of people coming together to do what they deem best given the circumstances? And is it not just all process without any critical stance on the systemic power inequalities structuring these encounters and powerful interests determining who gets what? Indeed, a lack of attention to the power as well as the means to evaluate context, content and outcomes are common criticisms of studies of communicative practice (Healey, 2007a, p 125).

However, the Follettian approach taken here shields communicative capacity from such concerns. First of all, power inequalities are a sign of domination (power–over) rather than integration (power–with) and therefore can never lead to encounters in which the goals, outcomes and legitimacy of participation derive from the situated relations of public professionals and citizens. Power inequalities are a direct violation of their relational condition and therefore unacceptable. Second, even when power relations are conducive to integration (in other words, authority follows from the *law of the situation* and therefore does not constitute domination), public professionals and citizens should be continuously interweaving with each other and their wider environment, including any person or issue that might raise concerns over what they have decided or done. A sense of what is the right thing to do emerges from the shared, embodied experience of addressing common concerns together, being fully embedded in the *total situation*. In other words, participatory democracy can only legitimately take shape through the actual practice of *becoming* together, letting the in-between take shape as it should in the situation. To let that happen, communicative capacity is indispensable.

So what then is communicative capacity? How do we know it when we see it? How can we learn it? Unfortunately, it defies any substantive definition. It cannot be codified, as it is not a permanent and universal thing that individuals *have* irrespective of time and place. It is not an instrumental ability to effectively transmit information in order to achieve set goals (Healey, 2006; Innes and Booher, 2003b; cf. Sullivan et al, 2006). It does not refer to communicative skills for achieving 'ideal speech' (Habermas, 1970a, 1970b, 1984a), that is communication which is perfectly clear, sincere, undistorted and effective. In contrast to idealised communication, communicative capacity refers to the ability to determine what real communication a practical situation requires (Wagenaar, 2007a; De Souza-Briggs, 2008; Forester, 2009). It comprises practical know-how, acquired intelligence or a knack for the situation: 'What should I say now?' (see Schön, 1983; Schmidt, 1993; Scott, 1998; Lee, 2007). Knowing how to stop a conflict from escalating, how to signal the limits of the rules of the conversation, or how to find the right tone in uttering a criticism, all are shared situated practices which we cannot define but recognise all too well when we see them performed (Schön, 1983; Young, 2000, p 80; Wagenaar, 2004).

While this might be a disappointing or elusive explanation to those in search of clear principles of good communication, taking a practice approach makes it remarkably clear how we can get to grips with what communicative capacity is.

> When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life we show ourselves knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action. (Schön, 1983, p 49; original emphasis)

Rather than 'knowing in action', it seems more appropriate to think of communicative capacity as 'knowing in *inter*action'. It is not an individual activity, but a social practice of engaging in concrete situations where you gradually get a sense of the meaning of certain words and expressions as well as how you can competently perform in these situations (Lave, 1988; Wenger, 1998). It is knowing what kind of jokes you can make to each other, how to retell a story, or which rituals

to uphold in your meetings (or in the breaks!). This social practice does not exist in the abstract, but emerges in the process of actively engaging with each other and the shared activity as public professionals and citizens go along their business. In other words, communicative capacity *emerges and exists in public encounters* while being engaged in the 'eternally unfolding present' (Cook and Wagenaar, 2012) of participatory practice. In other words, democracy can only be learned in the *doing* of it (Follett, 1934).

Learning how to communicate, then, cannot be taught from a book and does not follow from mechanically following some rules, but hinges on the in-between of the specific people involved in concrete situations. It is an emergent property that no participant has individually, but, rather, is produced in their interactions. Their shared experience of specific situations enables them to communicate intelligibly about it and move around effectively in it (Brown and Duguid, 2000; Wagenaar and Cook, 2011). Outsiders or newcomers who have not felt the tension in their stomach when a conflict emerged during a meeting, or who have not had the sensation of a change in the atmosphere in the room, will have difficulty in talking about what happened, let alone finding the right words or tone. However, they can develop their communicative capacity in the process of encountering others, by not subsuming 'Otherness' in their own frame of mind or in a habitual pattern of communication, but by truly opening up to experience Others in the total situation on their own terms (Follett, 1924; Buber, 1970).

So how can public professionals and citizens exercise communicative capacity rather than perpetuating habitual patterns? How can they prevent or stop having the same kind of conversations over and over again? How can they enhance their ability to jointly address the problems they are facing together? The next section delves into the nitty-gritty of three generic patterns of participatory practice and the communicative capacity required for breaking them. I explain why public professionals and citizens usually do not manage to reflect on the habitual patterns which shape their encounters, let alone change them. I also set out ways of adapting their conversations to the *law of the situation* (which will be further elaborated in Chapter Nine).

Generic patterns of participatory practice

Whether public professionals and citizens are upholding a habitual pattern or exercising communicative capacity depends on the communicative practices they enact in the process of encountering each other. Communication does not just mean exchanging information,

but more fundamentally, it comes down to situated performances; contextually embedded and embodied practices for taking part in a conversation, getting a message across, excluding certain persons or topics from the conversation, or discounting particular arguments or modes of expression. Saying something is doing or accomplishing something (Austin, 1962). Greeting, rhetoric, wit and gossip are not random types of communication, but always have underlying meanings and functions within their social context (Goffman, 1972b). A particular way of greeting, for example, can be a ritualised and superficial gesture that means that you do not truly acknowledge each other. The way people introduce themselves – if they offer a handshake, or whether they look at each other when spoken to – makes an enormous difference to their ability to talk about the substance of the issues facing them at that moment (Young, 2000, pp 57-77).

Public professionals and citizens are often unaware of the ways in which their situated performances bring habitual patterns of communication into being (let alone how they might change them). They are more concerned with making sense of a new policy, getting attention for a certain problem, or repairing the damage done by a conflict. The language used to talk about problems, tacit definitions of what constitutes relevant expertise, or the demeanour of conversations are usually taken for granted in the course of getting things done. This is not so much a matter of communicative incompetence; rather, habitual patterns constantly draw the attention of public professionals and citizens to the content of their conversation (the *situation*, *substantive issues* and *relationships* they are talking about) rather than the process of communicating (how they are engaging with the situation, discussing the issues, and relating with each other). That is why we need to disentangle the patterns they habitually enact and the ways in which communicative capacity can be exercised to break through these habitual patterns.

As shown in Table 2.2 at the start of this section, public professionals and citizens in the three case studies in this book uphold remarkably similar habitual patterns: they are all engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation*, **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand, and **making connections** to build and maintain their *relationships*. Although public professionals and citizens inevitably perform these generic patterns differently due to contextual variation, their habitual nature renders it difficult to adapt the nature, tone and conditions of conversations. However, exercising communicative capacity makes this possible; public professionals and citizens can adapt their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*, their **actionable understandings**

to *unify differences*, and their **regime of competence** to *cooperative styles of relating*. Practising these situational, dynamic and relational characteristics of integration into being will open up their habitual communicative patterns so that they do not get stuck in static habits.

First, the *situation* in which public professionals and citizens meet is an endless **work in progress**. It is inherently complex, ambiguous and changeable because it consists of a great number of individuals, organisations, problems and events, the shape and meaning of which are constantly changing. People join and leave at different points in time, while their individual responsibilities, motivations and working relationships are not always clear. The legitimacy of participating individuals and institutions is often questioned or contested. Rules and structures are regularly revised, with new policy ambitions often being imprecise and ambiguous. The composition and needs of neighbourhoods are complex and evolving, while the exact scope, causes and consequences of problems are difficult to pinpoint. Therefore, public professionals and citizens need the capacity to communicate about how this **work in progress** shapes who can and should say and do what, when, and how.

However, public professionals and citizens tend to grow accustomed to communicating about **work in progress** in the same habitual way, reinforcing a pattern of 'This is the way things are over here'. They do so by communicatively enacting the **ongoing business** – i.e., the 'dynamic, developmental, often taken-for-granted and unproblematic background against which and within which problems and opportunities of a community's practices arise and are dealt with' (Wagenaar and Cook, 2011, p 205) – as a static context that forces them to act in certain ways. For example, public professionals and citizens can set strict limits to what they can talk about and follow preset rules and procedures for arriving at joint decisions. While such a habitual pattern of deliberation can enable them to craft consensus about a specific problem insulated from external pressures, it also delineates their ability to address other problems or develop innovative solutions falling outside of the remit of their deliberative space. Indeed, crafting good institutional designs is indispensable for effective participation (see for example Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008; Smith, 2009). Yet, as any design will be useful for limited purposes and time, and can have unintended consequences that increase complexity and ambiguity (Perrow, 1999; Wagenaar, 2006, 2007a), it should be an ongoing, iterative, dynamic process.

Hence, **work in progress** implores public professionals and citizens to adapt the **ongoing business** of their encounters to the *total*

situation. Rather than a static, external context, the **ongoing business** should be understood as an evolving, shared repertoire that enables or inhibits what public professionals and citizens do as they interactively engage with particular elements of the *situation*. Public professionals and citizens should not let their **ongoing business** take a static, habitual form or seek to fix it in institutional designs. The *situation* is a highly interactive, adaptive and unpredictable **work in progress**, with the *total situation* constantly creating itself anew in unforeseeable, uncontrollable and even incomprehensible ways. Therefore, public professionals and citizens should collaboratively enquire into all the rules, policies, roles, persons and problems; their various interpretations, meanings and interconnections, and practical ways of modifying and accommodating these to each new situation, while constantly re-evaluating whether they are following the *law of the situation* in light of the past, current and future manifestations and potentialities of the *total situation* (Follett, 1924, 2004; Stout and Love, 2015, chapters 3 and 9). Put more succinctly, they need to engage with the *situation* through flexible, adaptive and holistic communication.

Second, discussing the *substantive issues* at hand is a constant process of **struggling** with different bits and pieces of knowledge, experience and emotions. It is cognitively demanding to take on new information and learn to translate others' expertise. Moreover, the process of acknowledging others' feelings, beliefs and experiences, as well as of being recognised as a legitimate participant in the conversation is emotionally charged. When public professionals and citizens are talking about local problems such as safety, playground renewal, housing issues, domestic violence, or health inequalities, they are not referring to some definitive stock of neutral and objective knowledge that exists external to them and could be acquired by putting all the different pieces of the puzzle together until the picture is complete. Rather, they are trying to make their ordinary and situated knowledge and experiences of the complexities of the local problems meaningful to each other. This process of exchanging intertwined knowledge, emotions and experiences hinges on their capacity to communicate about how they are **struggling** to translate different meanings and languages based on different forms of expertise.

Despite their efforts to listen to and learn from each other, public professionals and citizens tend to neglect the **struggling** involved in their conversations. This happens because they get into the habit of communicatively enacting static views of the *substantive issues* at hand in a so called **actionable understanding**:

an understanding of [the issue at hand] that entails a number
of things, including, making it an active, ongoing, and
embedded part of their work, having it fall under various
laws or policies applicable to the [situation], addressing the
possibility of it articulating with other[s] ... and trusting that
doing this is consistent with their often taken-for-granted
sense of what is and what might be, of what is desirable,
and what is to be avoided in such a situation, and to do
all this in a way that enables them to take an appropriate
action on it at an appropriate time – that is, an action that
is effective and responsible given these sorts of contextual
factors. (Cook and Wagenaar, 2012, p 20)

In some cases they might actually be **struggling** through joint processes
of discovering the details of specific problems, listening what others
have to say, and gradually identifying a common view and solution. But
such a habitual pattern of dialogue takes a lot of effort and commitment
while not always leading to widespread and durable results, leaving
public professionals and citizens frustrated with the idiosyncratic
character of their encounters. To be sure, exchanging expertise, beliefs,
values and feelings is not a straightforward transfer of knowledge
between senders and receivers, but a downright challenging process
of confronting psychological, organisational and social differences
(Hartman and Tops, 2005; Wagenaar, 2007a; Fischer, 2009; Forester,
2009). Nevertheless, working through these challenges is the only way
to effectively build joint understanding of what the issue at hand is,
how others are affected by it, and how it can be dealt with (Forester,
2006, 2009b).

Struggling thus urges public professionals and citizens to constantly
adapt the **actionable understandings** existing in-between them
by *unifying differences*. This goes beyond the instrumental transaction
of differences to reach compromise typical of communicative ethics
(Habermas, 1984a). As they accumulate joint experiences with the
issue at hand, public professionals and citizens modify and improve
their sense of what they need to know in order to act, how to come by
this knowledge, and who or what can provide it. Such an **actionable
understanding** should include a sense of the **struggling** involved in
making sense of the issues at hand, broadening and deepening their
grasp of what others mean to say, what is actually driving them, and
how to appreciate this. As such, public professionals and citizens can
engage in 'constructive conflict'. First, they should value the differences
in their expertise as the interconnected threads of their interweaving

whole. They then confront these differences by exploring them in more depth rather than opposing their apparent manifestations. Finally, they integrate their differences into new shared understandings of how to jointly address the issue at hand. (Follett, 1919, 1924; Elías and Alkadry, 2011; Stout and Love, 2015, pp 100–2). *Unifying differences* in this way renders communication a fine art of recognising, empathising and appreciating what is being expressed.

Third, building and maintaining *relationships* between public professionals and citizens is a continuous process of **making connections**. Relating does not come down to demanding that others honour a onetime pledge to participate or collaborate, but rather demands the constant linking of a great number of people, policies and problems. Public professionals and citizens build and maintain their *relationships* by trying to convince each other to take a particular course of action, get recognition for their presence, needs and experiences, and build trust in spite of uncertainties, mistakes and misunderstandings. Doing so is far from straightforward, since participatory practice stirs up countless functional and emotional issues that on the one hand motivate public professionals and citizens to collaborate, while at the same time bring about many barriers and tensions that frustrate their *relationships*. Their *relationships* are constantly put under pressure because mistakes, unexpected problems and misunderstandings simply happen. This means that the number of connections to be made always far exceeds the actual possibilities for doing so. **Making connections** thus requires the capacity to communicate about practical ways of empowering each other to participate in discussions, take shared decisions, and act on problems together.

Unfortunately, citizens and public professionals do not usually manage to alter their pattern of **making connections**. Habitually, they communicatively enact a static **regime of competence**: 'the social configurations in which [their] enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and [their] participation is recognizable as competence' (Wenger, 1998, p 5). Whether or not they address their *relationships* explicitly, through their relating, public professionals and citizens acknowledge one another as (legitimate) participants, qualify what it takes to be competent and interact meaningfully, and negotiate practical ways of being a person in the situation and wider context at hand. How they interact affects their group standing, status and reputation (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003, pp 150–152; Wagenaar, 2004, pp 650–2). For instance, public professionals and citizens can strive for commitment to 'genuine' participation and exclude anyone who does not live up to their standard. Such a habitual pattern of debate about personal beliefs

and motivations can be helpful for preventing inauthentic participation, but it is just as likely to lead to rash accusations and shallow discussion of others' sincerity and 'true' ideals. Undeniably, participation cannot work without a broadly shared commitment to mutual empowerment or the reform of structural power inequalities (Habermas, 1984a; King et al, 1998; Fung, 2004; Roberts, 2004). But making it work equally requires the ability to listen to what actually motivates others and talk about their inevitably different interpretations and expectations of participation (Huxham et al, 2000; Innes and Booher, 2004; Stout, 2010b).

Therefore, **making connections** requires public professionals and citizens to adapt the **regime of competence** of their encounters to *cooperative styles of relating*. Instead of trying to dominate others by holding them to a unilateral ideal of participation ('power-over'), their modes of collaboration should emerge from a relational process of group association. Shared, embodied experiences can generate a communal sense of what is competent and meaningful (inter)action, thereby actively integrating disparate experiences of the meaningfulness of the encounter and the competences of various participants. Public professionals and citizens should discover how to exercise 'power-with' each other while participating in conversations, taking shared decisions, and acting on problems together by being engaged in the integrating activity that is the practice of community (Follett, 1919, 1934; Stout and Staton, 2011; Stout and Love, 2015, chapters 9 and 12). The resulting *cooperative styles of relating* thus transpire from communicating about the experientially founded aspirations, standards, values and identities through which public professionals and citizens **make connections** with one another.

In sum, the communicative practices that public professionals and citizens enact in-between them uphold habitual patterns of communication but can also lead to integrative encounters. Public professionals and citizens are often habitually engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation*, **struggling** with the *substantive issues*, and **making connections** to build and maintain their *relationships*, without much concern for the *law of the situation*. Again, this is not a matter of communicative incompetence, but of the habit-inducing effects of the complex, ambiguous and evolving *situation* in which they meet, the cognitively demanding and emotionally charged *substantive issues* at hand, and the mistakes, unexpected problems and power asymmetries involved in building and maintaining *relationships*. However, public professionals and citizens can overcome static communicative practices by adapting their **ongoing business** to the

total situation, their **actionable understandings** to *unify differences*, and their **regime of competence** to *cooperative styles of relating*. By exercising communicative capacity in these ways, public professionals and citizens will develop integrative understandings, activities and relationships that will render participatory democracy more productive.

Summary

Since its introduction as a radical alternative to representative democracy, it has turned out that the actual shape, outcomes and legitimacy of participatory democracy strongly depend on what happens when public professionals and citizens meet. Up to now, these public encounters have mainly been approached from a substantive framework of deliberative democracy ideals, which has not necessarily informed effective and legitimate participation. Based on the work of Mary Follett and contemporary extensions, I have developed an understanding of public encounters as the communicative in-between of public professionals and citizens. The way they interweave in this in-between has a distinct influence on whether they manage to get something out of their encounters and, hence, what becomes of participatory democracy. In participatory practice, public professionals and citizens tend to sustain habitual patterns of communication which limit their ability to address the problems they come together to resolve. They get entangled in these patterns as they are engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation*, **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand, and **making connections** to build and maintain their *relationships*. The theory and practice of communicative capacity explains how public professionals and citizens can recognise and break unproductive habitual patterns by adapting the course of their conversations to the *law of the situation*. The following chapters will clarify how this theory came about, what it looks like, and what its implications are.

Studying narratives of participatory practice

[A]pparently innocuous storytelling … can do a great deal of work …
(John Forester, 1999, p 3)

This chapter provides some background to the ways in which the research was set up and carried out. It explains the interpretive, comparative approach used to study communicative practices in three international cases and the narrative analysis conducted to make sense of the stories citizens and public professionals told about their experiences of participatory practice. It explains how the cases were selected and compared and what they add to the analysis and conclusions about communicative capacity. The chapter then explains what narratives are and how, in each of the three cases, stories were collected through qualitative interviews with local public professionals and citizens, while observation (of participants), document analysis and feedback were used as additional methods to consider data about the same situations. Finally, it explains the grounded theory-building process of identifying emergent categories, patterns and metanarratives, which formed the building blocks of the theory of communicative capacity.

How public encounters in practice can illuminate theory

Instead of approaching public encounters from a predefined normative framework, I looked at what happens in everyday participatory practice. I did not start out with any concepts or theories to empirically confirm or enrich, but developed my own concepts and theories through an iterative process of data interpretation to theory and back again. This was done according to the principle of *practice illuminating theory* to 'understand the conceptualized from the immersion in a practice that provides content to the concepts' (Hummel, 1998, p 154). By engaging in thick description of actual practice – which, as the next section will argue, narratives can provide – we can grasp what happens in-between public professionals and citizens without relying on abstract understandings and concepts (Young, 2000; Bogason et al, 2002; Elías, 2010). It helps to grasp participatory democracy as embodied

in the experiences and encounters of public professionals and citizens. Moreover, by using an interpretive approach, we set ourselves up for surprise, letting understandings, categories and theories transpire from the data, from 'the ones who actually and concretely embody participative practices' (Elías, 2010, p 10). Comparing these practices as situated in diverse international contexts further illuminates the interweaving of public professionals and citizens and the communicative patterns, processes and capacity that transpire from their in-between. All this incredibly rich empirical data can then be related back to concepts and theories which surface as relevant – extending, criticising and integrating them – to develop a novel theory grounded in practice.

Looking at practice means examining the thoughts and activities with which individuals take part in the concrete situations they are implicated in. A practice is not an individual applying knowledge or contextually determined action, but is *a social activity performed to participate in a meaningful and competent way in a situation*. What makes your cooking taste delicious, an orchestra play in perfect harmony, or a meeting creative and integrative cannot be taught from a book or through instruction; it is an embodied experience that needs to be *practised*. Only through situated performances can we learn what it means to be a hairdresser, for example, as opposed to a boxer or fisherman, and what it takes to be good at it (Lave, 1988; Cook and Yanow, 1993; Wenger, 1998; Cook and Brown, 1999; Wagenaar and Cook, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Wagenaar and Cook, 2011). Due to their social, dynamic and evolving nature, we capture practices with action concepts – 'all those terms that are used to describe doings as opposed to happenings' (Fay, 1975, p 72; see also Stout, 2012b).

A practice does not reside inside the head of an individual, nor can it be read off contextual configurations. It is a transactional, or dialogical, process that exists in-between people as the rules-in-use and individual dispositions are evoked while interacting with others and the 'push and pull' (Wagenaar and Cook, 2011) of the situation. Practices are not mere working routines, habits of mind, standard operating procedures, technical knowledge, or specialised skills (Allison, 1969, pp 698-707), but transpire from both routine and improvised practical judgements as the situation 'signals to the actor that certain actions are called for, but also that certain conventions, commitments, physical obstacles, normative beliefs, procedures or rules have to be taken into account' (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003, p 150; see also Bordieu, 1972; Forester, 1993a; Wagenaar, 2004; Laws and Hajer, 2006; Healey, 2009; Freeman et al, 2011). While acting upon the situation, individuals have to make sense of what is going on, whether this is desirable, and what should

be done to change or sustain the situation (Argyris and Schön, 1976; Rein, 1983; Goffman, 1986; Rein and Schön, 1994; Laws and Rein, 2003). As this is always a social process, practicing is as much a process of learning *what to do* (know that and know how) as *how to be* (becoming and belonging), 'always straddling the known and the unknown in a subtle dance of the self' (Wenger, 1998, p 41).

To grapple with the nature and meaning of practices we cannot simply look at what people do, or take for granted what they say they do and what they think the situation is (Wagenaar, 2011, pp 18–19, 48–50). Instead, we need to critically examine the *performance* of their activities and their *meaning* within the social context at hand. Interpretivism is a broad tradition in the social sciences which assumes that the meaning of social activities derives from intrinsic intentions which cannot be read off social behaviour but need to be actively interpreted against the self-understandings of individuals and the functioning of this behaviour in the social context. Meaning is not the same as observable behaviour, is not a fixed entity that exists independent of actors or observations, and cannot be reduced to individual intentions or aggregate institutions. Rather, we can come to an understanding of meaning by reconstructing the life world of individuals in terms of their implicit (conscious and tacit) intentions, the ways in which these are enacted and communicated in processes of social construction, and the sociocultural rules, structures and categories within which all of this is situated (Yanow, 2000; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Wagenaar, 2011). Doing so requires *interpretation* of the ways in which physical, social, and linguistic artefacts are employed while communicating about the issues at hand (Yanow, 2003, p 242).

The methodological stream of interpretive policy analysis (IPA) interprets the language and argumentation through which policy is brought into being (Majone, 1989; Fischer and Forester, 1993). IPA provides methods for making sense of what happens in what Hajer (2003) calls the *institutional void* in which 'there are no clear rules and norms according to which politics is to be conducted and policy measures are to be agreed upon' (p 175). Due to globalisation, immigration and technological progress, we have witnessed considerable changes in the spaces in which policy making takes place, the amount of social and cultural difference in the composition of societies, and the degree of certainty about the effects of policies (Yanow, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Wagenaar, 2011). Policies are social constructs driven by particular (often conflicting) interpretations that reflect competing belief systems, sociopolitical power constellations, rhetoric, and ambiguous knowledge claims (Edelman, 1977). As no

indisputable criteria exist for settling on their nature, correctness or success (Rittel and Webber, 1973), IPA aspires to *detailed empirical research* of the concrete manifestations of daily policy practice, *dialogical analysis* of the divergent interpretations that emerge in the interactive, communicative process, and *critical normative judgement* of their inescapably political and practical implications (Fay, 1975; Forester, 1993a, pp 18-19; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Wagenaar, 2007b; Bevir, 2010, pp 10-13).

The goal is not to develop causal relationships, generalised statements, and a definitive resolution, but to explicate the contingent meanings of a practice to aid reflection, learning and change (Wagenaar, 2011, p 309). IPA aims to aid policy actors in dealing with the 'radical uncertainty' (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003, pp 9-10) they face in daily practice (Laws and Hajer, 2006). There is no Archimedean point from which they can resolve such controversial issues as multiculturalism, abortion, and biotechnology. Therefore, policy actors can never reduce the possibility that unanticipated or undesirable consequences emerge from the unforeseen interactions of the plural, complex, and contingent elements of a situation (Cook and Wagenaar, 2011, pp 14-15). As misunderstandings, tensions, and conflicts are inevitable, IPA aims at 'enhancing the awareness of uncertainty and unawareness' (Hajer, 2003, p 186). That means that research has to facilitate policy actors in asking intelligible questions about habitual ways of thinking and acting to explicate the meanings of a practice and, ideally, handle these more intelligibly and productively in their (inter)actions.

Despite this focus on studying and improving the contingent meanings of specific cases, IPA provides few criteria for case selection. But this is not necessarily a problem, as the cases

> have a range of similarities at various levels of detail but they do not have any one essential property or set of properties in common. We do not master the new concept by discovering a rule that tells us when to apply it… Our grasp of the concept lies in our ability to provide reasons why it applies to one case but not another and our ability to draw analogies with other cases. We recognize the pattern when we can discuss whether or not it is present in other cases. (Bevir, 2010, p 12)

According to Bevir, there is nothing wrong with a rather *ad hoc* approach to selecting cases, because the goal of the analysis is to make sense of contingent practices with the help of a (emergent) general

pattern or concept rather than the other way around. Defining *a priori* hypotheses and case selection criteria would imply deductively testing a pre-existing theoretical framework rather than an abductive exploration of a practice in order to *arrive at* such a theoretical framework. But that does not mean that deciding which cases to study is not guided by any logic; it is just that this is a logic of interpretive inquiry rather than of formal methods (Haverland and Yanow, 2012).[11] As we are not supposed to know at the beginning what the case will be an instance of (Wagenaar, 2011, chapter 9), interpretive case selection follows the logic of the real world problem, puzzle or dilemma that motivates the research.

In the case of my research, the real world problem is that nowadays public professionals and citizens encounter each other more frequently and intensively, but often do not manage to communicate productively about the problems they come together to resolve. Why not? What actually happens when public professionals and citizens meet in participatory practice? How do their public encounters in participatory practice take shape and meaning? How can public encounters become more productive? As I sought to come to an understanding of this real world problem without a predefined framework, the main question was: *how do public encounters give shape to participatory democracy in practice?* The cases had to offer as many opportunities as possible to illuminate theories of participatory democracy in practice. Therefore, I selected cases which were instances of public professionals and citizens engaged in intensive communication in challenging contexts which complicated their efforts toward mutual understanding at joint sense making. In such cases I was most likely to be confronted with new practices and forms of interaction that could challenge established political institutions and theoretical categories. I thus set myself up for surprise in order to let insights and theories transpire from the embodied experiences of public professionals and citizens with participatory encounters.

The cases were each *community participation* projects aimed at structurally involving citizens in decision making and problem solving in their direct living environment (community or neighbourhood) in collaboration with local public professionals working (and possibly living) in that area (Fung and Wright, 2003, p 15). The geographical setting is a crucial element: public professionals encounter *residents* rather than clients, consumers or citizens. Residents are usually diverse in their backgrounds and needs, and while there might be all kinds of social contacts and networks existing between them, even in the absence of these, the common denominator is that they are *neighbours*. Their motivations for, expectations of, and roles in community

participation are related to a specific place and space which they experience on a daily basis. Either on their own initiative or, more commonly, as a result of explicit efforts by local professionals, they make decisions, make use of budgets, or carry out initiatives *as part of a participatory policy process*. Depending on the nature of this policy and the participating local public organisations, community participation can involve any issue relevant to the daily lives of the residents, be it in the built environment (housing, infrastructure, greenery, for example), social dynamics (safety, cohesion, festivities), the economic sphere (poverty, entrepreneurial activity, unemployment), and the ecological domain (litter, cleanliness, sustainability).

On the one hand, community participation forms an ambitious context for bringing public professionals and citizens together. Being personally faced with the seriousness and complexity of the problems in their local area on a day to day basis, public professionals and residents can be expected to have strong motivations to improve the quality of life in their community and appreciate their interdependence and the importance of positive, workable relationships. Based on communitarianism, the assumption is that communal participation in a certain geographical location will stimulate the ability of its residents to capitalise on their shared cultural heritage, social ties, interests or experiences (Pierre and Peters, 2000, pp 137-59; Taylor, 2003; Amin, 2005). Moreover, public professionals are supposed to integrate individual goals, interests, structures and practices into a close knit policy-making community (Perri 6, 2005). As representatives of their agencies in local areas, they are expected to share a belief in the intrinsic value of collaboration for effective and democratic problem solving and maintain good social relationships (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Torfing, 2005; Sørensen, 2006; Stout, 2010d).

On the other hand, many contextual factors can inhibit public professionals and citizens in actually resolving the problems they face (Healey, 2007b; see also Table 2.1, p 23). Communitarianism has been criticised for its unrealistic and overly optimistic depictions and expectations of 'communities'. Despite the weak empirical support for 'area effects' and theoretical objections to the glorification of closely knit communities in our modern globalised and fragmented society, it upholds the idea that 'neighbourhoods', especially deprived ones, are spatially bordered 'communities' which have local and exceptional problems that can be solved through temporary policies targeted at engaging 'the community' (for example, Little, 2002; Delanty, 2003; Amin, 2005; Atkinson et al, 2005). Furthermore, community

participation is broadly defined and therefore embodies a wide variety of institutions and practices[12] that cannot be measured against clear standards. Its language and rhetoric might be adapted to fit local or national purposes as a 'spray-on solution' (Taylor, 2003, p 2) without sorting any real effects. Public authorities usually take the initiative, set the agenda and control what gets spent and done, while participants are involved based on established role patterns and have a broad variety of different motivations.

The cases selected reflect this combination of high ambition and indeterminacy. Table 3.1 shows that Glasgow, Amsterdam, and Bologna had strikingly similar ambitions aimed at achieving such communitarian norms as 'involving' or 'engag[ing]' citizens for more 'structural and sustainable conversations', 'influence', and 'social cohesion and inclusion'. At the same time, as the next chapters show, the local contexts, designs and practices were highly divergent, involving serious challenges in addressing housing, deprivation, safety, health and sociocultural problems. Moreover, the communicative practices of citizens and public professionals in the UK, the Netherlands and Italy are embedded in highly divergent contexts including, for example, the constitutional and cultural authority of the state, the division of power and responsibilities between levels of government, the role of civil society and quangos, and the history of participation. Hence, by comparing the ways in which public professionals and residents engage in improving the quality of life in their neighbourhoods, the opportunities to illuminate the theory of participatory democracy through public encounters in participatory practice are maximised.

Table 3.1: Policies for community participation (my translations)

Glasgow	to 'support the development of **active and informed communities** that can **engage** with and have an **influence** on the community planning process' (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p 6)
Amsterdam	'**involving** residents ... both in setting goals on the neighbourhood level and in implementation and evaluation ... [with] extra attention for **difficult to reach groups** ... [as] in order to have **structural and sustainable conversations**' (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008b, p 5)
Bologna	'valuing the **active citizenry**, stimulating/promoting an increase of social cohesion and inclusion, **involving** persons who are usually disadvantaged or **less inclined** to participate' (Comune di Bologna, 2008, art 40.1)

Narrative analysis: examining what happens in-between

A narrative is a story people tell about a real or imagined situation or range of events that wittingly or unwittingly enables them to pinpoint what happened, make sense of these happenings, and express their evaluation of the situation. We do it all the time, for example when we tell our friends or family about how our day was. Likewise, public professionals and citizens make sense of their encounters *through narrative*, that is by giving detailed accounts of concrete experiences. A range of studies have shown that we can learn a great deal about modern governance by examining the stories policy actors tell to make sense of their personal experiences of the messy, conflict-ridden and complex nature of everyday practice (Kaplan, 1993; Roe, 1994; Vinzant and Crothers, 1998; Abma, 1999; Forester, 1999; Bevir and Rhodes, 2003; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Hendriks, 2005; Hampton, 2009; Van Hulst, 2013). As a result, narrative analysis has gained wide acceptance in public administration, policy analysis and political science (Hummel, 1991; White, 1992; Forester, 1993b; Patterson and Monroe, 1998; Fischer, 2003, chapter 8).

Narratives are not just random stories, but form a distinct mode of knowing, a form of linguistic expression – different from logico-deductive or informational statements – through which we go about making sense of the world and communicating our understandings and experiences. The study of narratives stems from the ancient Greek tradition of storytelling to convey wisdom and the religious practice of studying the meaning of sacred texts. From the 1960s, the disciplines of history, literary criticism and psychology developed it as a scientific method by analysing personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales and novels as primary devices/carriers of sense making through which we can access contextualised meanings (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliot, 2005). In the social sciences, narratives illuminate the complexity of daily practice by revealing the multiplicity of values, knowledge, and identities being performed in the communication between policy actors (Wagenaar, 1997; Abma, 1999; Forester, 1999; Wagenaar, 2007b, pp 26-7, 42). As such, narrative analysis helps us to grasp what happens in-between public professionals and citizens as they talk about the problems they face together.

It is possible to take a hermeneutic, discursive or dialogical approach to narrative analysis (Wagenaar, 2011). In a hermeneutic approach, narratives help to make systems of meaning (traditions, routines, cultures) intelligible by accessing the subjective experiences of

ordinary individuals and, from their hidden assumptions, values and emotions, reconstructing how (a part of) social reality actually looks to them (see Durose, 2009 for an example). Such thick description (Geertz, 1973/1993) of what people actually do and think can be enlightening, but often comes at the cost of a more critical stance towards possible flaws in the self-understanding of social actors, the assumption that meanings exist independent of the observer and can be readily discovered, and the role of overarching structures and power configurations (Wagenaar, 2011, pp 46-50). In a discursive approach, narrative analysis reveals how linguistic structures and power configurations condition our knowledge and actions (see Dubois, 2009 for an example). This helps to reveal that daily practices inevitably depend on the historically contingent, taken-for-granted and dispersed institutions in which social categories, everyday relationships and governance systems are encapsulated. But, as a result, the role of active agency often remains ambiguously compromised by the pervasive force of overarching discursive structures (McAnulla, 2006; Wagenaar, 2012).

In a dialogical approach, narrative analysis helps to grapple with the in-between, or the 'constantly evolving process of interchange' (Fay, 1996 quoted in Wagenaar, 2011, p 55) through which policy actors try to come to an understanding of complex, contingent and changeable situations. These understandings are always partial and tentative, as they depend on the specific physical, social and temporal ways in which individuals are positioned in the world. In consequence, meaning is not fixed in the consciousness of individuals and does not reside exclusively in overarching institutional arrangements. Instead, Wagenaar (2011, p 57) explains, meaning is *relational* as it emerges from 'our interactions with others and with the world', and can be made insightful by capturing the 'give-and-take' that 'emerges from the patterned activities we engage in when we grapple with concrete situations that present themselves to us as in need of being resolved'.

Narratives do dialogical, or relational, work for policy actors (Forester, 1993b): through storytelling, policy actors engage in an 'active, never-ending activity of sense making in a world of action' (Wagenaar, 2011, p 219) that enables them to make practical judgements and influence the course of policy processes. By revealing the purposes particular stories fulfil in their policy context, we can uncover how storytellers communicate with their direct and wider audiences. Narratives thus enable, and follow from, everyday practices. A crucial point here is that the shape and meaning of particular practices are not pre-determined and do not rest on a rational, objective assessment of their strengths

and weaknesses for the situation at hand, but, instead, *derive from the relational work that narratives do*.

Four characteristics enable this relational work: narratives are open ended, subjective, value laden, and action oriented (Wagenaar, 2011, pp 210-16). First, the course and meaning of stories are open to change: they are provisional representations of situations that can still take unexpected turns. What appeared to be the closure of a chapter can turn out to be merely a short passage. Second, stories are about the idiosyncrasies of specific people who face doubts and certainties about everyday issues. The details of the person and situation inevitably invite empathy, side taking, and judgement. Third, narratives are not just random stories about people and situations, but are intelligible moral constructs of characters operating in a specific setting. The story represents beliefs and values about bigger underlying issues and how things ought to work. Fourth, narratives function as warrants that provide justification for a particular course of action. The setting and plot of a story endow actions in an indeterminate and complex context with certainty and legitimacy. Hence, narratives transmit information, emotions, moral values, beliefs, visions and norms by weaving together these different bits and pieces of everyday human conduct into a meaningful whole.

Narrative analysis can be conducted in a variety of ways, with narratives, discourses and frames[13] often used in combination (see Laws and Rein, 2003). For example, Hajer's (1995) discourse analysis of environmental politics relies extensively on the analytical concept of storyline. Depending on the goals of the research and the nature of the data, a narrative analysis will tend towards either a holistic approach, providing detail-heavy descriptions of significant themes in actors' lives, or a categorical approach focused on the identification of linguistic structures (see Chase, 2005; Elliot, 2005, p 38). Forester's (1999) approach is characteristic of the former: he provides long excerpts from unstructured interviews to illuminate how planners' daily practice is a matter of practical judgement, anticipation, imagination, emotional responsiveness, empathy and political sensibility. He then takes these skilfully apart to reveal the work their narratives do to enable practices within social, political and economic constraints. Alternatively, Gold and Hamblett (1999) take the latter approach by uncovering in short quotes how policy actors use linguistic devices such as intensifiers, markers, qualifiers and metaphors to structure their accounts of situations. In this book, I use a mix of holistic and categorical approaches, depending on the need for a particular kind of analysis emerging from the data (see Table 3.2 for an overview).

Table 3.2: Ways to structure narratives

Narrative element	Source(s)	Goal
Frame (actions, values, causal beliefs)	Rein and Schön, 1993; Laws and Rein, 2003	Reconstruct organisation of thoughts
Plot line (for example, 'story of decline') *Beginnings, middles, and ends* *Characters* (heroes and villains)	Stone, 1989; Kaplan, 1933; Roe, 1994; Stone, 2002	Reveal how causal and temporal order is imposed on a range of events
Diagnostic-prescriptive stories	Rein and Schön, 1994	Reveal normative leap from description to prescription
Signifiers (empty and floating) *Metaphors* (for example, health, tools, war)	Laclau, 1996; Jeffares, 2007 Stone, 2002	Categorise the vocabulary in use

For instance, when public professionals and citizens in Bologna are telling different stories about the same meetings, I analyse these as *diagnostic prescriptive stories* that 'describe what is wrong with the present situation in such a way as to set the direction for its future transformation' (Rein and Schön, 1994, p 26). When policy actors reflect on the current state of affairs, they select and label certain salient features of what is a complex and ambitguous situation and organise these features in a seemingly compelling and coherent way based on a 'normative leap' (Rein and Schön, 1994, p 26) from description to prescription. Alternatively, I analyse narratives as *causal stories* evolving around *plotlines* (Stone, 1989, 2002). For example, a 'story of decline' can legitimise immediate intervention in a situation to prevent some kind of disaster: 'In the beginning, things were pretty good. But they got worse. In fact, right now, they are nearly intolerable, Something must be done' (Stone, 2002, p 138). By comparing conflicting diagnostic prescriptive stories and plotlines, I can reveal the deeper tensions of seemingly innocent disagreements, as well as the underlying communicative pattern that sustains them.

As a third example, when public professionals and citizens in Glasgow constantly refer to the same ambiguous concepts in many different, and often conflicting, ways, I use *signifiers* to reveal how their vocabulary is a source of miscommunication. Signifiers are ambiguous, evocative and enticing concepts which provide a common language. Their abstract, broad brush, evocative and symbolic nature can have a binding and integrative function, because it creates the impression of equivalent interpretations. But it can also be a source of conflict because misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts are left implicit (Laclau, 1996;

Stone, 2002). A concept can either be a 'floating signifier', when it embodies multiple meanings that policy actors seek to enforce in a hegemonic discursive struggle, or an 'empty signifier' when critical mass has accumulated for a particular interpretation to represent the 'true' meaning of the idea or phenomenon (Jeffares, 2007). In each case, the vocabulary in use is analysed by identifying recurrent signifiers, counting how often they are mentioned during the interviews, and comparing the quantitative and qualitative differences in their usage.

The analysis goes through four levels of abstraction in total: first–order narratives, second–order narratives, metanarratives, and theoretical narratives. *First-order narratives* are the 'bare' stories that public professionals and citizens tell. This 'raw data' about their daily practices derives from qualitative interviews (explained in the next section). *Second-order narratives* are the analytical interpretations of first–order narratives. I construct an account of how public professionals and citizens structure their narratives to render their experiences meaningful to themselves (conveying particular identities, values, beliefs, feelings, and so on) and to the broader context of which they are a part (why a specific audience has to appreciate the unusual or unexpected qualities and causal sequence of these events). Second–order narratives, then, focus on the interplay of the content, structure and performance of the stories (Elliot, 2005).

Metanarratives are the overarching stories of cases, covering a set of narratives, which reveal the significance of the situation in time and institutional context as well as how individual intentions and perceptions are related to this context and to each other (Kohler Riessman, 2002; Fischer, 2003, chapter 8). Metanarratives are collections of second–order narratives that reveal how the same range of events, activity, or phenomena is interpreted, acted upon and valued in different ways, and how public professionals and citizens structure their narratives to organise these different interpretations. By comparing various second–order narratives, we can make out the habitual communicative patterns that together characterise the three cases. An important strategy in this process is to identify the 'dominant narrative' that supports the most common mode of communication and compare this to the 'counter narrative(s)' that emphasise(s) contrasting or conflicting practices (Roe, 1994).

From there, I develop the *theoretical narrative*: the overall story of the research which synthesises the empirical results, presents the theoretical framework that emerges, and clarifies the links and contribution to the literature. Doing so involves an iterative process of reviewing literature and redrafting in order to further develop the emergent theories and

concepts by drawing on, extending and integrating existing theories and concepts. It is a tricky balancing act to relate and present the emergent theories and concepts to relevant literature without losing their originality, validity and nuance or giving the reader the impression that they are theoretical categories which were merely confirmed by the empirical findings. One way of going about this is the method of 'ideal typing', in which the emergent categories are abstracted into analytically 'pure' forms that do not empirically exist. Ideal typical constructs provide an analytical yardstick for interpreting and evaluating the divergent practices, patterns and outcomes in specific cases (Weber, 1949; Rutgers, 2001; Stout, 2010c). Existing theories and concepts can be used as ideal typical constructs, as long as their relevance derives from the emergent categories and their meaning is grounded in the everyday practices illuminating theory (the next section will discuss how this can be done through 'memo writing' and 'theoretical sampling'). As such, narrative analysis helps to develop a theoretical understanding of how public professionals and citizens sustain and overcome patterns of communication through their narratives.

Grounded theory: dialogical analysis of practice

Analysing narratives is a highly sensitive, subtle and intricate process. A variety of qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used in this process (Abma, 1999; Elliot, 2005; Jones and McBeth, 2010). For this book, the stories public professionals and citizens tell about participatory practice have been interpreted through *grounded analysis of qualitative data* (Wagenaar, 2011, p 10). This is not the same as qualitative research (see Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005); it means that the meanings of narratives are actively interpreted by going back and forth between different practices, concrete situations and local context. It is an iterative dialogical process of confronting initial assumptions with empirical data, generating analytical categories from this process, comparing these categories again with more empirical data and so on. This means constantly moving back and forth between pre-existing assumptions, newly acquired information and potentially relevant theoretical explanations. It is an extensive, iterative and dialogical process of observing, questioning and reflecting on the pluralism of meanings produced by a multitude of persons as they talk about and move around in daily practice (Yanow, 2000; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Wagenaar, 2011).

Grounded theory does not provide any strict rules for dialogical analysis, but offers heuristics – sensitising concepts and strategies of

inquiry – that guide the researcher in being reflective, systematic and grounded (Dey, 1999) while gradually building a theory *grounded in the data*. The goal is to gather high quality data ('deep' or 'thick' descriptions of actors' actual thoughts, experiences and actions) and analyse these data to formulate original and cogent theories abstracted from and illustrated by the data. Rather than proposing one best way of analysis, the main concern is to monitor the 'quality of qualitative research'. Glaser and Strauss, who first developed grounded theory in 1967, considered that much of the research in the social sciences labelled as *qualitative* forced findings into speculative theoretical categories which were not firmly grounded in the empirical material (Charmaz, 2005). In this section I explain how I conducted 59 qualitative interviews and analysed them through a grounded theory process of coding, memo writing and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 1990, 2002, 2006).

In each case study, I first examined all the relevant policy documents and research that I could obtain in order to have a decent background in the local governance system, community participation policies, and the neighbourhood. To find my way in each city, I got in touch with well embedded contact persons at the neighbourhood and/or city level who helped me to draft an initial list of interview candidates, facilitated my access to important meetings during my research period, and provided me with relevant policy documents. Over the course of about three months, I then conducted 20 interviews with a variety of public professionals and residents. Their selection developed organically according to emergent themes and suggestions made by other participants, but in general I tried to talk to people with varying types of experiences and expertise. I tried to maximise variation in backgrounds by contacting public professionals working in different organisations and functions, and residents living in different parts of the neighbourhood and for varying periods of time (see Table 3.3).

Intensive interviewing formed the main thrust of the data collection process, while observation of participants at meetings and document

Table 3.3: Summary of data

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna	Total
Interviews	19[14]	20	20	59
Meetings	3	4	1	8
Policy documents	13	19	10	42
Transcribed text (pages)	240	234	181	655
Memos (pages)	9 (64)	8 (59)	8 (88)	25 (211)

analysis were also used to check the reliability (Fischer, 2003, pp 154–5) of the first-order narratives provided by the respondents and the second-order narratives that came out of my analysis. The analysis of policy documents provided me with background information about the history and characteristics of the neighbourhood and project necessary for being a knowledgeable interviewer and becoming aware of underlying values, beliefs, goals and issues. By observing participants at meetings, I obtained an impression of the atmosphere, issues and practices that residents and public professionals were engaged in. I often noticed that themes from the interviews also emerged during the meetings as well as how various participants reconstructed these in different ways. The notes taken during meetings, together with general fieldwork notes, formed an important source of reflection on the course of the research (Fielding, 2001).

For the qualitative interviews, an in depth and intensive approach was taken (Weiss, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Wagenaar, 2011, chapter 9). The goal of the interviews was to *develop the narrative* of the participants, to provide a window onto their experiences. To do that, I tried to build a 'working relationship' with the participants (Wagenaar, 2011, pp 252-3). The key to high quality narratives, or good qualitative data, is to make sure that the participants understand the goals of the research and what is expected of them, as well as that they feel comfortable enough for self-disclosure. If such a working relationship is absent, participants will provide short and generalised statements, good intentions and opinions, instead of the detailed, open and extensive descriptions of personal experiences that narratives consist of. Therefore, I interviewed participants in a setting they were familiar with (their office or a public meeting space) and explained in advance the purposes of the research and the interview. Most importantly, I always stressed that I was looking for detailed and concrete experiences, and that I was there to learn from them because *they* were the expert, not me. Although people often modestly denied the significance of their experiences, I made a sincere effort to convince them of the opposite.

During the interviews, my most important task was to monitor the quality of the data. This is a difficult task, because the interview should develop as a *directed conversation* or *unfolding story*, which on the one hand is informal, open ended, and guided by what the respondent is saying, while, on the other hand, follows a general list of themes and questions to keep the participants on topic (Charmaz, 2002; Wagenaar, 2011, chapter 9). I always let the wording and order of the questions vary according to what a participant was telling me, thereby

qualifying as an unstructured interview (Fielding and Thomas, 2001). But unstructured does not mean unsystematic: each interview had a beginning, middle, and end to ensure a natural build-up of questions and expectations and flow of information and disclosure. Therefore, I always started with the same *opening question* ('You are a resident of [neighbourhood]/working here as [function], could you please tell me in which circumstances you first came to live/work here?') and *closing question* ('Based on everything that you've told me, what lessons do you draw for the future?'). The opening question is formulated relatively open, but nevertheless focuses attention on their personal history and actual experiences with regards to community participation by focusing on the concrete conditions under which they first came to live or work in the area. From their initial answer, many themes emerged that we could then explore further. The closing question induced participants to reflect and get a sense of closure.

In the middle of the interviews, I always formulated the questions in an active and open way to stimulate participants to provide detailed answers that did not sum up or skim over issues and experiences. I often had to ask for more elaboration or details of a statement, with probably the most often used question being: 'Can you give me an example of a concrete situation in which you experienced this?' Asking for examples guides a participant away from giving generalised answers or justifications that summarise rather than describe experiences. When determining the next question, I tried to create a natural transition from what a participant had just said by either continuing on the same topic or coming back to a topic that had been mentioned previously (which I noted on my note pad with so called 'markers'). I further monitored the natural flow of the interview by being alert to emotional signals, encouraging them to tell more by verbal and nonverbal cues, not intruding on the participant's story, and talking about myself only briefly and without disclosure when the participant asked me something (Weiss, 1994; Charmaz, 2002; Legard et al, 2003).

Perhaps the best illustration of this interviewing approach comes from an interview with a police officer in Amsterdam. After talking for around 20 minutes about her daily activities, the neighbourhood, and contact with residents, I asked how the introduction of the Neighbourhood Approach – the local community participation project – had affected her daily practice. She responded by asking me what *I* meant by 'the Neighbourhood Approach', because for her it was completely unclear what this project had actually changed to her contact with residents. I responded that I thought it was very interesting that for her the change was unclear and encouraged her to tell me more

about this. In this way I not only diverted attention away from myself, but more fundamentally invited her to develop her narrative about struggling with the nature and added value of the project. It also led me to focus in other interviews on what participants understood to be the nature and added value of the project, discovering that it did not have very clear rules and structures and was only an overarching label for a broad array of diverse and ongoing activities, and identifying the flexibility of the policy framework as an important conceptual issue.

As such, the data gathering of my research followed a grounded theory process to reveal 'constructions or competing definitions of the situation as given *in action*, not merely stated in reconstructed accounts' (Charmaz, 2006, p 180; emphasis added). The quality of the data is in the level of concreteness and detail of the respondents' narratives. This enabled me to raise analytical issues out of diverging stories, and translate these into conceptual categories and, then, theoretical explanations. I recorded and transcribed the interviews word for word in order to get a firm grounding in what a respondent had actually said. By transcribing verbatim, not omitting 'ums', repetitions, errors, and incoherent sentences, I could present utterances in their actual, real world, narrative form and tease out doubts and inconsistencies in the thinking of a participant – even though some of this has undoubtedly been lost in translation.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews started with coding: 'the process of defining what the data are about' by 'naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data' (Charmaz, 2006, p 43). The most important question to ask when looking at interview data is: *What is this an instance of?* This is the first step from description to conceptualisation: what is actually going on in the data? Codes have to be active and evocative words that are narrow enough to describe detailed parts of data and broad enough to represent underlying assumptions and feelings or broader patterns and tensions. In other words, codes are sensitising concepts that stick closely to the view of the participants as well as lead to theoretical categories. I always tried to stay close to the data by describing participants' thoughts and activities on their own terms, rather than resorting to already existing theories or acquired insights, to see things that would be overlooked from *a priori* assumptions.

While the use of sophisticated software packages such as NVivo are popular for grounded theory, I analysed interviews in a perhaps more crude and time consuming, but also more creative and engaged way by using the comment function of Microsoft Word to label segments of data, or 'meaning units' (Wagenaar, 2011, p 262). A meaning unit can

vary from a sentence to a chunk of text as large as a page, depending on *what that piece of data is an instance of*. The codes emerged and developed from an iterative interpretive process, with each interview generating some new codes – even though this happened less towards the end of the research process. Initial coding led to a variety of detailed codes in the beginning and gradually turned into focused coding, in which I only started to use the most significant and frequent codes. In each case I tried to start afresh rather than importing codes from the other cases, but several codes proved to work in making sense of specific practices in each case. While analysing an interview, I noted the codes and the numbers of the comments in a separate document together with some initial explanations of their meaning. This document then formed the basis for a memo, which I wrote according to the themes that emerged from the comparison of several interviews.

Memo writing was a pivotal step between initial analysis and writing drafts as it helped to evaluate the data and analysis; to explain codes, link them to each other, develop ideas, and fine tune subsequent data search (Charmaz, 2006). Several techniques that helped to focus memos were to give them a title, define categories, and discuss where the categories and data were leading the research. Furthermore, numerical and graphical representations of codes, actors and connections aided insight into the relationships between codes and categories (Roe, 1994, pp 155-62). Initial memos were detailed reconstructions of first–order narratives, which I interpreted by analysing how the narratives were structured in terms of plotlines, signifiers, frames, and so on. In more advanced memos I developed metanarratives by defining categories, identifying gaps, and looking for patterns. Gradually, the focus changed from comparing data with data towards *creating dialogue between theory and data*. Indeed, while my first memos were analyses of individual interviews of about two to three pages, final memos were theoretically driven treatises of about 20 pages. As such, memo writing furthered the grounded theory process from analytical categories as descriptive and synthesising tools to conceptual categories that serve theoretical definition and the production of a metanarrative.

Finally, the process turned to perhaps the trickiest part: theoretical sampling. This refers to the stage in which one should be more confident in judging what the most relevant parts of the analysis are and how the data could be rearranged and ordered. Theoretical sampling means turning the inductive process on its head, by taking the emerged theory and returning to the collected data and/or to the field for additional data. Data analysis is now supposed to be guided by the emerged theoretical categories in order to reconfirm their

presence, refine their properties and links to the broader context, and spot possible flaws and unforeseen insights (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory leaves unclear, though, when exactly this *salto mortale* should be taken or when it is complete (Dey, 1999). In this process of theorising, I wrote several theoretical memos as well as feedback reports for each of the three cases. The latter forced me to explain in clear terms what I had found and what that meant; the former helped me to write freely about my ideas and dilemmas in formulating a theory. Through this process of going back and forth between theories and data, I started to see that my findings were substantially about communication and in the end came up with the theoretical concept of communicative capacity for rearranging and making sense of the data. Continuous redrafting and iterative literature reviews led me to develop and fine tune the emergent theoretical framework.

Final remarks

Taking a comparative, interpretive, theory–building approach shows that, as John Forester (1999) states, '*apparently innocuous storytelling … can do a great deal of work'*. Narrative analysis helps to examine how public encounters give shape to participatory democracy in practice. It illuminates what happens in-between public professionals and citizens through a dialogical process of grounded theorising. By telling stories rather than articulating their views in abstract arguments, professionals and citizens help us to imagine what it is like to be there and experience the situation in all its overwhelming messiness and indeterminacy. This enables us to appreciate the subtleties in activities and expressions, discover the hidden meanings of words and behaviours, see the practical ways in which theories and policies manifest themselves in the real world, and feel the difficulties of practical judgement and emotional struggles (Forester, 1999; Young, 2000; Schein, 2003; Ryfe, 2006; Petts, 2007). By comparing across cases and theorising from these micro practices, we can get a better understanding of what communicative capacity is, why it is so challenging, and how we can exercise it.

Communicative patterns: what happens when public professionals and citizens meet

'[T]he lesson is that participation needs to be understood not as a moment but as a process.' (Corrado – public professional, Bologna)

This chapter demonstrates that when public professionals and citizens meet, they tend to develop and sustain habitual patterns of communication which limit their ability to address the problems they came to resolve. It introduces the three cases by means of their metanarratives and arrives at a first understanding of what communicative capacity is and why it is important. Each case is characterised by a distinct communicative pattern, each upholding the conflicting underlying narratives of **Community** and **Planning** with little regard for the *law of the situation*. In a **Planning** narrative, participation works best if everybody adheres to the same structures, plans and ideas, while in a **Community** narrative, participation works best if people behave in spontaneous, flexible and creative ways in the absence of a system in which plans, rules, structures and roles are strictly specified. Comparison of the cases shows that habitual patterns of communication are sustained when public professionals and citizens fail to recognise how their communicative practices evoke and uphold these two incompatible participatory narratives (or a conflict between them) rather than understanding what type of communication is needed to move the situation forward. The following chapters explain why this often does not happen and in which ways it can be achieved.

The main lesson of this chapter is, as Corrado (a young public professional from Bologna) puts it, *"that participation needs to be understood not as a moment but as a process"*. One mode of communication might work well at one moment, but is unlikely to remain adequate as situations rapidly evolve in-between public professionals and citizens. As Follett (1919) explains, their encounter 'is changing its quality every moment … so that at every moment the whole is new. Thus unifying activity is changing its quality all the time by bringing other

qualities into itself' (p 582). In order to handle this 'continuous qualitative change, [t]he supreme object of my allegiance is never a thing, a "made". It is the very Process itself to which I give my loyalty and every activity of my life.' In other words, public professionals and citizens should not communicate based on a rigid commitment to their own interests and perceptions of the *situation*, but should communicate in ways that follow the *law of the situation*. What happens in-between is not a matter of separate individuals transmitting information and arguments back and forth, but of values, beliefs, emotions, structures, rules, interests and relationships being performed into being in a continuous relational process of circular response.

However, in each of the three cases, public professionals and residents enact a habitual pattern of communication. These three patterns are captured in the metanarratives of the cases. As explained in Chapter Three, metanarratives leave out details and nuances to make a broader pattern visible and also to reveal inherent tensions in and variations on these patterns. In the Glasgow case, public professionals and residents are engaged in a pattern of **making it work**: overt and tacit disputes between opposed views on the issue of whether 'it is working' or not, which sustain a pattern of antagonism and stalemate. In Amsterdam, they have a more pragmatic pattern of communication, **being in touch**, in which mutual trust and personal relationships serve as the basis for gradually finding solutions to local problems, while at the same time, they do not facilitate structural changes. The case of Bologna is characterised by the communicative pattern of **canalising**: ordered and reasoned exchange of arguments within fixed boundaries to make concrete decisions, but also achieving little beyond these fixed boundaries. Hence, these cases help us see in different ways why public professionals and citizens need communicative capacity to recognise and break their habitual patterns of communication and adapt their conversations to the *law of the situation*.

Glasgow: making it work

> '[W]e know how we want to do it. But the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice …' (Gail – community planning officer)

The Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) immediately makes apparent that communicative practices are vital for the productivity of participatory democracy. **Making it work** is a powerful, and somewhat ironic, title for the metanarrative of the

Glasgow case, because it indicates that local public encounters are dominated by *antagonistic communication through overt and tacit disputes about the issue of whether the policy of* **Community Planning** *is working or not*. Across the board, public professionals and residents are committed to solving the grave problems local communities are facing, but they find that they have only limited possibilities for actually **making it work**. As Gail, a key figure in getting local residents to participate and public professionals to engage with them, summarises the main dilemma of her work: 'the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice'. Thus, **making it work** both refers to the gap between their ideals and actual practice, and the antagonistic pattern of communication through which public professionals and residents talk about, and further reinforce, this impasse.

The ensuing analysis reveals that the communicative pattern of **making it work** inhibits public professionals and residents in moving their discussions forward and spending their time more productively on finding solutions to the problems they are facing. I begin by sketching out the local context in which the metanarrative of **making it work** is embedded in order to clarify where the tendency to contest whether 'it is working' comes from. I then show that residents and public professionals tend to communicate by expressing, and not moving beyond, their conflicting standpoints. However, when I critically consider what happens when they encounter each other, two things become clear: (a) all share a commitment to **making it work**, and (b) the opposition between their conflicting views is related to a fundamental tension between the two contradictory underlying narratives of **Community** and **Planning**. Finally, I conclude that public professionals and residents could communicate more productively by recognising how this underlying tension, and the associated habitual communicative pattern, distorts their ambition for **making it work** as a first step toward adapting their conversations to the *law of the situation*.

Since publication of the New Labour white papers *Modernising Government* (1998) and *Neighbourhood Renewal* (1998, 2001), the landscape of urban governance has changed significantly (Foley and Martin, 2000; Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004). The goal was to develop collaborative and inclusive partnerships to promote democratic renewal, social inclusion, economic growth and environmental sustainability. All local authorities had to put in place Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), known as Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) in Scotland,[15] that 'joined up' all relevant policy areas and local public agencies (Imrie and Raco, 2003). Moreover, urban policies

included the formal requirement to grant residents a role in local governance processes. However, despite far reaching ambitions, these policies left the structures and procedures through which partnerships had to operate unspecified, and were not grounded in a formal division of legal, financial and political responsibilities (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004; Sinclair, 2008).

In 2004, the GCPP was introduced to replace the Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs), which had been present in eight Glaswegian neighbourhoods. The GCPP was to provide *in every area of the city* the same structures and rules for collaboration between public agencies, voluntary organisations, private sector organisations and 'the community'. In accordance with the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the GCPP is committed to instituting 'more effective delivery through partnership … [and] effective and genuine community engagement' (2004, p 2). The Glasgow Community Plan 2005-2010 envisages four goals: (1) coordinated, equal and cohesive partnership working; (2) equal and comprehensive structures across the city; (3) broad, inclusive and equal engagement of residents; and (4), actual influence of residents on decision making (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004). Concrete strategies for achieving these goals need to be specified annually in a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) based on local needs and the consensus of all local stakeholders, and are expected to reflect the Scottish Government's National Outcomes and National Performance Framework.[16]

The overall coordination of the GCPP rests with a Strategic Board of six statutory partners.[17] The city is divided into five strategic planning areas (North, East, South East, South West, and West), each subdivided into two Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) areas. Each LCPP consists of several collaborative structures,[18] most importantly LCPP Boards and Community Reference Groups (CRGs). LCPP Boards are strategic platforms for representatives of local partner agencies, the CRG and local councillors. In the area where the research took place, the LCPP Board formally consisted of 20 members: four local councillors, five community residents,[19] and eleven members from partner agencies,[20] and is attended by several community planning officers. The CRGs consist of individual residents and Community Forum[21] representatives, totalling up to 18 members in the area where the research was conducted. LCPP Boards and CRGs each meet every six to eight weeks to discuss collaborative projects, neighbourhood management and modes of community engagement.

I conducted research in the Pollokshields and Southside Central (P&SC) area, which, together with Langside and Linn,

forms the South East strategic planning area, and covers the area south of the city centre and the River Clyde as far as Carmunnock, the southernmost point of the city (see Figure 4.1). P&SC includes Pollokshields, Strathbungo, Shawlands, Govanhill, Crosshill, Gorbals[22] and Toryglen (see Figure 4.2). The area and its population (*circa* 50,000) are characterised by great diversity. The 'Black and Ethnic Minority population' [sic] is reported to be the highest in the city (19% of the population in P&SC compared to an average of 5.5% of the population in the city as a whole) and one of the highest in Scotland.[23] Socioeconomic variation is high (the percentage in managerial positions is higher than the city average (28.9% versus 24%) as is the number of unemployed (11.2% compared with 8.7%)) and unevenly distributed over the area: in West Pollokshields there are expensive Victorian villas, while East Pollokshields, the Gorbals, Govanhill, and Toryglen are among the bottom 15% of all areas in Scotland in terms of deprivation (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2006; SLIM [Skills and Learning Intelligence Module], 2007).

Figure 4.1: Glasgow South East: located south of the city centre and the River Clyde
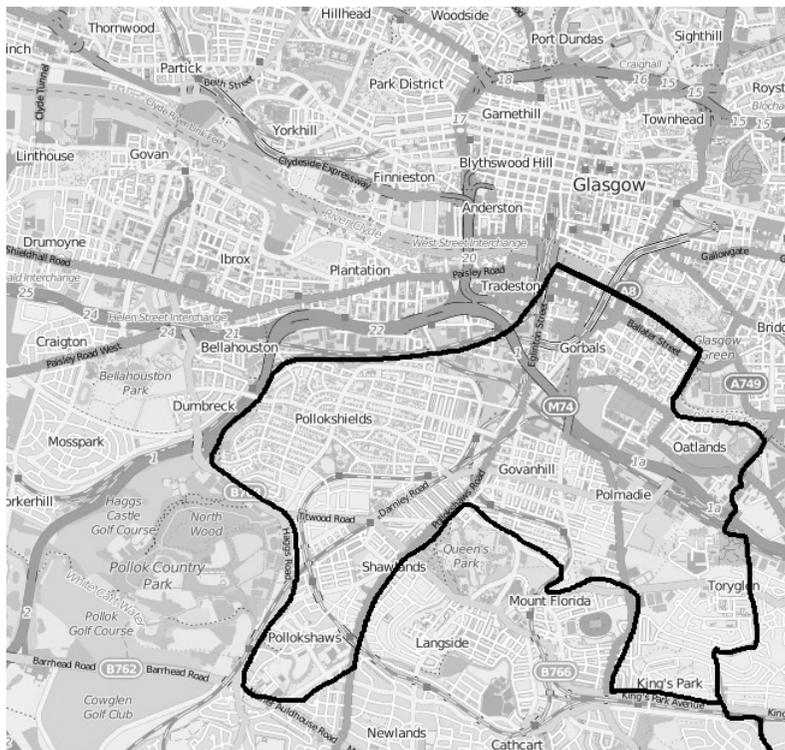
© OpenStreetMap contributors (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Figure 4.2 : Pollokshields and Southside Central: administrative boundaries
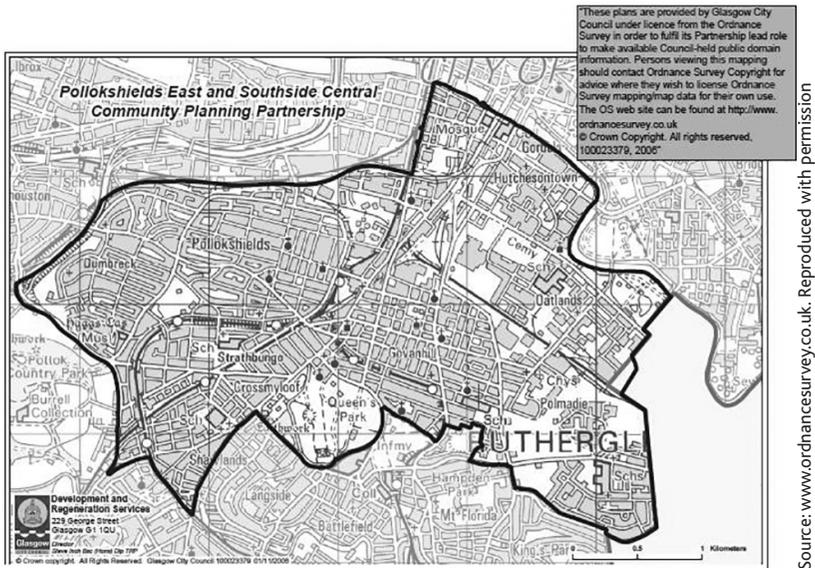
Furthermore, the most deprived areas in P&SC suffer from a range of severe problems that far outweigh averages for the city and the country. For example, 33% of the working age population in the Gorbals claim Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance compared to 10% for Scotland as a whole. With 1,147 crimes per 10,000 population in 2004, crime levels in the most deprived areas were well above those for the South East strategic planning area overall (723), Glasgow (842), and Scotland (530). At the time of the fieldwork hospital admissions related to alcohol abuse (2,927 per 100,000 in 2001-04) in these areas were more than double those for the South East (1,405) and Glasgow (1,241), and the differences are even more staggering for drug-related admissions (904 compared with 354 for the South East area and 295 for Glasgow). Although the problems in these areas are among the most severe in the city, many other areas in the South West, East and North suffer from comparable levels of deprivation (SLIMS, 2007; Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2008).

This historical narrative helps us to understand the rationale for instituting the GCPP: to provide a new participatory infrastructure that comprehensively covers all the areas, problems and stakeholders in order to facilitate more effective problem solving. The emphasis given to an 'equal', 'inclusive', and 'effective' approach (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p 6), forms a recent twist to the longstanding Glaswegian approach to alleviating the high level of grave problems in

its most deprived areas (Keating, 1988). Indeed, the idea of Planning *with* the Community sounds appealing and innovative. Or as Stewart, a pensioner with a long history in local politics and volunteering, succinctly put it in his Glaswegian accent: "This is a big thing they say they're *gonnae* do. And it sounds good. But it *disnae* happen." His stories about his neighbourhood, the Gorbals illuminate how the scale and complexity of the GCPP as well as local problems make it very challenging to live up to the commitment to **making it work**. So does it work? This is the focus of public encounters in Glasgow.

Public professionals and residents in Glasgow are not inclined to move beyond oppositional standpoints on the issue of whether Community Planning 'is working'. Most of them assume that they are right (and others wrong) and hardly anyone is interested in the beliefs, experiences and emotions of others, let alone trying to *integrate* them. They express strong views; some very positive, some downright negative, and only a few take a more nuanced stance. Compare for example these statements by, respectively, a local police officer, an active resident, a public health manager, and a regeneration manager:

> '[T]he boards are very well structured, they're very well run, um, and everyone has an opportunity to put forward if they have a concern.' (Mike – police officer)

> 'It should be a case of if there are structures there, … make the best of them, … instead of them having to reinvent all the stuff. Which is what they're trying to do, and not very successfully.' (Sara – Community Reference Group member)

> 'So it's a lot of very joint processes, almost trying to pull people together, um, so that we've almost got shared priorities.' (Moira – community planning officer)

> 'I think that Community Planning … suggests and offers something that none of us really knows exactly what it is that we're trying to get out of it.' (Liam – regeneration manager)

By sticking to these opposing views, residents and public professionals do not manage to arrive at a joint understanding of Community Planning. How can it be the case that there are 'very joint processes' while at the same time 'none of us really knows exactly what it is that

we're trying to get out of it'? Who is right in stating that it is 'very well structured' and 'very well run' or 'them having to reinvent all the stuff … and not very successfully'? Is one side simply wrong? Or should we conclude that Community Planning works well in some cases and not so well in others? That people simply always disagree? Such questions and answers do not bring us much further, because they rest on the idea that there is a single truth to be discovered and an ideal of participation to be achieved outside and above public encounters in practice. If we take this approach, we accept these standpoints as given, as well as the communicative pattern of **making it work** that they uphold. Instead, we need to enquire into how residents and public professionals perform this pattern into being as they encounter each other.

The following two narratives about what 'communities' need and want help us to grapple with the beliefs, emotions and experiences on which the oppositional standpoints about **making it work** are based. The first story comes from Shawn, a Community Planning officer, who mediates between partner agencies and residents based on a strong concern for serving the community through sincere personal relationships, and the second from Stewart, the proactive pensioner we just met.

> **'Communities … don't want … that somebody comes along and offers a service, you know, for a couple of weeks and then disappears again**, because the money has run out or the people haven't thought about it properly. And it's about saying, you know "If you allow us time to understand what your views and thoughts and expression and wishes are, we can try to do that"… [T]he partners need that amount of **flexibility** as opposed to having a **rigidity** of "This is the way we do things, you know, and we're not going to change our way"… **The partners know by working effectively with each other … they can deliver more effective services** … because if they spread themselves so thinly then they're not going to achieve anything. But if **they target resources**, "I'm doing it in this particular area on a Tuesday and you're doing it on a Wednesday"… And that gets back to a point a long time ago … that there would have been … partners who wouldn't have been seen dead in the room with another ... Now **they realise that** the only way they're going to deliver effective services … And most of them **are enjoying that**, you know, **they're achieving**

what they're set out to do by using that additional resource, … [getting] recognition by a community who says "Yes, at last, somebody is listening to us, we've been asking for this for … thirty-five years, you know, and now somebody is listening". And **you would hope that once you've achieved that happy medium … that you try and build on that**… So I mean, **it's working … and I think it will continue to work …'** (Shawn – Community Planning officer)

'But **getting, um, the community involved and … to work with one another is not very easy, you know,** because they all want to be on top… [chuckles] And a lot of people are naturally negative, they don't see the positive side and look ahead**, they just argue their own point … **We've been sitting and talking about the same thing for two years and we'll be sitting here in another two years** … You got to find out where you're going and make sure that people… And I think that's the problem with Community Planning and the Community Reference Group … **people don't really understand what it's about, where we're supposed to be going**. And that's not their fault, that's the fault I think of the Council, … because **the community won't cooperate unless they know exactly where they're going**. So the, I blame **the Council**, or whoever is in charge of Community Planning, **are not getting it right** … **[T]hey're** just consulting the community and … **not actually asking to give advice properly** … they're giving members of the community the opportunity to criticise and condemn what's actually happening, … because they're not explaining it properly. Um, **we'll never get anywhere**.' (Stewart – Community Reference Group member)

At first glance, we might wonder what is so fundamentally contradictory between these two narratives. Both express a quite similar view on how community participation should ideally be: people joined in a communal approach to solving problems based on mutual understanding. So what is the problem, then? Well, Shawn asserts that Community Planning is "working and will continue to work", while Stewart concludes that "we'll never get anywhere". These opposing verdicts are supported by two diverging storylines.

The first diagnosis is based on a '*story of helplessness and control*': 'the situation is bad. We always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things' (Stone, 2002, p 142). In Shawn's narrative, communities desire effective and durable problem solving. This could not be achieved before, as partner agencies displayed "rigidity" in their way of working, "spread [their resources] so thinly", and "wouldn't have been seen dead in the room with another". Now, however, Community Planning forms "a happy medium" which helps agencies in "achieving what they're set out to do", because it facilitates "flexibility" in the ways in which services are delivered and more effective "target[ing of] resources". All partners "realise that [this is] the only way they're going to deliver effective services", "they are enjoying that", and get "recognition by [the] community". Hence, Community Planning is **making it work** because it offers control over a previously helpless situation.

The second diagnosis is based on a 'story of change is only an illusion': 'you always thought things were getting … better. But you were wrong. Let me show you some evidence that things are in fact going in the opposite direction. Improvement was an illusion' (Stone, 2002, p 142). Stewart's narrative posits that public professionals cannot solve problems together with residents before having reached some mutual understanding about "what it's about, [and] where we're supposed to be going". Community participation might seem straightforward, but, in actual fact, getting "the community involved and … to work with one another is not very easy", because "the community won't cooperate unless they know exactly where they're going". While some might be under the illusion that Community Planning has created a productive dynamic, it is "not actually asking to give advice properly" and is "not getting it right". Therefore, Community Planning is not **making it work** unless it takes a fundamentally different approach that grasps the terms on which residents are willing to participate and recognises the ways in which they need to be addressed.

These conflicting diagnoses of the current situation are not just a matter of a public professional and a resident with different experiences taking opposing positions, but point to a deeper tension between their narratives. Shawn values Community Planning because it brings a single, coherent approach to participation as collaboration based on coordination of input and output. Partner organisations need to translate the desires and needs of the community into these coordinated plans and targeted resources. Participation will only work if there continues to be control over the commitment of partners to collaborate in this

way. In other words, his narrative depicts participation as **Planning**: adhering to fixed institutions to channel knowledge and have stable, committed relationships. In contrast, Stewart's narrative reproaches Community Planning exactly because it tries to establish a system that controls participation. Residents feel constrained and forced into a single mould, and therefore display defensive and conflictive behaviour. Participation will only work if residents are addressed on their own terms through personal engagement with their views and ways of working. His narrative, then, portrays participation as **Community**: gradually developing social relationships towards collaboration through interdependencies, common beliefs and values, and reciprocity.

Thus, **Community** and **Planning** are not the natural partners they were assumed to be with the institution of Community Planning. Upon deeper inquiry, **Community** and **Planning** appear to embody fundamentally opposing ways of thinking, acting, and organising. To be sure, that does not mean that public professionals and residents do not and can never understand each other or collaborate. But in the Glasgow case they rarely manage to do so in a productive way. For example, during a LCPP Board meeting in November 2009, there was a discussion about the 'Big Event', a one day gathering in which participants discussed local problems in five thematic areas (Healthy, Learning, Safe, Vibrant, and Working) and could vote on 'top priority issues' from a predetermined list. Two resident participants[24] argued that it "couldn't have worked as a community event" because it was "too overwhelming" and not "meaningful for the whole of South East Glasgow". While they felt that it "was a genuine attempt to widen the discussion with stakeholders in community planning", small, local gatherings organised "from the grassroots" would have been more appropriate than a comprehensive event based on policy priorities.

The story of Gail, who, as already mentioned at the start of this section, was responsible for turning the unproductive pattern of **making it work** around, stresses the depth of the problem:

'The Community Planning partners come to Community Reference Group meetings and present their strategies and plans and proposals, and then there is a discussion about it, at the moment. But **we're wanting to move forward in a more, in a better way**, so that they come and discuss their plans for engagement, not their strategies they've already decided, you know. And that the Community Reference Group members are actually actively involved in going out and seeking views on these issues and bringing those views

back… And **that's what we need to move to**. But at the moment we're in a sort of more "This is my plan, what do you think of it, like it?"… [W]e haven't got that whole process nailed yet, but **we know how we want to do it. But the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice**, because in practice you've got quite limited options on the table. I mean, often we don't actually have that many options. If you narrowed it down to what are the options for the priorities here … it comes down to judgements made by people who have influence. And it's, you know, **it's difficult to, to really present options in the complex policy environment that we have**, where you've got national objectives, and city wide objectives, and then local issues coming into play, and **not always that much room to move on how you do things**. So … **getting that engagement to be really meaningful is really tricky**, you know.' (Gail – Community Planning officer)

Gail identifies a discrepancy between 'the ideal world' and practice, and feels that the options to change this situation are limited. Her narrative, which I coded as **being stuck**, demonstrates beautifully how the habitual pattern of **making it work** is performed into being in-between public professionals and residents. She explains that there is "not always that much room to move on how you do things" and it is hard "to really present options". Public professionals engage with residents in a restricted, procedural way, as they have not much discretion to integrate all the elements of the "complex policy environment" (such as national and city wide policies and strategic priorities) with local problems and needs expressed by residents. Residents interpret this lack of 'meaningful' engagement as a matter of ill will on the part of public professionals and resort to an antagonistic stance. This, in turn, leaves public professionals affronted as they feel a lack of appreciation for their efforts in making the best out of a narrow mandate. Encountering each other in this way, then, they get stuck in a habitual pattern of disputing whether Community Planning is **making it work** rather than adapting their conversations to the *law of the situation* to actually make it work.

But is it really inevitable that public professionals and residents are **stuck** in this pattern? At the moment, they are convinced that they "know how … to do it" and that their view needs to be adopted "to move forward in … a better way". However, they will not be able to

move forward until they recognise the fundamental tension between **Community** and **Planning** that underlies their ideas and experiences of participation. In other words, public professionals and residents need to acknowledge how they are sustaining a communicative pattern that inhibits them in actually **making it work**. Doing so would be a first step toward adapting their conversations to the *law of the situation* and communicating more productively.

In conclusion, communication between public professionals and residents in Glasgow is characterised by **making it work**: an antagonistic pattern of communication of overt and tacit disputes about whether 'it is working' or not. The next two cases have more productive communicative patterns. At the same time, the Glasgow case reveals the underlying, irresolvable tension between **Community** and **Planning** much more clearly than the other two cases. The narratives of public professionals and residents demonstrate the need for regulation and control of a comprehensive and coherent system as well as interdependency and reciprocity in personal contacts. In the other two cases, this tension is not drawn out as clearly, placing the dominant emphasis either on **Community** (Amsterdam) or **Planning** (Bologna). As I argue in the conclusion to this chapter, the ability to take and defend both positions is an important way to practice communicative capacity when the habitual pattern is overly one sided.

Amsterdam: being in touch

> *'You actually have to intervene in a process on which you hardly have any influence …, in the relationship, in the communication between the organisation and the residents.'* (Margreet – area manager)

The case of the *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak* (AW) [Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach] illuminates a completely different communicative pattern. After the apparent absence of productive communication in Glasgow, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam appear to possess a certain ability to search pragmatically and collaboratively for shared solutions to local problems. The metanarrative of **being in touch** denotes the way in which they are inclined to have *extensive personal contact focused on gradually working towards more mutual understanding, trust, and adaptation in order to find joint solutions for concrete, practical problems*. They are all in contact with a wide range of other persons about numerous local problems and try to bring about some change through open, empathic, and reciprocal

communication. But Margreet, who works for the City District to coordinate collaboration between public agencies and residents at the strategic level, admits that this is a complex and messy "process on which you hardly have any influence". **Being in touch**, then, refers to a pattern of communication which values and links many different ways of doing and thinking, as well as enabling otherwise unattainable solutions to be found, but which also makes problem solving very intensive, fragile, and dependent on personal relationships.

   Being in touch is bound up with a **Community** narrative: public professionals and residents communicate in flexible, spontaneous, and creative ways, but at the same time are short of formal structures, budgets, and hard-and-fast rules for more structured and efficient decision making and problem solving (**Planning**). As the analysis that follows will show, first, the AW is bound up in a local context which comprises great variety in people, neighbourhoods, and problems, their interdependencies, and joint discretion for making it all work. As in the Glasgow case, I then demonstrate that residents and public professionals in Amsterdam are concerned with **making it work**, but their habitual communicative pattern consists of pragmatic personal contact focused on underlying beliefs, feelings, and experiences. But despite the apparent appeal of this pattern, analysis of their narratives reveals (1) a dominant inclination to resolve problems and conflicts by **being in touch**, and (2) a counter narrative of **Planning** that articulates the shortcomings of this **Community** narrative. I therefore conclude that public professionals and residents could communicate more productively by recognising how **being in touch** does not always suit the *law of the situation* but forms a habitual pattern that limits their ability to achieve more structural and widespread results.

   Since the beginning of the 1990s, several decentralisation reforms have made collaboration and participation more manifest in Dutch urban governance (Denters and Klok, 2005). While central policy coordination, performance measurement and funding[25] continue to play a role, municipalities and housing corporations[26] were given the principal responsibility for jointly formulating long-term policies and budgets (*meerjarenplannen*). Their interdependence in implementing these long-term plans follows from the former having the authority to buy ground, issue legally binding planning documents, and maintain public spaces, and the latter having the authority to construct buildings and maintain social housing and facilities. At the same time, local service providers in schooling, health care, police, and social welfare received substantive autonomy to develop their own policies, while municipalities became less responsible for the content of these policies

and more for facilitating cooperation among these organisations (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1997; Louw et al, 2003; KEI, 2004; Verhage, 2005).

The start of the AW in 2008 marked the local commitment to further turn the needs and activities of residents into central elements of urban governance. The newly created Ministry of Living, Neighbourhoods, and Integration had just introduced 'The Neighbourhood Approach' at the national level in 2007 as an integral and joined up approach to community participation in the most deprived urban areas (Ministerie VROM/WWI, 2007). This policy represented the culmination of the *Grote Stedenbeleid* (GSB) [Big Cities Policies] (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1997, 2002, 2004), which framed disadvantaged neighbourhoods as increasingly socially disintegrated, ethnically segregated, and economically deprived 'problem accumulation areas' (Uitermark, 2005). Funding was now targeted to 40 neighbourhoods, which had been selected as the most problematic areas of the country, to enhance levels of 'liveability'. The policy granted municipalities, housing corporations, and other local public agencies the autonomy and shared responsibility for developing their own local Neighbourhood Approach (Andersen and Van Kempen, 2003; Dekker and Van Kempen, 2004).

In Amsterdam, national funding was granted to five nationally selected neighbourhoods (*wijken*), in total consisting of seventeen quarters (*buurten*), spread out over nine city districts. Funding is used to facilitate 'resident initiatives' in a participatory budgeting system inviting residents to propose initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions in their area, and, once a voting round has awarded them the requested funding, to carry out their initiative. In each area, residents meet every six weeks with public professionals (street level workers and middle level managers) from the City District, housing corporations, police, and social work to monitor the progress of resident initiatives, neighbourhood management, and the jointly formulated *Buurt Uitvoeringsprogramma's* (BUPs) [Quarter Implementation Programs]. In addition to the pre-existing resident meetings, newly established resident platforms constitute a kind of informal board of a few residents who prepare meetings and monitor daily affairs. Public professionals meet in (1) an 'area team' including an alderman, administrative directors' representative, and communications advisor; (2) 'direction groups' comprising area managers (City District) and area developers (housing corporations); and (3) 'executive meetings' of quarter managers (City District), neighbourhood managers (housing corporations), quarter coordinators (social work), and quarter directors

Figure 4.3 : Bos & Lommer: located west of the city centre (top left corner)
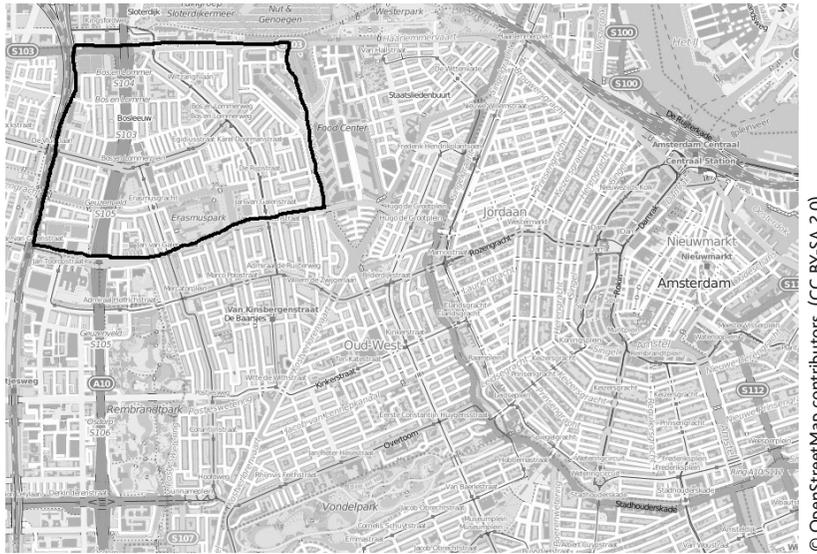
(Police). Finally, a citywide management team monitors and coordinates all neighbourhood-level activities (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008).

The AW invest less in comprehensive plans and overarching systems, but rather in building up social networks among residents and public professionals as a basis for collaboration. It offers budget and discretion to enhance the visibility and approachability of public professionals in the neighbourhoods and the activity and engagement of residents. For example, in the area where I conducted the research, the city district of Bos & Lommer,[27] public professionals and residents have direct personal contact on a small scale through meetings and initiatives at the level of the six quarters (Kolenkit, Gulden Winckel, Gibraltar, Robert Scott, Landlust, and Erasmuspark – total population of *circa* 30,000). These quarters each have their own distinctive physical characteristics, demographics, and problems, and their participatory meetings and initiatives have slightly different compositions and formats. During the fieldwork, I identified at least 40 different civic associations and voluntary organisations in the area.

The nature and extent of the problems in the quarters of Bos & Lommer differ greatly. The Kolenkit stands out in particular, having been labelled the 'worst neighbourhood of the country', with the lowest average income and the highest unemployment rate (14%) in the city (compared with an average of 10.4% for Bos & Lommer as a whole, 7.5% for Amsterdam, and 4.2% for the Netherlands).

Although ethnic diversity is greatest in Landlust, with 127 different nationalities, 76% of Kolenkit inhabitants have a non-Western migrant background (compared with 38% in Erasmuspark, 54% in Bos & Lommer, and 34.7% in Amsterdam). The housing stock in Kolenkit is almost completely owned by housing corporations (in comparison with 22% in Erasmuspark and 50.2% in Amsterdam). At the same time, safety, crime, and social isolation are bigger issues in Erasmuspark and Robert Scott. Furthermore, all quarters suffer in different degrees and forms from many other problems such as below average school results, above average high school dropouts, badly maintained or inadequate housing stock, street litter and bulk garbage, bicycle wrecks, nuisance from junkies and groups of youngsters, and the ongoing demolition and reconstruction of housing estates (Stadsdeel Bos & Lommer, 2007, 2008 2009a; 2009b; Dienst Onderzoek and Statistiek Gemeente Amsterdam, 2009).

Thus, residents and public professionals are faced with long lists of complex and lingering problems which defy straightforward definitions and solutions. Many of these problems form the tip of an iceberg, so that a problem is partially tackled only to reappear on the agenda at a later date. This way of working means that there are always new issues for the so called 'action points list'. This fixed component on the agenda of the resident meetings provides an overview of specific problems (for example, 'remove litter', 'badly maintained plantation', or 'repair broken windows'), the exact location, what should be done, by whom, and by when. The AW was intended to offer that extra bit of commitment and resources needed to come up with more innovative and effective solutions.

Rather than contesting whether the AW is working or not, residents and public professionals tend to have close personal contact to work out pragmatic solutions for particular problems. Let's listen to Malika, a neighbourhood manager who works for the City District and manages the contact between residents and public professionals in two quarters on neighbourhood maintenance as well as resident initiatives focused on cleanliness, safety, and regeneration, for example. Her story is not just a typically Dutch problem, but is telling in the way in which public professionals and residents encounter each other by **being in touch**:

> **'We noticed that almost in all of Bos & Lommer we have a bicycle stand shortage** … Then we thought "We're going to cooperate and make one campaign out of it and then … it's effective…" Indeed, um, money was made available, which came in instalments. So then it's the turn

Figure 4.4 : The quarters of Bos & Lommer
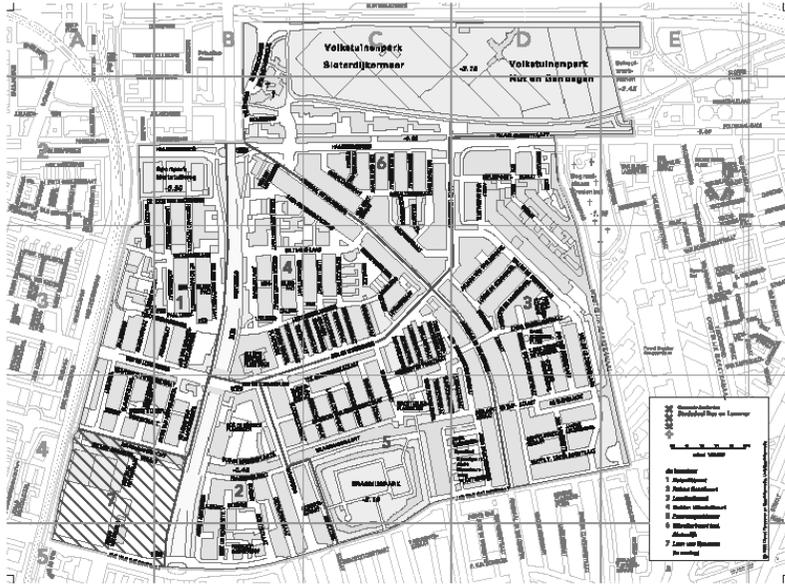
Source: www.west.amsterdam.nl

of quarter A, and then of quarter B… **But with hindsight … you knew actually in advance that … you weren't going to achieve a lot with that approach** ... And **later a few bicycle stands came, um, on the street where it was possible, but eventually not where it was very much needed because it wasn't possible technically speaking** ... Then the second round of the Neighbourhood Approach was going on … **[a group of residents] had investigated it so nicely, and came up with such nice, smart, um, solutions for it.** And they got enough money from the Neighbourhood Approach ... and they started a campaign … **from a different perspective. Looking at, like, freeing up space at bicycle stands, like the removal of bicycle wrecks** ... So … they managed to get permission from the Daily Board [of the city district council], they're going to start a pilot ... And … [the] Daily Board, they also have to be included very well. I don't want that my Board is going to thwart me in some way. That's like, **that bit of, um, freedom that you give them and trust at the same time**. One should, um, of course the ideas have to be realistic, have to be within the legislation, … be achievable … But on the other hand, um, there

might be possibilities that we've overlooked … **So at least you have to be open for it and go and throw ideas around together**.' (Malika – neighbourhood manager)

Malika tells us about how she and her colleagues discovered a bicycle stand shortage and changed from a structured, procedural to an open participatory approach. As they 'knew actually in advance', the initial procedural approach did not work, because stands were placed at spots where it was technically possible but not where they were most necessary. Bicycle stands can only be installed if the physical dimensions of the street meet to the legal requirements, so it is not possible in the narrowest streets where a lot of bikes are actually crammed together, blocking the whole pavement and representing a risk to road safety. From the technical perspective, there seemed to be no feasible solution. However, by taking a participatory approach, a previously unthought of solution emerged. A handful of residents reframed the definition of the problem from a focus on putting in extra stands to looking at the removal of bicycle wrecks. Rather than implementing a programme based on priorities and budget that trickled down from politics, Malika and the residents now had to negotiate with the politicians for permission. She concludes that a structural solution for this bicycle problem, and other problems as well, requires **being in touch**: to "be open to" alternative approaches, give others "freedom … and trust", and "throw ideas around together".

Resolving the bicycle problem is likely to remain a process of "horsing around together".[28] Malika said later on in the interview, coming back to the example, that many bits and pieces still had to be worked out. The precise point at which a bike qualifies as a 'wreck' and who has the authority to remove it are complicated legal issues. This means that a lot more time, effort, and resources will be needed and these extra resources have to be negotiated with the politicians, who may eventually get impatient for 'results'. Many public professionals and residents therefore make great efforts to convince others that results can only be achieved by **being in touch**. However, not everybody agrees that this approach actually works. For instance, Mohammed – a young and active resident – told me how he had proposed a solution to a problem with storage box windows being smashed three times already, and each time there was an enthusiastic response from public professionals but it was never followed up. This is only one of the many examples he gave to explain his sceptical view "that you're actually getting into some kind of cycle". Later I show in more detail that in this case it is also contested whether the AW is **making it work**.

Being in touch means a lot of talking and 'horsing around' and often does not directly lead to big, concrete results, and also hardly ever goes into 'the big decisions'.

Contestation, conflict, and antagonism are undeniably part of local public encounters. At the same time, nobody qualifies as either an outright adversary or a fanatic zealot of the AW. Public professionals and residents articulate nuanced views about the pros and cons of specific events, activities, and problems. They express satisfaction, but also point out mistakes, problems, and frustrations. To understand why **being in touch**, rather than **making it work**, is the habitual communicative pattern, consider the following two stories. Mark is a middle level manager at a housing corporation responsible for the social dimension of the housing stock in one of the quarters and talks about the huge amount of work community participation requires. Peter is a resident who has been active for several years in the resident meeting and resident platform of his quarter and is very displeased with the large derelict site in front of his house that, at the time of the interview, had already been there for over three years:

> 'we can learn a lot from our colleagues who say "No, … [there's no use sending] a letter, we'll go door to door". Then I say "Yeah, **door to door, do you know how much time that takes?**" Well, I did it a few times, you lose the entire afternoon. And then you absolutely don't have the feeling the message is arriving. **But at the moment that you organise a [participation meeting], it appears that about thirty people come to it who are triggered by that personal contact**. Only a few minutes at the door, getting acquainted, introducing yourself, explaining what's the plan. So I think you achieve a lot on the street level by just paying attention to that tenant, even if it is those ten minutes per house. **Calculate that, hey, 200 houses, … times ten, well, you're busy for days if you want to reach all residents**. Yeah, that's just difficult… I'm glad we have those neighbourhood managers, because they have the time for that ... And I've got my hands full with nuisance and letters that come in, phone calls, bailiffs, lawyers… So those are my … dilemmas. **I would like to put all my time into it, participation, [but] engaging people costs time**. And especially **the personal contact, I think that that's the core of, if you, yeah, want to engage the tenant, they have to know who they're dealing**

with. And you build trust by seeing each other more often, speaking to each other more often.' (Mark – housing manager)

'I have a piece of derelict land in front of my house. When I moved in there in the summer of 2006 ... there were still firefighter barracks then, it was made public that by the end of 2006 the lot would be demolished and then the ground would be prepared for construction and **in Spring 2007 they would start building there. It is still derelict now**. Um, so then we have an issue with the City District, with a project developer who has to build it, with a contractor who has to execute it, and with a housing corporation which has to purchase it. The last thing I heard was that it is [contractor] who has to build there and that they are bankrupt. And **what actually is going to happen, nobody knows**, but really absolutely nobody. And **that's dragging on for, what is it, three years now**. And no spade has gone into the ground yet, **absolutely nothing has happened**. And **it is really a black box what happens there**. We can't even determine ourselves who is leading in it, who eventually has to take the decision. **We don't know who to hold to account for that**. And so you can have almost no influence on it except for asking at each resident meeting 'What's the status?' And then **just hope that the people who are there know something about it and are honest about it**. And that's hard. But it's a very clear example indeed of how all services have to cooperate, maybe not cooperate, and are not clear in the information they provide. And **it is undoubtedly like that with more premises**.' (Peter – resident)

At first examination, we might detect the same division between these narratives as was the case with the stories of Shawn and Stewart in Glasgow: a 'story of helplessness and control' supports the argument that the AW is **making it work** in Mark's narrative ("it appears that about thirty people come to it who are triggered by that personal contact") and a 'story of change is only an illusion' underpins the opposite in Peter's narrative ("absolutely nothing has happened" and "it is undoubtedly like that with more premises"). However, the full interviews with Mark and Peter indicate a different narrative. Mark, for example, laments that he is forced to spend a lot of time in

supporting residents in carrying out their initiatives, because they "are not willing to implement. And that's the core of the Neighbourhood Approach." In contrast, Peter assesses a project that was started to deal with safety problems caused by loitering youngsters as "now running well, it now took on such forms that it really led to a significantly safer neighbourhood". Thus, both Mark and Peter take a pragmatic view of whether the AW is working.

Closer inspection of their stories reveals that their pragmatic mode of communication is inexorably bound up with a shared causal belief in solving local problems by **being in touch**. Causal beliefs are deeply held convictions about what has brought about a certain situation, or will bring about a desired situation, and they facilitate or legitimate particular events, actions, and values (see Chapter Three). In the first story, Mark shares his dilemma about using a personal 'door to door' approach, which on the one hand diverts a lot of time from important routine activities, but on the other hand motivates residents to participate. In the end, he reveals his causal belief that the only way to really "engage the tenant, … [is to] build trust by seeing each other more often, speaking to each other more often". Peter also holds a causal belief in **being in touch**. He talks about a piece of derelict land that should have been built upon years ago and the future of which is still shrouded in fog. Various organisations are not cooperating and communicating well, leaving residents with nothing more than to "just hope that the people who are there know something about it and are honest about it". Thus, his story conveys that the low degree of **being in touch** inhibits the situation from moving forward.

On the one hand, Mark and Peter believe that the more public professionals and residents are in touch, the better they will be able to solve local problems. Their narratives emphasise that "getting acquainted, introducing yourself, explaining what's the plan" enables productive conversations, because then everyone knows "who they're dealing with" and "who to hold to account" about specific issues. **Being in touch** implies that public professionals and residents are responsive to each other's needs, ideas, feelings, problems and practices, and are open to negotiating flexible and creative solutions. In this **Community** narrative, participation depends on their ability to deal directly with people and improvise beyond policies, decision-making structures, rules and job descriptions, as formal institutions are considered insufficient for dealing with the intricacies of local problems.

On the other hand, Mark and Peter are struggling with the shortcomings of this narrative, including hints at a counter narrative of **Planning**. Their stories point out that **being in touch** is a very

resource-, time- and energy-intensive pattern of communication (Mark) and is very fragile when personal needs and distress are not recognised or big decisions and processes are out of reach (Peter). Therefore, residents and public professionals regularly express a desire for structures, rules, and plans that could create more clarity, certainty and stability. At the moment, they have to take a lot of details into account, struggle to find out who exactly is doing what, and go back and forth between a great many different people, policies, and problems. Formal responsibilities are shared rather than depending of strict division of labour, while formal plans are the outcomes of negotiation and implementation processes rather than being predetermined. A **Planning** narrative can regulate communication more by focusing attention on determining precise goals to be achieved and decisions to be made, dividing responsibilities, and specifying mandates, budgets, and timelines for decision making and implementation. At the same time, **Planning** can also reduce the ability of residents and public professionals to "get acquainted", give each other "freedom and trust", and "throw ideas around together".

Hence, although challenged by a counter narrative of Planning, the communicative pattern of **being in touch** is firmly grounded in a narrative of **Community**. It is unlikely that public professionals and residents will get out of the habit of encountering each other by **being in touch**. Like Margreet, who we met at the beginning of this section, Tineke is an area manager at the City District responsible for coordinating the regeneration of specific quarters at a strategic level. Both their stories support a pattern of **being in touch**, despite the difficulties they experienced when trying to sustain trust between other public professionals and residents:

> **'[The] City District is responsible for all social housing, and last year it drafted a MIPSA. That is a Long-term Investment Plan: Social Housing**. ... Just the collection of the factual information is already a lot of work, and then also looking strategically how we want these places to be used in the future ... **was so much work, and it had to be done on such short notice, that it has just been conducted internally** ... So afterwards I went into the quarter with "Yeah, ... these are the goals of the [MIPSA]". "Yeah," **my housing corporation says, "hello, um, you didn't ask us anything, while we were supposed to collaborate, weren't we?** And in the meantime you've already come up with everything."

Um, yeah, that's quite unpleasant. **But it is actually exactly the same with the corporations**, ... the decision making ... is at the level of the direction of that housing corporation, which has a lot more housing, covering many other neighbourhoods, and they have to make a judgement "What do I do with my own stock, ... what is the current situation, which strategic investment decisions do I take?" ... So I say "Well, pot calling the kettle black. I ... get confronted with the MIPSA all decided, but you actually have that investment decision of the corporation. **So let's just with the two of us accept that we don't have any influence on the level of this quarter …".** Um, yeah, and then we were friends again and we were thinking like, yeah, that's just the way it is, but how can you make sure that those two decisions are in fact coordinated?'** (Tineke – area manager)

'…a very elementary thing, but one which still often happens is that, um, communication between residents and just our organisation… Look, **[a proactive resident] sends a letter with a complaint**, that letter, um, it reaches three different desks, um, eventually mine. Um, well, in the end all kinds of things go wrong, it appears. **I write an answer … and bring the letter to the secretariat**, they have to dispatch it… That was just before Christmas, so **it just stays there for three weeks, because I accidentally used a wrong format**. So I don't get a call like "Gee …, you ticked the wrong thing, can you do it again?", no, it stays there for three weeks. Um, well, I still send that letter, but **it doesn't arrive at the postal address** of [the resident]. So he emails me again, and I say "Yeah, but I sent it already then and then." Well, then it appears that something went wrong on that postal address. Anyway, **in the end something goes horribly wrong in the procedure and then I have to make a great effort to get and stay on speaking terms with [the resident]**, and, um, also to explain in a proper way that "Well, we just make mistakes as organisation, we didn't manage it well, that's correct." And, um, then I can't say much more than that… And, um, the distrust that residents have towards the City District is already huge, we have a very bad name… So, yeah, it's difficult then, um, that **you actually have to**

intervene in a process on which you hardly have any influence …, in the relationship, in the communication between the organisation and the residents. Yeah, **you can … chase it up in your organisation, but anyway, that doesn't solve the problem, of course**. And you have a resident who for the umpteenth time, so to say, um, is disappointed, um, confirmed in his distrust. So those things are quite difficult.' (Margreet – area manager)

Both Tineke and Margreet share one of their experiences with an administrative practice within their own organisation. The first, drafting a long–term social housing plan, was "a lot of work", while the second, following the procedures in answering a letter, seemed "a very elementary thing". Neither followed the planned route because "it had to be done on such short notice" and "accidentally … a wrong format" was used. As a result, they got into a conflict that damaged mutual trust and relationships. Both indicate that they first needed "to make a great effort" to restore their relationships before they could proceed with their collaboration. Thus, their public encounters took shape through a fragile and delicate process of **being in touch** as mutual trust was not embedded in broader changes or institutions. Of course, institutional improvements could have been made as well: problems might have been prevented by more collaborative decision making at the top (Tineke), and more streamlined internal communication (Margreet). However, these **Community** narratives reveal how public professionals and residents instead enact a habitual pattern of **being in touch** that certainly does not always follow the *law of the situation*.

To conclude, the habitual pattern of **being in touch** enables public professionals and residents to pragmatically recognise and connect many different views and activities through their personal relationships. But **being in touch** also inhibits them in embedding, broadening, and channelling the results beyond specific relationships or situations. The next case shows that a communicative pattern grounded in a **Planning** narrative can bring more clarity, certainty, and stability to public encounters, but also comes at the cost of flexible, spontaneous, and creative communication. Thus, both the narratives of **Community** and **Planning** support habitual communicative patterns which limit abilities to solve local problems. Therefore, public professionals and residents need the capacity to recognise and break through these patterns and communicate based on the *law of the situation*.

Bologna: canalising

'From an initial phase of strong scepticism, we nevertheless managed to have credibility for doing participation and then …, building on that, doing it in a way for effectively arriving at changes.'
(Corrado – neighbourhood official)

The case of Bologna's *Piano Strutturale Comunale* (PSC) [Structural Municipal Plan]- turns out to be an excellent complement to the previous cases. After the division between narratives of **Community** and **Planning** in Glasgow and the dominance of a **Community** narrative in Amsterdam, **Planning** proved to be the dominant narrative in Bologna. The metanarrative of **canalising** explains this situation with a communicative pattern that *enables public professionals and citizens to channel their energy, attention, and behaviour from an initially antagonistic situation towards the formulation of concrete proposals and plans*. Corrado, who grew up in the neighbourhood and took part in the participative workshops as a neighbourhood official, explains how **canalising** enabled them in moving from "an initial phase of strong scepticism" to "effectively arriving at changes". The public professionals and residents who took part in the so-called participative workshops (*laboratori*) exchanged views and arguments according to formal procedures and fixed boundaries. **Canalising**, then, denotes a communicative pattern which does not transgress planned guidelines for the sake of achieving concrete results, and, as such, limits the free floating and capricious emergence of ideas, feelings and relationships.

The analysis shows that the communicative pattern of **canalising** is grounded in a **Planning** narrative in which the goals, timelines, and inclusion of local actors are purposively circumscribed. Getting into the habit of **canalising** effectively led the participatory process from a problematic situation to a set of joint decisions, but also downplayed the freedom, spontaneity, and creativity inherent in a **Community** narrative of participation. I explain how this pattern came about by first of all outlining how the participative workshops were created out of urban governance reforms and local needs to address conflict and stalemate. I then demonstrate that public professionals and residents widely appreciate the participative workshops for their propensity to establish productive communication. However, the counter narrative of a small minority shows that it also produces a habitual pattern in which underlying beliefs and feelings are not addressed. Finally, I conclude that public professionals and residents could enhance the productivity of their communication by recognising how the habitual pattern of

canalising limits the scope of conversations to predetermined formats rather than adapting them to the *law of the situation*.

   Participatory democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy. It only started to develop following the decentralisation reforms in the 1990s and local authorities being granted constitutional autonomy in 2001. Traditionally, the Italian system was highly centralised and local government amounted to the administration of central policies.[29] There is no urban governance system or history of community participation as in the other two cases, as Italy has never had a national urban policy, minister, or ministry for this area (Dente, 1985, 1997; Governa and Saccomani, 2004). Local government policy does not extend beyond the housing policy of the Ministry of Public Works (integrated into the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport in 2001), and the 1942 national planning law (renewed in 1980), which required local governments to formulate a General Regulatory Plan (*Piano Regolatore Generale*). However, the reforms in the 1990s and 2001 created an interdependent multilevel governance system. Municipalities, provinces, and regions are now autonomous policy-making bodies (Capano and Gualmini, 2006) looking to translate their newfound responsibilities into more effective and legitimate local political and administrative systems. Many local entities have revised their planning systems, including legal requirements for citizen participation.

   In 2008, the PSC of Bologna was adopted as a new comprehensive planning system to replace the General Regulatory Planning system. It followed Law 20/2000 of the Emilia–Romagna Region, which completely reformed the regional planning system (see Provincia di Bologna, 2003; Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2003, 2009; Comune di Bologna, 2008). The PSC specified strategic goals for urban regeneration in seven thematic future visions on the city (*Le Sette Città*) and detailed the formal decision-making structures, rules, and procedures. Following development of the PSC, which was based on citizen input, and adopted by the City Council in 2008, citizens were involved in eight participative workshops across the city to feed into the development of a *Piano Operativo Comunale* (POC) [Operational Municipal Plan]–. A POC is a five year plan that specifies specific projects in operational terms, their cartographic representations, and technical norms. The participative workshops consisted of sets of meetings in which facilitators (*facilitatori*), assisted by administrators and planners (commonly referred to as *tecnici* meaning technicians), used participative techniques to help citizens in translating their needs and desires into concrete proposals for the area under discussion (Comune di Bologna, 2009b).

I conducted research in the Bolognina neighbourhood, where the two most ambitious participative workshops (*Laboratorio Mercato* and *Laboratorio Bolognina Est*) were organised. Bolognina (circa 32,750 inhabitants) is part of the Navile District together with the neighbourhoods of Corticella and Lame (total population circa 64,600). It is located just to the north of the historical city centre, from which it is separated by the railway tracks of the central rail station, and consists of three zones (historical Bolognina, Arcoveggio and Casaralta). Bolognina is perhaps the most paradigmatic example of the crumbling of Italian civil society and local communities as a result of the collapse of the traditional political system in the 1990s, with massive deindustrialisation and increasing immigration (Callari Galli, 2007). Over the course of the previous decades, Bolognina changed from a tightly knit working class community with a strong identity[30] into a deprived area with a massive amount of derelict land, immigrants, and safety problems.

Figure 4.5: Bolognina: located north of the city centre
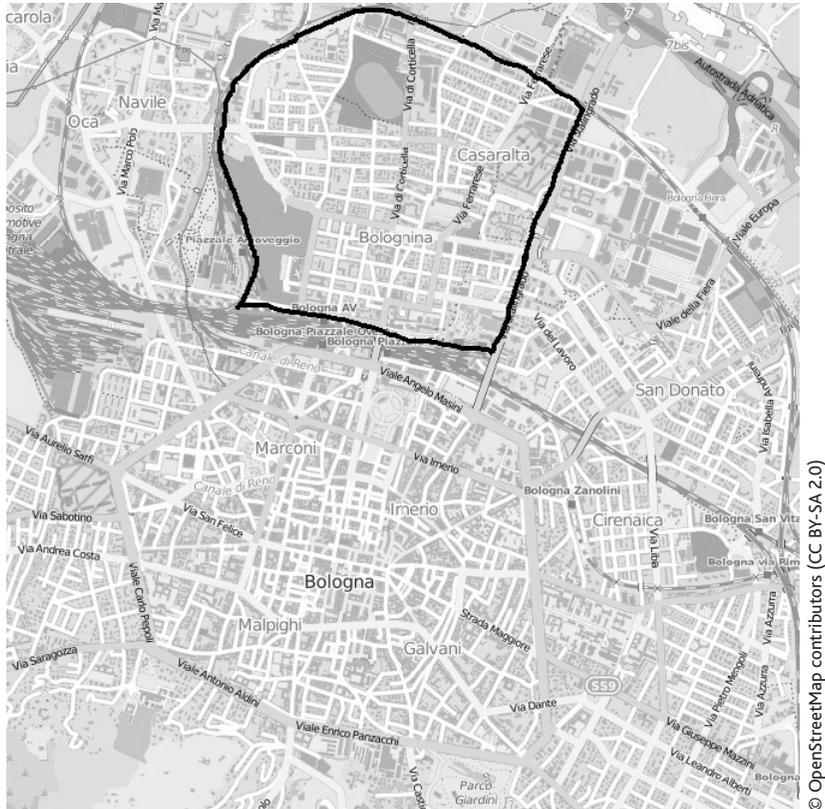
The neighbourhood was mainly built to provide housing for the manual labourers working in the industrial factories of Casaralta, Cevolani, and Sasib (respectively train, automobile, and machine industry). Their closure in the 1980s announced the weakening of the strong social networks that had grown around the workplace, the Church, and the Communist Party. When the latter two 'poles of socialisation' also started to disintegrate, the elderly traditional inhabitants became increasingly isolated, faced with an influx of younger people working in the tertiary sector and immigrants from a variety of countries (70% of the immigrant population arrived in the previous ten years). The population distinguishes itself from the rest of the city by higher levels of unemployment (5.3% compared with 4.4% for the city as a whole), lower levels of education (the highest level of education was elementary school for 61.9% and higher education for 11.1% compared to 54.8% and 16.6% for the city as a whole), and more inhabitants with an immigrant background (19% compared with 10.5%)[31] (Comune di Bologna, 2007b, 2009a, 2011). The derelict

Figure 4.6: Bolognina: cartographic representation

Source: Comune di Bologna

areas around the old factories, the military barracks (*Caserna Sani*), and the huge fruit and vegetable market (*Mercato Ortofrutticolo)* became hotspots for drug dealing, illegal habitation (sleeping rough), violence and prostitution, causing tremendous distress and grief among the original residents (Callari Galli, 2007; Procopio, 2008; Daconto, 2010).

The reform of the urban planning system and the degeneration of this area, as well as other neighbourhoods, created a strong impetus for **canalising**. In fact, in 2005, residents of Bolognina, in particular those living close to the old *Mercato Ortofrutticolo*, were engaged in a protracted conflict with the Municipality over the regeneration of the area. A situation of antagonism and stalemate had emerged because the area had been left to decay for fifteen years and the plans which were eventually formulated in 1999 proposed a kind of 'gated community' which would effectively cut off the current residents from the new green spaces and public facilities on the derelict site with a big wall and several high buildings. The residents felt anything but compensated for their years of waiting and suffering.[32] Giovanni, a long-time resident, explained to me how the plan for this 'Berlin wall' triggered several civic associations to get together to compile, distribute, and analyse a survey, convene a meeting with the recently elected political authorities, and convince them to organise participative workshops to resolve the conflict. With the support of several neighbourhood officials and civil servants, they managed to create the conditions for a deliberative space that could *canalise* the existing antagonism toward productive conversations and new outcomes.

The success of the *Laboratorio Mercato* did not only lead to adoption of its proposals, which 'radically modified the previous plan' (Comune di Bologna, 2007a, p 46), but also of its institutional format (Ginocchini and Tartari, 2007). In 2008, the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* was started as the most ambitious of all participative workshops, as it set out to facilitate residents in formulating proposals for the regeneration of the three abandoned factory areas in the neighbourhood (Ginocchini, 2009). While the previous *Laboratorio* was coordinated by three expert facilitators appointed by the Municipality, in *Bolognina-Est the facilitators were commissioned following a* public tender process which was won by *Associazione Orlando*, a locally based but (inter)nationally operating women's rights association. The narrative of Chiara (a professional facilitator who was hired as an external expert to assist *Orlando*) about the preparation for the participative workshops illustrates how **canalising** had become the habitual pattern of communication:

'To prepare the meetings we worked with the technicians **to decide … what kind of information we needed to show to the citizens**, and also we, um, prepared the question we used to open a meeting. I mean, um, … we prepared … a big poster, hm, on which several **key questions** are present, **the focus of the discussion**, um, **a scheme in which the things the people say are ordered**. Um, both in respect to the locations as to the themes, emphasising that which is present, that which is the future, and that which is shared, that which is problematical, that which is an opportunity, and a [threat] … [So] a big poster that guides and orients, … **allows to collect in an ordered fashion that what the people say**, in a way that allows the people to write directly on these posters. It is like the preparation of these kinds of materials and also … **cartographies** [maps] **or photographs**, images that can help or give examples, or for having a, **the materials with which to work**, writing together with people in small groups. This is how…' (Chiara – facilitator)

Chiara describes how they went about preparing and managing three thematic meetings. For every meeting, the facilitators and the 'technicians' met to decide the exact topic, the questions that would focus the discussion, and "what kind of information we needed to show to the citizens". From their analysis of the neighbourhood and relevant rules and policies, the conveners prepared maps, photos, and models on the basis of which residents could form an image of what the proposals would look like. Every meeting was introduced to explain what the current situation of the area under discussion was, what the PSC proposed, and what the goals and procedures of the meeting were. The format of small group and plenary discussions, which was used for the thematic meetings, aided a deliberative process in which similarities and differences were confronted to build mutual understanding, compromise and consensus. The facilitators assisted residents in marking 'problems' and 'opportunities' on maps and in two by two 'SWOT' [Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats] matrices with 'present/future' and 'opportunities/problems' on the axes. This helped 'to collect in an ordered fashion that what the people say' and synthesise the final proposals into a report that was handed to the Municipality.

As such, the participative workshops utilised a variety of formats to *canalise* the inputs of the residents "in an ordered fashion" towards

concrete proposals for the regeneration of the neighbourhood. **Canalising** became the new habitual communicative pattern because it facilitated a constructive and productive deliberative process as well as enabling a new type of relationship between public professionals and residents. As a result, the majority of respondents (15 out of 20) praised the participative workshops for their unexpected and unprecedented potential in **making it work**, while the remaining five respondents voiced considerable criticism, disappointment, and frustration. We can understand this division in evaluations by comparing the stories of Davide, a middle level manager at the Urban Planning Department who talks about his role in the participative workshops, and Piero, a pensioner who worked in one of the factories for whom this was his first participative experience.

> '[O]ne of the things we saw in the experience of the *Laboratorio* this year is that **you can't discuss everything. You have to delimitate the field in which you can discuss, um, because otherwise the discussions can get, um, can [go astray]**. And so, if this happens, the *Laboratorio* is no more useful, you don't get anything. While **you are discussing about, if this pedestrian, um, [walkway] has to be green or not,** it's an important question for the final environment that will be created by the realisation of this work… **But you can't discuss if this pedestrian or bicycle route is better than a light mass transport system**. Because if you discuss that you don't get any route, any pedestrian route, you will have an abandoned railway as it is now… **So my role in this kind of processes was the one of telling the… [boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions**. I think this … is considered a bad thing, um, by the people who have an ideological view on participation. And, um, in this year **we tried to demonstrate that participation can produce spaces**. And so if you want to produce spaces you have to go very near the needs of people and the way in which, um, the spaces are used.' (Davide – urban planning manager)
>
> '**[We had] good meetings and good discussions. However, the big decisions were assumed** … All the projects of, on which the *Laboratorio* is working were already decided, all of them … The citizens have participated voluntarily. However, **they have decided**

> **the details between brackets**. Like, a bench, two trees,
> … bicycle paths. The rest, everything already, the frame
> was already decided. **That's all right, … the function
> of the** *Laboratorio* **was emphasised a lot**. And the true
> function of the *Laboratorio* is to create, this is my opinion,
> consensus about the decisions ... And **the citizens were
> pleased** … because while the *Laboratorio* was underway it
> was understood that they were starting to work on all the,
> on the recovery … **And for the first time they found a
> place, the residents, where to, um, let their feelings
> run free**…' (Piero – resident)

In the first instance, both Davide and Piero seem to concur with the dominant narrative that **canalising** is the best mode of communication. The participative workshops have "[boundaries] in which you can effectively take decisions" because "you can't discuss everything" and "otherwise the discussions … can [go astray]". Although some people might dislike the fact that "the big decisions were assumed", in the end "the function of the *Laboratorio* was emphasised a lot" and "the citizens were pleased" because "for the first time they found a place … where to … let their feelings run free". By focusing on the decisions which can be made within the political mandate, "participation can produce spaces" and generate concrete, tangible changes. Thus, while both are aware of the shortcomings of **canalising**, they support this mode of communication with a 'story of gradual progress': 'In the beginning, things were pretty bad. Now they got better. Admittedley, we are not quite there yet. But we are heading in the right direction.'[33]

A closer look at their narratives reveals that Davide and Piero actually provide contrasting 'diagnostic prescriptive stories' (see Chapter Three). Such stories represent a complex reality and a vision for future transformation based on such a subtle 'normative leap … as to make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious' (Rein and Schön, 1994, p 26). The 'normative leap' in Davide's narrative is made in the sentence "discussing about, if this pedestrian, um, [walkway] has to be green or not, it's an important question for the final environment that will be created by the realisation of this work". Here, his implicit assumption is that detailed physical interventions will have a significant effect on the liveability of the area. While this might indeed be the case, this viewpoint contradicts the narratives of public professionals and residents in Amsterdam describing local problems which defied technical planning and interventions. But Davide, as an urban planner, values the participative workshops because they make it possible to

collect the views of residents, coordinate these views with strategic planning goals, and prevent 'end of pipe' conflicts from emerging a long way into the process. As such, **canalising** provides a more stable and reliable basis than the previous system for the long-term transformation of the city as a whole.

The 'normative leap' in Piero's narrative is made in the statement "The citizens have participated voluntarily. However, they have decided the details between brackets." This is not so much a complaint about the symbolic use of participation by the Municipality, but rather that the fixed agenda and procedures inhibited residents in addressing local problems on their own terms. Public professionals focused attention on the design of the physical environment by translating individual needs, feelings, and desires into concrete proposals for the planning system. Certainly, Piero thinks that the architecture of buildings and squares, the exact routes of pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes, and the types of greenery and parks will affect the usage, social dynamics, and safety problems of the neighbourhood. But he questions whether it will be enough to reverse the strong social segregation and intricate safety problems that have so deeply permeated the neighbourhood. Hence, **canalising** guides residents towards decision making 'between brackets', away from making more autonomous, emotional, and spontaneous contributions to deepen understandings of local problems on their own terms.

Thus, we see that the tension between **Community** and **Planning** also lingers underneath the surface of the communicative pattern of **canalising**. Public professionals and residents achieved consensus on a set of predetermined issues through a pattern of rational deliberation, but, as a result, they did not address underlying beliefs, feelings, and experiences. Their public encounters did not take place in an open and continuous forum for delving into the progress and complexities of a mixture of everyday problems, projects, and initiatives (**Community**), but in a delineated and goal oriented space that enabled the participants to arrive at concrete decisions about specific issues (**Planning**). The underlying rationale is not to let a river of talk run free but to dig a canal that can get the stream of words from A to B in a straight line. This **Planning** approach to participation intends to avoid the risk that all the talking diffuses into nothing, at the cost of artificially cutting through the natural state of the local context. Like Fedrico, the narratives of Fabrizio, Corrado, and Angelo (other public professionals who facilitated the workshops) also emphasise that a lot of their work consisted of explaining to residents what they could talk about and which topics were not for discussion.

Canalising, in other words, is a habitual pattern of communication in which the goals, topic, and timelines are set in advance; meetings follow a predetermined set of participative structures and techniques; and the aim is formulate concrete proposals which can be synthesised in a final plan. This requires communicative practices which bring together a variety of different people to discuss a common topic, making their individual viewpoints visible and concrete (for example, by using maps and models), evaluating the tensions and trade-offs between them (by using 2x2 SWOT matrices, for example), and working towards mutual understanding and compromise through the rational exchange of arguments. To be sure, Elisa, a young and cheerful lady who is active in civic groups and local politics, told me that she had met new people and learned about their views on the neighbourhood and experiences with safety problems. But there was no room for the conversation to take its own course. The viewpoints of residents and the rules of the game are considered as factual and fixed based on the belief that a structured, ordered, and delineated process will maximise the capacity for solving local problems.

Despite the value of this **Planning** narrative, **canalising** inhibits public professionals and residents in communicating in an open and unstructured way to explore values and feelings, broader problems of the neighbourhood, and the goals and boundaries of the participatory process. A **Community** narrative of establishing emotional connections and spontaneously generating unthought of solutions is inhibited by having a temporal project in which viewpoints and institutions are considered as factual and fixed and are connected on a functional level. The story of Nadia, who leads a social work association which provides support to youngsters, explains why **canalising** is both a valuable and limited communicative pattern:

> 'But the problem is that, um, after that, **after the workshops, nothing happened**. Because one thing is participation, asking people, listening to them, and so on, and another thing is doing. And what has to be done now, the entire redevelopment of the area is **such a huge project that it takes a lot of time just to start**. And then here we have political problems, we don't have the mayor. Um, … and this slows things down very much. So the problem is that **when you start these kind of processes you also have to follow them [up]** and to make sure that what people say will be done sooner or later. **Otherwise the frustration will grow** up and that's what's

happening now, because **people have been asked for [input] and they don't see the results** of the, of what they said… They have been asked for what they want and they said what they wanted and now what they wanted is not there and **they don't know when it will be there**. And in that part of the city [safety] is a very big problem, criminality especially in Bolognina Est, in Casaralta, in those old factories … Um, **so people keep on suffering the same old problems**. **So let's see what happens in the [near] future**. [sighs] How long people will bear the situation.' (Nadia – social work agency manager)

By observing that "after the workshops, nothing happened", Nadia indicates that participation is a continuous process that should not have stopped after the participative workshops. In fact, during my fieldwork I was only able to attend one meeting, because the recent dismissal of the mayor meant that the Municipality could not take any formal decisions and was therefore unable to decide to organise new workshops. The only reason one meeting could be held was because it was discovered that a legal rule for building heights was overlooked, which had implications for the plans that had been made. But the narrative of Nadia is more than a simple argument for putting the money where the mouth is, because it is not based on the causal belief that the local problems will be solved if **canalising** is extended to the implementation process. A continuation of **canalising** is likely to get stuck on the functional level about why "people … don't see the results". Misunderstanding and antagonism will (re) emerge, because residents might not understand the complexities of the urban governance system and implementation process. In turn, public professionals have a grasp of how these complexities mean that "such a huge project … takes a lot of time just to start", but might not appreciate the extent to which "people keep on suffering the same old problems". Therefore, it appears necessary to enhance the ability of public professionals and residents to have more open and unstructured conversations in which they can talk about their feelings of disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty, as well as explore creative ideas to find previously unthought of solutions and initiatives. Taking a **Community** approach to communication would moderate the **Planning** limitations of the existing habitual pattern.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that **canalising** forms the habitual communicative pattern of public professionals and residents in Bologna. This pattern enabled them to achieve concrete results in a challenging

context, but also downplays more free flowing, flexible, and autonomous communication. While the initial situation could have given rise to an impasse between **Community** and **Planning** narratives as in the Glasgow case, public professionals and residents established a new and more productive pattern of communication that provided the stability, clarity, and certainty often lacking in the Amsterdam case. In the **Planning** narrative of Bologna, 'participation can produce spaces' because public professionals and residents communicate according to predetermined mandates and procedures, participative methods, and mediators. However, it remains uncertain whether the planned interventions will actually yield the agreed changes, and whether the newfound productive relationships are there to stay. Therefore, public professionals and residents need to cultivate their capacity to communicate according to the *law of the situation*.

Summary and implications: communicative patterns and capacity

This chapter demonstrates that when public professionals and citizens meet, they communicate according to habitual patterns which shape their ability to understand each other, make decisions, and solve problems. These communicative patterns prove difficult to change because public professionals and citizens are so much in the habit of communicating in one way that they neglect the way in which the storylines, causal beliefs, and normative leaps supporting their everyday talk unlock or exclude possibilities for changing the course of the conversation. No pattern of communication is ideal for **making it work**. Rather, the ability of citizens and public professionals to resolve the problems they are facing together requires the capacity to recognise what type of communication suits the *law of the situation*. Let's reconsider the case material in light of this first part of the theory of communicative capacity.

First of all, public professionals and residents come together for a variety of reasons: to make plans for social housing, think up new ways to create space for bicycles, resolve a planning conflict, improve safety, or discuss policies and rules for engagement. They all do so because they want to change or improve something about the current situation, whether it is outrage with a wall that will create a gated community, failure to solve the bicycle problem with a technical approach, or ambitions for linking policy goals to local needs. We have already seen several instances in which they achieved change – the formulation of joint plans after fifteen years of conflict in Bologna probably being

the most successful example. But somewhere along the way public professionals and residents get caught in a pattern of communication that limits their ability to solve problems – for example not having any influence on regeneration decisions in Amsterdam, but being fully dependent on whether the people who happen to be at the meeting know what is happening and are being honest about it. So even though participatory democracy brings public professionals and residents together to achieve change, it does not necessarily induce them to change themselves or their habitual patterns of communication and to *integrate* their practices according to the *law of the situation*.

In Glasgow, public professionals and residents are in the habit of communicating by debating. Although they are not constantly fighting in overt standoffs, their stories are mainly aimed at defending their own position rather than finding common ground or making compromises. Public professionals and residents spend a lot of time contesting whether Community Planning is working or not rather than talking about the actual local problems or exploring possible solutions. This habitual communicative pattern leads them to neglect their shared commitment to **making it work** and to get stuck between those wanting to communicate in an open and flexible way and those preferring to be guided by preset plans and structures. While this opposition does help to articulate the presence and value of both modes of communication, public professionals and residents in Glasgow tend to lack the communicative capacity to let go of their pre-existing positions and *integrate* their views, experiences, needs, and practices into a way of collaborating to which they could all agree.

Rather than antagonistic debate, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam habitually communicate through dialogue. That does not mean that they set up safe spaces and tell their life stories, but they greatly value having extensive personal contact focused on gradually creating more mutual trust, understanding, and adaptation. Public professionals and residents are **being in touch** with each other in flexible, spontaneous, and empathic ways to find joint resolutions for concrete, practical problems. This habitual communicative pattern enables them to listen to each other, develop their relationships, and identify common ground, but does not help them to take their joint understandings far beyond their personal relationships to influence structural changes. Therefore, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam tend to lack the communicative capacity to effectively *integrate* all elements of the *total situation* (all the rules, policies, decisions, persons, interests, and so on relevant to their encounter) in their communal practice.

In contrast, public professionals and residents in Bologna adhere to a communicative habit of deliberation. While they managed to break through the conflictual pattern that was so deeply engrained in their encounters, they immediately sought refuge in another pattern of communication. Public professionals and residents had a series of well prepared and facilitated meetings in which they exchanged ideas, views, and arguments to formulate joint plans within set boundaries. This habitual communicative pattern was tremendously effective in **canalising** their attention and energy towards compromise and concrete results and preventing the process from going astray. At the same time, it inhibited them in talking about local problems in a more open way and developing their relationships beyond the formal remit of the deliberative process. Public professionals and residents in Bologna tend to lack the communicative capacity for flexible and ongoing conversations in which they *integrate* their differences by constantly relating to one another in novel ways.

As all these three cases demonstrate, then, participatory democracy offers a valuable framework for public professionals and citizens to come together, collaborate, and produce positive change. However, its very desirable purposes regularly fail to materialise because, as they encounter each other, public professionals and citizens are not always *integrating* to the fullness of their relational condition (see Chapter Two). How they learn to join their thoughts and actions with each other and the *total situation* is limited to a recurring pattern through which they are accustomed to communicate. Therefore, public professionals and citizens need the capacity to recognise and break through these habitual patterns by adapting their communicative practices to the *law of the situation*. But this does not often happen.

A primary reason is that professionals and citizens (often implicitly) hold the belief that their ways of communicating are ideal. Grounded in narratives of **Community** and **Planning**, they sustain a situation in which one mode of communication dominates other forms of expression (as is the case in Amsterdam and Bologna) or where they are wedged between contradictory ideals (Glasgow). However, it is important not to oversimplify the variety of practices they use to express themselves and interact. For example, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam are sometimes engaged in antagonistic communication about **making it work** just like their counterparts in Glasgow, or **canalise** their communication as in Bologna. Nevertheless, the narratives of Mark, Peter, Tineke, and Margreet all uphold **being in touch** as a habitual pattern of communication. Indeed, it is not possible to simultaneously communicate based on the belief that participation

needs to develop freely and spontaneously from interdependencies, common beliefs and values, and reciprocity (**Community**), and the belief that it requires adhering to fixed institutions which coordinate knowledge and maintain committed relationships (**Planning**). In other words, **Community** and **Planning** are indispensable, not ideal, and incompatible narratives for participatory encounters.

Rather than ignoring or trying to resolve the tension between **Community** and **Planning**, it needs to be constantly reinterpreted and renegotiated based on the *law of the situation*. On the one hand, this can mean that public professionals and citizens learn to communicate in flexible, spontaneous and creative ways by **being in touch** when predetermined boundaries turn out to limit their ability to address problems on their own terms and develop their personal relationships. On the other hand, it can mean that public professionals and citizens learn to communicate according to clear structures, budgets, and hard-and-fast rules by **canalising** when their joint efforts appear to be disjointed and large scale results hard to achieve. This is by no means an easy feat; it means intervening in rapidly evolving processes when most other people seem to be concerned with their stakes in the substantive issues at hand.

A second reason for the resilience of communicative patterns, then, is that changing engrained habits is not just done by simply instituting a new policy or once standing up in a meeting and stressing the need for a different conversation. It requires protracted efforts for making people aware of, and helping them to change, the habits induced by and adverse effects of the individual predispositions they bring to their encounters, all that happens in-between them during their encounters, and the elements of the *total situation* left out of their encounters. This long drawn out and hard work does not happen in a vacuum, but needs to be done as public professionals and citizens go about their daily affairs in participatory practice. As we already saw in some narratives in this chapter, several of them highlight the limitations of their communicative pattern and want to adapt their mode of communication to the *law of the situation*. But they are unable to get a sufficient number of others to do the same *in the process of* engaging with the *situation* in which they meet, discussing the *substantive issues* at hand, and building and maintaining their *relationships*. The next three chapters will delve into the situated performances through which they do so and tease out the resistances and affordances of participatory practice that enable or inhibit communicative capacity.

Work in progress:
engaging with the situation

'[I]t's just an ongoing piece of work … that doesn't stop.' (Mark
– Community Planning officer, Glasgow)

This chapter further clarifies what communicative capacity looks like,
as well as what enables and inhibits public professionals and citizens
in exercising it, by explaining how they engage with the *situation* in
which they meet. The comparison of the cases shows that the *situation*
of public encounters is a complex, ambiguous, and changing **work in
progress**. It consists of a great number of persons, institutions, policies
and problems, the meaning and significance of which constantly
change. Therefore, public professionals and citizens spend a lot of time
talking about how to refine rules, structures and plans, while being
unaware of how they perform habitual patterns of communication
into being through this process. Although it is undeniably preferable to
improve the institutional design of the *situation*, this is unlikely to offer
anything more than a temporary stabilisation of the **work in progress**.
As Mark, a Community Planning officer in Glasgow, indicates in the
opening quote, participatory practice is "just an ongoing piece of
work … that doesn't stop". Public professionals and citizens often fail
to discuss what has changed productively, what appears to be affecting
what, and what might be the most sensible way of going forward.
More problematically, their encounters are likely to be characterised
by antagonism, deadlock and persistent problems because they lack
the capacity to communicate about who can and should say and do
what, when, and how.

   By **starting from scratch** with new participatory institutions,
public professionals and residents in Glasgow were divided between
proponents and critics of the reform. As a result, they spend most time
contesting the proper form and function of their participatory structures
instead of talking about how to resolve local problems. In Amsterdam,
the *situation* grants space to public professionals and residents to **get to
grips** with the nitty-gritty of local problems. While this flexibility is
greatly appreciated, it also generates a desire for more clarity, certainty,
and stability about who is supposed to do what, when, and how. Public

professionals and residents in Bologna have been **groundbreaking** by establishing, for the first time, participatory institutions that set strict limits to the conditions under which they meet. This helps to focus their conversations on concrete decisions but also constrains them in addressing local problems on their own terms. Thus, in their own ways, each case demonstrates how public professionals and residents engage with the *situation* by practising a habitual pattern into being rather than cultivating their capacity to adapt their **ongoing business** to the unrelenting complexity, ambiguity, and changeability of the *total situation*.

Glasgow: starting from scratch

> *'And everybody is feeling the same sense of frustration. But we're attending dozens of meetings, we're getting dozens of pieces of paper, we're preparing reports, we're observing the process, we're not actually doing what we believe is our role.'* (Liam – regeneration manager)

The case of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) makes clear that the *situation* is intrinsically a **work in progress** and how neglecting the capacity to communicate about this is detrimental to solving local problems. Public professionals and residents in Glasgow sustain an unproductive dynamic of engaging with their *situation* by spending most of the time contesting the nature and value of their participatory institutions. The introduction of the GCPP created an impasse between two quite dogmatically opposed standpoints about whether they should be **starting from scratch** by abandoning pre-existing ways of working and fully adopting the new institutional format. From the start, public professionals and residents were divided between those in favour of the reform and the opportunities for comprehensive and consistent collaboration it offered, and those who experienced it as suffocating, patronising, and hampering. By fixating their **ongoing business** on institutional design and failing to recognise that structures, rules, and policies are **work in progress**, public professionals and residents seriously undermine their capacity to communicate about who could and should say and do what, when, and how to solve local problems.

Many public professionals and residents are, in the words of Liam (a deeply committed and disillusioned middle level manager of a regeneration agency), 'feeling the same sense of frustration'. Of course, nature of the GCPP as a whole is not as disheartening as Liam's comment

suggests. I attended several meetings of the Community Reference Group (CRG) and the Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) Board in Pollokshields Southside Central, at which a range of ambitious and important projects were discussed and coordinated, such as the Health Impact Assessment, Govanhill Neighbourhood Management, Fairer Scotland Fund, and Let Glasgow Flourish. So, things do get done. However, that does not change the fact that a significant amount of time is spent on contesting the structures, rules and policies through which things should be done. Public professionals and residents feel constrained in their ability to solve local problems by this focus on institutions rather than problems. Across the board they express uncertainty about, or dissatisfaction with, who is supposed to do what, which decisions need to be taken when, and how certain structures are to be developed. In one of the meetings, for example, Liam asked several times for more clarity about how specific plans and procedures would work out in practice and the expression on his face clearly showed his lack of satisfaction with the answers he got. Thus, public professionals and residents in Glasgow have limited capacity for communicating about **work in progress** and adapting their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*.

At the root of this *situation* is the transition from Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) to Community Planning in 2004 (see Chapter Four). The Council commissioned a review of the SIPs and found that local problems were insufficiently reduced. The main reason for this was said to be that organisations and projects were constrained by the geographical boundaries of the few areas that had a SIP, while the problems themselves transcended those boundaries. Therefore, a new institutional format was designed with the aim of ensuring that all parts of the city would use similar structures and produce equal outcomes. Taking its cue from the Scottish Community Planning policy (Scottish Executive, 2003), the GCPP Board required all partner agencies to (re)organise themselves in terms of the boundaries of the ten LCPP areas and provide representatives for each LCPP Board. Residents from different neighbourhoods were invited to participate in the CRGs of the LCPP areas. Both assemblies were granted administrative support from a local team of Community Planning officers, each of which was headed by an Engagement Network Coordinator (ENC) with the specific responsibility of making the new participatory arrangements work.

The position and practices of these ENCs underline how the *situation* of the GCPP is a matter of **starting from scratch**: five people were appointed to these newly created positions to develop

a new community engagement approach. They did so by holding consultations in the local areas, recruiting members from community groups and organisations as well as from traditionally underrepresented groups and, together with participating residents, setting rules and procedures for the meetings. Although at first sight these practices might seem like the natural order of things, we should not gloss over the fact that their point of departure was the introduction of the GCPP, which therefore structured and formalised the role of the ENCs. Many residents and public professionals already had experience with SIPs and similar bodies that predated them. While some saw the GCPP as an opportunity to start afresh, others considered it a poorly thought through and artificial intervention in the practices and institutions they had built up over the years. Other professionals and residents only became involved once the GCPP was up and running, in some cases because the organisations for which they worked now had a statutory duty to participate. Bill, a middle level manager in one of the public agencies that was new to the participatory scene, said "my involvement really has only started last week". The implication of these diverging starting points is that the **ongoing business** is all but a shared property, as professionals and residents have differentlevels of experience with and knowledge of the GCPP, the SIPs, and the local area, as well as of how legitimate they consider the GCPP.

Instead of constructive communication about how this variety in backgrounds could be integrated, **starting from scratch** generated strongly opposing narratives about the added value of the new institutional format. Compare for example the narratives of Moira, a policy maker at the City Council who was involved in developing the GCPP, and Alastair, an active pensioner who talks a lot to residents in the area while walking his dog every day and finds the new rules and structures inadequate:

> 'So with Community Planning what you've got is you have to use the specific money that comes for Community Planning to target deprivation, but you don't have to spend it within the areas where the worst five percent live, for example. You can spend it as long as the effects of the money that you're using is addressing deprivation for people. So … that's much more flexible, and **a much more grown–up approach** I think to dealing with these issues. So there were good things about SIPs, we did feel it was nice working in them, I liked working in them. **You felt more close to working in the communities** and, um, because **you**

can't have that, you just can't possibly have that kind of a, you can't know everybody within an area of that size, all the groups, **you just can't, it's not possible**… And so I suppose for the people who were involved in Social Inclusion Partnerships, … they've moved from a situation where they probably felt much closer to things than they do now into something that is much bigger that has **a different kind of thinking** behind it. **And that takes time to get used to**.' (Moira – Community Planning officer)

'[T]he Culture and Sports people who are in charge of 'Vibrance', getting excitement going, um, like sports and so on, … said … they had managed to get groups from different areas together and were disappointed that it didn't seem to work. I pointed out to them **it's obvious it wouldn't work**, because people in each area have their own identity, way of doing things and so on, and **you can't force people to say 'you're going to work together'**, they have to decide for themselves whether they want to work together. And so you organise a competition between them, between various areas, like **a football competition, something like that, and that would draw people together**. But you can't say "you are going to".' (Alastair – resident)

Moira describes the transition to the GCPP with a metaphor of maturation to legitimise the policy that everyone should adopt equivalent understandings of its goals, rules and opportunities. Not working that close to each other anymore might be a loss, but is an unavoidable part of a more "grown-up", sophisticated and wise approach that just "takes time to get used to". The narratives of nine other respondents[34] also held that the GCPP would work better by **broadening** the collective understanding of the meaning of Community Planning, each other's practices and the benefits of collaboration. Alastair does not agree at all: he stresses that "you can't force people" to work in a particular way. Instead, organising something like a football competition "would draw people together", because it would allow collaboration to emerge spontaneously, create a sense of familiarity with different local ways of doing things, and respect residents' autonomy and needs. The narratives of eight further respondents[35] also asserted that the GCPP would work better if it **did it right** by treating, supporting, and empowering 'the community'

'properly' to solve their problems. Public professionals tend to hold the former narrative and residents the latter. However, Liam and Cynthia, both public professionals, are an exception to this rule. Therefore, it seems that the views of public professionals and residents on **starting from scratch,** rather than their formal positions *per se*, inhibit them in communicating constructively.

Perhaps the best example I experienced of the clash between these opposing narratives was the introduction of the 'Rules and Procedures for Community Reference Groups'. This seven page document was aimed at streamlining and normalising the CRGs by requiring resident representatives to be officially nominated by a constituent group with which they should formally consult and feedback. This generated great resistance among the residents, who spent almost an entire meeting arguing that the consultation process for the document had been seriously deficient, the rules were unworkable because most of them were active on several platforms at the same time, and it would be beyond the remit of a *reference* group to do such formal *representation*.[36] Nevertheless, the Strategic Board approved the document.

Rather than an isolated incident, this clash is exemplary for the regular contestation of the institutional format. By fixating their **ongoing business** on getting rules, structures, and procedures 'right', local actors often neglect the **work in progress** in which they were involved. Consider for example the Structure Diagram (Figure 5.1). This rather complex organisational chart was designed in 2008 and has been constantly changing ever since. At the start of my fieldwork, the 'Community Engagement Coordinating Group' had just been abolished. The 'Thematic Groups' were just being developed but were abolished one year later. Five months after that, the CRGs were up for review and amendment. This constant concern with the institutional format *per se* diverts attention and energy away from finding practicable and sensible ways of addressing local problems.

Institutions often play an ambiguous role in British and Scottish (urban) governance. Their historical development is characterised by a piecemeal and incoherent approach to reform, which has led to an interwoven patchwork of continuity and change, formal and informal arrangements, governmental and nongovernmental actors, control and discretion[37] (Rhodes, 2000; Marsh et al, 2003; Richards, 2003). In the absence of a constitution,[38] the basis for government is formed by a collection of conventions, traditions, Acts of Parliament and devolved bodies, and rulings of the Courts (Oliver, 2003). This has resulted in a situation in which local authorities have no autonomous basis for existence and cannot act *ultra vires*, that is beyond the mandate

Figure 5.1: Glasgow South East: Community Planning structure
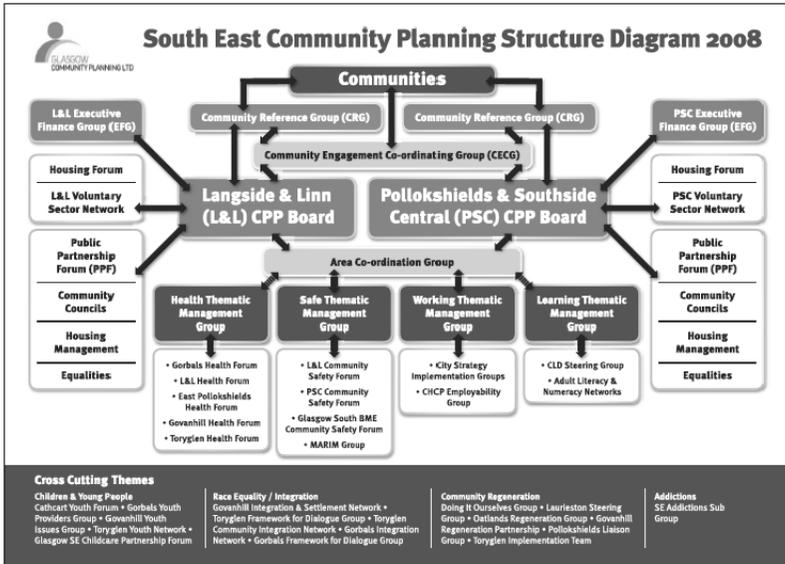
Source: Glasgow Community Planning Ltd

provided by Parliament,[39] while at the same time they have discretion in collaboration in the fragmented systems of local service delivery and urban planning. Local authorities have to balance central government legislation, statutory instruments, circulars, judicial review, default power, performance measurement and inspection, statutory appeals, and financial instruments (such as capping and ring fenced grants), with their agreements with QUANGOs, private sector organisations, and voluntary and community groups (Gray, 1994; Stewart, 2003; Wilson and Game, 2011).

Over the previous decades, moreover, national policies for local governance have taken the form of broad indications and discursive strategies rather than detailed guidelines and coherent programmes (Atkinson and Moon, 1994; Lovering, 1995; Newman, 2001; Imrie and Raco, 2003). Under evocative straplines such as the 'Third Way' or the 'Big Society', local government has been made responsible for 'an urban renaissance' or 'a new era of people power' (Lees, 2003). Local authorities are legally obliged to collaborate with public agencies, voluntary organisations, the private sector, and community members in Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) for local service delivery and urban planning, but are provided with broad and indecisive indications as to how that should be done (Cowell, 2010; Matthews, 2010). Also

urban development plans do not contain precise specifications of norms, criteria, rights, and procedures, but only priorities, targets, and indicators that provide guidance to planning processes in which stakeholders can determine which types of land use best serve 'the public interest' (Adams, 1994; Healey, 1995; Booth, 2003).

In this context, the GCPP institutions imbue the **ongoing business** of public professionals and residents with a set of 'floating signifiers' – as explained in Chapter Three, these are words with multiple meanings that policy actors seek to enforce in a hegemonic discursive struggle. Notice in the following story how the Glasgow Community Plan 2005–10 shapes the words used by Barry, a middle level manager in one of the public agencies who is trying to define the meaning of Community Planning for his work, but does little to help him in giving concrete meaning to the floating signifiers:

> **Community** Planning is a process that brings together the public sector, **partners** and the **community** to agree priorities on the planning and provision of **services**. **Community** Planning is about ... jointly planning **services** in a way that will ensure their more effective delivery through **partnership**... Effective and genuine **community engagement** is at the heart of this. We are committed to ensuring that **communities** play a key role in taking forward the **Community** Planning agenda both in our local **neighbourhoods** and at a city level. (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p 2)

> 'A lot of it is around some of the **partnership** work. Some of the real struggles I suppose we're having at the moment is about that taking responsibility away from the key **partner** agencies, the Council departments, Regeneration Agencies, the Community Healthcare **Partnerships** saying "We'll just do that" and saying "Well, no actually we can't just do that", we need to work so that we get the **community** more **involved**, we get individuals more **involved**, we **engage** with a wider section of the population as well. Because I think that is one of the real issues at the moment in terms of **Community** Planning, **community engagement**, is we're not **engaging** with a wide section of the... And ... there needs to be that discussion throughout what do people actually understand by **community engagement**, **community involvement**, capacity building. Because I

> think it means all things to different people. Um, that a lot of people see **community engagement** as getting people **involved** in decision-making processes within the area. … So there's that whole thing about who we are **engaging** with and how we get them **engaged** and maintain their **engagement**.' (Barry – culture manager)

Barry's story illustrates how the narratives of public professionals and residents are to a large degree based on floating signifiers like 'community', 'engagement', and 'partners'. He uses the signifiers 'engage(ment)' and 'involve(ment)' twelve times, but cannot pin down their meaning. Table 5.1 (p 138) shows that 'community' is the most frequently used and confusing signifier: it was used on average 118 times in each interview, so it is very unlikely to mean the same thing to one person, let alone being used coherently by everyone. Equally unlikely is a final agreement on when a person is 'representative' or when there is real 'engagement'. Some kind of selectivity is inevitable when dealing with 50,000 inhabitants, nine 'neighbourhoods', 121 community organisations and groups,[40] high variation in socioeconomic status and ethnic background, and a lot of influx and outflow. However, public professionals and residents do not acknowledge that the meaning of their vocabulary is a **work in progress** that requires pragmatic negotiation of sensible working definitions. Instead of collaboratively and pragmatically adapting their **ongoing business**, they get entangled in the static habit of contesting the institutional format.

Thus, the GCPP provides an ambiguous and constantly changing *situation* of general policies and broad guidelines that fosters a static **ongoing business**. To better solve local problems, public professionals and residents would need to acknowledge that their *situation* is an ongoing **work in progress** and adapt their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*. One way of doing so would be to pragmatically give meaning to GCPP institutions in relation to the concrete characteristics of concrete local issues. However, the capacity of public professionals and residents to communicate about the *situation* is limited by the conflict that was generated by **starting from scratch** with the GCPP. By enacting the resulting opposing narratives about the 'right' structures, rules and policies, they fail to adapt their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*. As such, public professionals and residents fail to nurture their communicative capacity for reaching practical agreements on how to put their participatory institutions to work.

Amsterdam: getting to grips

'There's a very obscure palette. It's really … difficult to put your finger on it, what's actually happening, who is doing what, what is where.' (Dennis – neighbourhood manager)

In the case of the Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*), public professionals and residents are deeply immersed in the **work in progress** of their *situation*. This enables them to focus on mutual adjustment between a multitude of actors and factors but at the same time, creates confusion over a lack of coherence, clarity, and concrete results. Public professionals and residents are constantly **getting to grips** with what is going on by gradually trying to find more details about local problems, developing policies and initiatives tailored to specific problems, and strengthening collaboration and interdependencies. Making sense of this "very obscure palette" as Dennis, a neighbourhood manager, puts it, is very difficult. Public encounters regularly go off course, mistakes are made, tensions and conflicts arise, and frustration and bewilderment are the result. Their flexible and pragmatic **ongoing business** allows public professionals and residents to respond to the nitty-gritty of local problems, but the **work in progress** often overtakes them and blurs their communication.

Like Dennis, many others find it difficult not to lose track of everything that is going on and what should be done. Public professionals and residents are greatly immersed in the details of specific events, activities, and problems and therefore do not always manage to coordinate their many different ways of thinking and doing. They are often uncertain about the added value of the AW in **getting to grips** and express a desire for more certainty, stability and clarity about structures, responsibilities, budgets, and so on. For example, Hetty, a middle level manager at a housing corporation, told me how the complexity of large scale housing estate renovation projects constantly frustrates her desire "to communicate reliable information to the residents" and make a lasting difference to the many problems her tenants experience in their daily lives. The AW does not impose a general structure or detailed set of rules, but was added to pre-existing structures and resources to support resident participation and collaboration between the Municipality and other local public agencies. The freedom public professionals and residents have to fit the AW in with their existing practices feeds into a counter narrative focused on reducing uncertainty, change, and ambiguity by clearer rules, structures,

and plans. However, their tendency to engage with their *situation* by **getting to grips** limits their capacity to communicate productively about the **work in progress** and adapt their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*.

The most powerful, and at first sight absurd, example of this habitual pattern is the 'bread problem' in the Kolenkit quarter: people throw out big pieces of bread, or even whole loaves, on the street, fields and green spaces, which attracts a lot of birds which produce large quantities of bird droppings on the pavement and on cars, as well as rodents, causing serious hygiene threats. Several solutions were tried out over a period of four years: street signs that forbid throwing out bread, a public awareness campaign about the consequences for public hygiene and health, street cleaning events, police patrols and enforcement, and intervention in tenant status by the housing corporation (for example threatening to relocate tenants or revoke their contracts). But the problem still remains. The difficulty is finding out who exactly is throwing out the bread, what their motivations are, and what could be done to prevent them from doing it again. Eventually someone suggested placing three big garbage containers specifically for bread in the area. A great deal of old bread was collected in this way, but by no means all of it. Moreover, the containers introduced new problems because nobody is really responsible for emptying them, and recycling is difficult because the bread is often thrown away in plastic bags. The most captivating account of the bread problem comes from a local police officer, who told a vivacious story covering more than a page (not included here because of its length) about this 'obstinate' problem "which we are really, for four years already, we're bickering about that".

This *seemingly small problem*, then, appears to be exceedingly difficult to solve, requires a lot of detailed knowledge, collaboration, and improvisation, and takes a lot of time and effort from people who would like to devote their attention to bigger problems or more structural solutions. During my fieldwork, I discovered that public professionals and residents in Amsterdam are entangled in many such idiosyncratic problems. Consider, for example, the experiences of Diana, a woman who over the past years has become a trusted figure among immigrant women in her neighbourhood and in this way finds out a lot about problems with domestic violence, and Tineke, the area manager we met in Chapter Four who would like to change the inability of the City District to solve something seemingly simple like the renewal of a playground:

'I also help people here in the neighbourhood, and that's really a very nice thing. Um, and people come to talk to me about their problems, because they've built up a bond with me… But **it takes a lot of energy, hey, really a lot, because there's a lot of problems**. You've also got a lot of domestic violence here in Bos & Lommer. Yeah, **really big problems, but you don't hear about it**. **It just goes to someone they really trust.** And I really find that terrible. Because they're afraid to go to the Police … who can't do anything if no complaint is filed… **That's why it gets stuck I think**. Because you can't just knock on someone's door and say 'Yeah, I heard that you hit your wife'… **You can't just go there**, no, absolutely not. Just if you hear something … I do hear things sometimes, but then I'm also like, yeah, people are also very good in making a mountain out of a molehill. So actually you have to hear it yourself and also see it a bit … But it can also be a false alarm and then you're standing there …' (Diana – resident)

'[W]e had … a resident initiative that a little house should be placed on the playing ground. But yeah, **that required a lot of work, but nobody here in the City District had it in his programme**, so nobody had the time … and the only one who took initiative was the alderman. Yeah, so he kept on shouting and then … something happened, but that wasn't coordinated. So that took months of work, plus that … Waternet … had to deliver the water. And, well, **sometimes very simple things**, but that also wasn't in the programme, like "Yeah, water isn't possible over there because it doesn't have an address." Well there you go, then it was stalled for months again. And if you then saw that something that doesn't go along established lines, how long it then takes to realise something, that's unexplainable to residents. **"Surely the City District is able to do something that small?" We actually aren't.** Well …, that kind of cooperation, well, you actually want to be stronger in that … Just being able to do some things that didn't had to be decided months ago and for which the budget had to be cleared three years ago and things like that. **And that is very difficult, … it is completely stuck on all fronts**. And then you can do little, um, um, improvising, but a neighbourhood *does* ask for that. It just

says like "Yeah, hello, that tile is loose *now*, it has to be says like "Yeah, hello, that tile is loose *now*, it has to be fixed *now.*" "Yeah, but we have a maintenance programme and then in three years it's the turn of the sidewalk in this street." **Try and explain that**.' (Tineke – area manager)

Both narratives are based on the plotline that I coded as **getting to grips**. Both Diana and Tineke present themselves as (tragic) heroes who are desperately fighting against all odds. Once they got involved with the problem, they discovered tremendously complex barriers to obtaining the right kind of information and to getting interdependent actors to actually communicate. While facing reactions like "Surely the City District is able to do something that small?", they looked beneath the surface of the **seemingly small problems** and found lengthy personal stories, a multitude of details and interdependencies, and a great deal of perceptions and ambiguities. Judging how much we can and should get to grips is inherently difficult: what should we do and how much time and effort should we spend on this? As Diana explains, "it takes a lot of energy ... because there's a lot of problems". Investing energy in one specific problem might lead to an innovative solution, but can just as well imply that time is lost on minutiae or misconceptions that could be more effectively used to solve more problems on a larger scale. This open-ended plotline helps Diana and Tineke to communicate that **getting to grips** is an inevitable, 'tragic fate': tackling **seemingly small problems** means surrendering to a *situation* that consists of many details, interdependencies, and perceptions, with the prospect of losing track and not reaching any satisfactory resolutions.

As such, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam face a range of lingering problems that regularly reappear on the agenda: the demolition and reconstruction of large housing estates, nuisance by youngsters, defects in buildings and streets, dumping of litter and bulk garbage, the inadequate spoken and written language skills of some immigrants, underachievement in schools (poor results of students), burglaries, lack of or delays to renovation of playgrounds, domestic violence,[41] unemployment, deficient social facilities, and so on. Some problems could be quickly fixed, but the majority require regular monitoring (to see if something has been done, what still has to be done, whether the problem has returned, whether new problems have emerged or other interventions are needed), regular maintenance, and long-term planning. Resident meetings and professional meetings serve as platforms for taking stock of the state of the problems as well as of

who has been doing what, discussing particulars and possible solutions, and coordinating activities. The resident meetings at which I was present were attended by, respectively, 47, 32 and 21 participants, on each occasion filling the main rooms of the various community centres in which they took place. There was wide variation in the dynamics and focus of the meetings, because the presence or absence of specific individuals greatly influences what is talked about. Furthermore, the course of the conversation was sometimes determined by topics that came up spontaneously rather than the order of the agenda. And often responsibility for doing something was discussed – yet often not settled – on the spot. Public professionals and residents are constantly **getting to grips** with the **ongoing business** of the *situation* in which they find themselves at that moment.

The introduction of the AW was far from a breakpoint in the *situation*. By using the availability of central government grants for the most deprived neighbourhoods (see Chapter Four), the aim was to strengthen the commitment of local public agencies to collaboration and to resident participation as well as to further broaden and deepen the participation of residents in meetings and initiatives. The AW did not establish a general structure, but sought to further institutionalise professional collaboration, leaving existing institutions such as resident meetings and quarter budgets intact. A general organisational chart is nowhere to be found in the main policy document (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008) and its influence on the vocabulary of public professionals and residents is low. Table 5.2 (p 138) shows that only a few signifiers are used frequently and that their usage varies greatly (notice especially the large number of zeros). Public professionals and residents primarily use 'empty signifiers', the meanings of which are fixed in the public discourse of the Big Cities Policy (see Chapter Four). Note also that 'the quarter' and 'the residents' (used on average 42 and 35 times respectively) are the most important signifiers rather than 'the neighbourhood' (used only 12 times). So the narratives of public professionals and residents do not evolve around a strong vocabulary of Neighbourhood Approach signifiers, but by and large concentrate on the nitty-gritty of seemingly small problems.

The AW does not integrate all the different ways of thinking and doing in a shared **ongoing business**, but allows policies, structures and consensus to emerge and develop freely in an ongoing **work in progress**. Although this offers possibilities for integration to occur organically based on how the additional policies and budgets fit with the needs of specific neighbourhoods, to many people it remains unclear exactly what the nature and added value of the AW is. Consider for

example the responses of Yvonne, the police officer who described the bread problem so engagingly, and Samir, a social worker assisting residents in setting up and carrying out initiatives who is frustrated by how difficult it is to really help people, when I asked them what had changed for them since the introduction of 'the Neighbourhood Approach':

'You say "since the Neighbourhood Approach"…, **what do you mean by "since the Neighbourhood Approach has come"?** Because when I came here … in 2006 then there already was a good, um, **there already was Neighbourhood Approach**, that connection with residents and resident meetings and involving residents in it, **that was already well underway**. **A lot of things have been added** to that because of that list [the national government's selection list] of the 40 most deprived neighbourhoods] and then **I constantly get … engulfed by all kinds of things**. And then I think "Oh, there's something else again". But what do *you* mean by Neighbourhood Approach?' (Yvonne – police officer)

'we also got from the Neighbourhood Approach again, um, extra money [for] house visits now… [P]eople go to talk about problems with residents from door to door. But that, if you go to the residents and talk about their problems, **if you don't have anything to offer it's no use, then you're wasting money** with it as well. And you go just to talk "Yeah, what is the problem?", "Yeah, house is too small", "And?" Then you're standing there, while you need to have something to offer before you go to the residents. We don't have that… On the one hand, … I see the Neighbourhood Approach absolutely like something that needs extra money, but **it also needs an integrated approach**. … We need to cooperate with all organisations, just being clear… **It's all unclear** about the Neighbourhood Approach, not clear between the corporations … , between the City District and the corporations there's no clear agreement, and also the other organisations which are active in the quarter, for them it's also not a very clear story. And also, um, you also see that … **the individual person is very important**. In some organisations, someone works there for three months, who

just started to get to know the neighbourhood and the next
day there's someone else… So you lose all, um, contacts
that you've built up … and you have to make them again
and that then takes yet another year.' (Samir – social worker)

Both Yvonne and Samir are uncertain about the added value of the
Neighbourhood Approach. Yvonne cannot even distinguish between
before and after and feels that she "constantly get[s] … engulfed by all
kinds of things". The AW generated extra institutions and practices on
top of already existing ones but did not really provide the foundations
for any large scale changes or outcomes. The temporary additional
resources facilitate, for example, house visits to talk about problems with
residents, but "if you don't have anything to offer it's no use, then you're
wasting money". Moreover, Samir indicates, outcomes by and large
depend on the efforts and personal relationships of individuals. When
residents move or public professionals change jobs, the persons left
behind have to start all over again with building up relationships, trust,
and local knowledge. Therefore, what Yvonne and Samir articulate
is a counter narrative[42] about the need for long-term vision, budgets,
structures and professional positions. The implicit belief is that fixed
rules, structures and plans will enhance stability, clarity and certainty
by spelling out what 'the Neighbourhood Approach' actually comes
down to and guaranteeing "an integral approach".

   This counter narrative of stability, clarity and certainty reflects
a common criticism of the inbuilt tendency for negotiation and
consensus seeking in the Neighbourhood Approach as well as in the
Dutch (urban) governance system. Dutch politics and policy making are
known for their emphasis on searching for consensus in a fragmented
system (Toonen, 1990; Hendriks and Toonen, 1998; Kickert, 2003).
Many interdependent stakeholders cannot unilaterally enforce any
decisions. That means on the one hand that conflicts are often prevented
or ironed out, everyone has equal rights and opportunities to speak
their mind and that gradual progress and welfare are achieved in a
relatively stable manner. On the other hand, it generates complaints
about indecision, lack of transparency, ineffectiveness, and 'viscosity'. In
urban governance, municipalities lack formal instruments for coercion
or control and therefore rely on facilitating cooperation and informal
negotiation to adapt plans along the way (Faludi and Van der Valk,
1994; Verhage, 2005). The decentralisation reforms (see Chapter Four)
have further stimulated the tendency to let local policies, budgets and
agreements emerge as conclusions of negotiations and implementation

processes, rather than directly shape them through formal plans (Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000; Priemus, 2004).

To conclude, AW institutions were intended to further deepen and broaden collaboration and resident participation. Existing structures and practices were not replaced by top-down institutions, but rather were intended to facilitate the emergence of new joint ways to resolve local problems. Public professionals and residents in Amsterdam are often deeply immersed in the **work in progress** of their *situation*. In the absence of clearly delineated responsibilities, detailed plans and stable communication channels, there is a constant need to **get to grips** with what is going on and what should have been done. This spurs confusion about their **ongoing business** and requires continuous renegotiation of persistent problems. Public professionals and residents hold a pragmatic attitude to the concrete ways in which institutions could be tailored to local problems. But some also articulate a counter narrative that fixed rules, structures and plans would guarantee stability, clarity and certainty. However, as they are entangled in a habitual pattern of **getting to grips** with the *situation*, public professionals and residents pay little attention to cultivating their capacity to communicate about how to engage with the **work in progress** more productively.

Bologna: breaking new ground

> *'a role of great competence … but also a professional revolution, because I can't remember technicians who … would engage in discussion and listen to the citizens and translate … the things citizens say into a project.'* (Giuliana – resident)

The case of Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*) stands in stark contrast to the previous case because the PSC embodies a clear institutional design that guides public professionals and residents in dealing with **work in progress**. For the first time in the local history, a deliberative space was insulated from political debate and antagonistic relations, in which residents, supported by public professionals, could make decisions about urban planning projects. The significance of this development is illustrated by Giuliana, a middle aged woman who has lived in the neighbourhood all her life and had never before seen public professionals "engage in discussion and listen to the citizens and translate ... the things citizens say into a project". For public professionals and residents in Bologna, engaging with the *situation* in this way is **groundbreaking**: establishing a fixed institutional format to achieve unexpected and unprecedented results

and modes of interaction. Public professionals and residents established, and adhered to, an institutional design that delineated who could say what, when, and how. This helps them to effectively confront specific elements of the **work in progress**, but also compromises their ability to adapt their **ongoing business** to the *total situation*.

While an overwhelming majority of public professionals and residents are positive, as is Giuliana, about the participative workshops (see Chapter Four), a number of them communicate criticism, disappointment and frustration about the degree to which the workshops enable sustainable change. Gino, for example, an elderly man who worked in one of the factories, finds that fundamental problems with safety and social cohesion have not been addressed on their own terms because of the focus on making proposals for physical interventions. The political, financial and legal provisions that were made to break with the old unproductive pattern meant that strict limits were imposed on the goals, topics and time available for the participative workshops. These limitations created the right conditions for turning a *situation* of conflict and stalemate into a constructive communicative process during the *Laboratorio Mercato*. But the institutional design of the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* turned out to be less effective in delineating the **work in progress** and creating a shared **ongoing business**. This raises the question of whether the participatory institutions consolidated in the PSC really constitute such a **groundbreaking** reform, or merely reaffirm existing institutions and problems.

The **groundbreaking** experience of the *Laboratorio Mercato* did more than resolve the longstanding conflict between the residents and the Municipality about the *Ex- Mercato* area. It led to fundamental changes to the *situation*, as the Municipality adopted its institutional design as the preferred participatory format for abiding by the regional law's requirements for a new urban planning system (see Chapter Four). The *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* was the most ambitious of all the following participative workshops, but turned out to be less effective than its predecessor in producing satisfactory and conclusive results. In their interviews, Fabrizio, Giulio and Corrado, public professionals who were involved in **creating conditions** (see the following stories) for the *laboratory*, explained in detail that the population in the east of the neighbourhood was much more socially and ethnically diverse and less prone to participate, two of the three landowners did not participate, and the abandoned old military area (another problem hotspot) could not be discussed. Moreover, at the time of the fieldwork, it was still unclear exactly what would happen with the results of the *Laboratorio* because the recent dismissal of the mayor had led to a political vacuum

in which the Municipality was not legally allowed to take any formal decisions.

The problems encountered during the participative workshops did not alter the overriding force of the dominant narrative[43] but they did give rise to a critical counter narrative.[44] Consider how the narratives of Alma and Gino, two long-time residents of Bolognina, support these conflicting evaluations of the participative workshops:

'I think **it's always … important to somehow try to, um, have participative workshops** whether one manages to have a great project like Ex-Mercato or maybe doesn't completely manage like Bolognina-Est. Because I think that **if persons participate in these structures, they feel more that the area is theirs**, more belonging to ourselves, and therefore maybe manage to maintain it better… And also, in my opinion, **it is a way for persons to get to know each other, to understand each other**, to see the problems of another person that may not be mine and that I maybe don't consider but this person might have. For example, … a lot of persons were against the youngsters of Ex-Mercato, which is a social centre, who obviously make music also in the night, … walk with dogs, maybe have Rasta hair, and thus seem to be different… Then, instead, you get to know them, … you see that they … go to university, you see they are like, I don't know, like my son… So, … you're not afraid anymore, because you know them and you understand how they can be different from you but without being strange… **So, these participative workshops are in my view also a way to improve the neighbourhood**, … also because, um, at the moment there are, um… Uniting people would really be the lesson in the end that is more important than the urban plans for good cohabitation.' (Alma – resident)

'I don't know if in the future there will be other structures … of participation like Bolognina-Est. If they will be there, they will have to be made in a way more, um, … extended over time. The *Laboratorio* … has been operative for three months, hell-for-leather with meetings… And so **we have been really butchered**, it was not possible … to analyse all the aspects. But we have been pressed because a project had to be presented. … We started in October and I think we

had to present it in December, a crazy thing, with people who … weren't yet prepared for these things here. … So, **the things have been done with too much of a hurry**. And so … it did not bear fruit, um, like was hoped. All in all **we have been constrained to accepting a status quo**, um, caused by a scarcity of time. … The second phase, that … [focused on] the ex-Sasib area also had the same characteristic, done in a hurry and badly, already with the **work in progress**. So, what, for the citizen, what does this mean, that they are already constructing? So, **I perceive also a sort of delusion from the side of the participants**. Because we found ourselves in … a state of play in which in reality you could not intervene much if you didn't talk about the bicycle lane turning right or instead turning left.' (Gino – resident)

Alma's narrative upholds the idea that the participative workshops are **groundbreaking** based on a 'storyline of helplessness and control' (see Chapter Four). Since the disintegration of the strong social networks that characterised the neighbourhood until the 1990s, the residents have increasingly experienced segregation, indifference, and fear. The participative workshops offered new opportunities to reverse this negative spiral because "it is a way for persons to get to know each other, to understand each other". According to Alma, improving the neighbourhood requires more contact, mutual understanding and ownership. Even when one "maybe doesn't completely manage" to have "a great project", it is still "important to somehow ... have participative workshops". In other words, they are a first step in the right direction on a longer path of positive development. In contrast, Gino structures his rejection of the **groundbreaking** nature of the *situation* according to a 'storyline of change is only an illusion' (see Chapter Four). The meetings did little more than pressure a group of poorly prepared residents into taking a few minor decisions about very complex issues. The residents "have been really butchered" and "the things have been done with too much of a hurry". While participative workshops seemed like an opportunity to really influence the future of the neighbourhood, in the end the residents "have been constrained to accepting a status quo" and felt "a sort of delusion". So little has really improved.

These narratives should not be read as mere expressions of conflicting hard-and-fast stances, but rather as stories communicating diverging visions of the potential of the participative workshops to deal with

the **work in progress** of the *situation*. Both respondents agree that the *situation* is **work in progress**: improving the social and physical conditions of the neighbourhood is a complex and long-term process to which the participative workshops have only made a limited contribution. They disagree, however, about whether the participative workshops offer mostly opportunities or constraints for future change. The opportunities and constraints of the *Laboratorio Mercato* and *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* result from strong agenda setting efforts aimed at **creating conditions** in which participation would be possible. Since this form of participation was unprecedented, a lot of ground had to be cleared to make the *laboratori* possible. The counter narrative formulates objections to the resulting artificial and illegitimate exclusion of a lot of problems, people and places. Conversely, as the story of Giulio, a neighbourhood official who helped to prepare both *laboratory*, about the negotiations with the landowners demonstrates, the dominant narrative considers the constraining conditions as an unfortunate but inevitable element of breaking new **ground**.

> **'We have asked … to meet with the landowner, because it was important to know if the landowner would create problems or not during the** *Laboratorio*. Also because we understood well that the landowner had an interest in a transformation of the land tax that would lead to an increase in value. … **We said to the landowner that … the agreement on that tax in terms of the building indices of that area, that we didn't want to put that under discussion**. However, a part of that value would have to be transformed in services for the citizens. Second issue, the project had to take the history of Bolognina into account, so it could not be a separated reality but had to be intertwined with the historical part of the neighbourhood that was around this new area. … **The landowner agreed but asked for guaranteed timescales** on the implementation of the process. **We have guaranteed the timescales, but we asked the landowner for a robust collaboration** in the costs of the … *Laboratorio*. This was fundamental, because it needed to have facilitators, sociological research … on the composition of the population … to see what types of responses there were among the residents. How many schools, how many health clinics, … how much greenery, how many, for example, gyms, etcetera… **The landowner**

> **accepted and the Municipality has formalised the process** … to arrive at the … presentation of the proposed project.' (Giulio – neighbourhood official)

Giulio illuminates some of the **work in progress** inherent to the regeneration of the Mercato area.[45] Before the *Laboratorio* was possible, they had to negotiate with the landowner that the building indices and land value would not be decreased and might even increase, that the project had to be harmonious with the historical surroundings and would support service provision to residents, that timescales would be respected, and that the costs necessary for preparing the project had to be shared. Elsewhere in the interview, Giulio explained how the preparations also comprised extensive political bargaining between the Neighbourhood Council and the Municipality, active involvement of a group of antagonised civic associations, and the exploration of several technical options with regards to the height and design of buildings, infrastructural routes, and standards for traffic nuisance. Underlying these practices was the belief that the only way for the participative workshops to be effective was by **creating conditions** which 'guarantee' that certain decisions could be made about particular topics within a limited time span. In other words, the **work in progress** of the *situation* needed to be 'bracketed' by establishing fixed goals, structures, and procedures to achieve concrete results.

   Hence, the participative workshops were designed with clear rules about who could decide what, when and how. That is not to say that the residents were used as tokens in a symbolic participative process in which all the decisions were already taken. All the meetings were structured according to particular participative methods, such as Scenario Workshops and Open Space Technology,[46] in which facilitators assisted residents in free and informed deliberation about concrete proposals for how the areas should look. This formal regulation of decision-making powers implied that residents could only discuss problems within the fixed boundaries of the participative workshops, or, as analysis of the vocabulary shows, only *in terms of* the participative workshops. Compare, for instance, the positive narrative of Vito, a planner who feels that his project of redeveloping an old railway track that runs through the neighbourhood benefited from participation, with the sceptical narrative of Dusnella, an elderly resident active in a civic association for immigrants who quickly dropped out because she did not feel she was taken seriously:

'[A] **project** was already being developed for, um, the bicycle and walking lane along this railway track. Um, … [the *Laboratorio*] could integrate our **project**, … with the prospect of enriching this **project**… making it not only a street for cycling but also a linear park. This was a bit the motive for which at a certain moment we … were asked to **participate** really directly in the meetings of the Labortorio, um, by presenting our **project** … And we have gone to the **neighbourhood** … where the **citizens** were present who had already done the work, part of the work, … and we have presented this **project**. Clearly at this point we have searched to, um, … integrate the **project** of the bicycle lane by collecting also, um, suggestions, desires, um, from the participants of the *Laboratorio* who really asked to enrich this **project** … by connecting it to … interventions for **regeneration** that will be done successively.' (Vito – urban planner)

'Yes, well, **I have hardly followed it, because … I don't believe in it**. Because I have followed the first meetings and they talked about everything except this situation [of hidden criminality and illegality]. When I talked with [one of the organisers] and said "… but what are we talking about? When you go out here in the night, um, it becomes a Bronx, **the houses overcrowded, the illegal blacks… We don't talk about it**." She said to me … "Ah, you make this intervention and report it to us." I mean, I felt like I was mocked a lot of times. **It is a reality that everyone knows and I don't know if it has come out of the** *Laboratorio* … and about what they have talked. … They surely have done good things. … If from an urban point of view Casaralta has a destination, a **project** has been done, it can be that it's good. However, I know that at the end [the theme of hidden criminality and illegality] won't come out, because … in the end there's a contract between the politician and the constructor.' (Dusnella – voluntary association manager)

Vito and Dusnella tell diverging stories about how open and constructive the participative workshops were for dealing with local problems. Their vocabulary reveals that the formal boundaries of the participative workshops were enabling to Vito while Dusnella felt

excluded. The narrative of Vito, who refers, for example, seven times to 'project' here, fits neatly around 'empty signifiers'[47] of the PSC (see Table 5.3, p 139) such as 'project' (average use of 23), 'citizens' (average use of 44), 'neighbourhood' (average use of 23), and 'regeneration' (average use of 6). In contrast, Dusnella's narrative concentrates primarily on 'hidden problems' that cannot be captured by 'technical' vocabulary and the formal institutions that support it. Dusnella does not use the 'wrong' vocabulary; rather, she refuses to use the formal vocabulary, because it neither makes sense to her nor helps to explain the problems she experiences. Thus the participative workshops can be seen as **groundbreaking** on the one hand – that is, a promising institutional design that grants residents more opportunities, freedom and tools than before to influence local decisions – but, on the other hand, as having only generated a narrow **ongoing business** for engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation* – for instance, with regards to the opportunities for residents to discuss and decide upon issues autonomously.

The narrative of **groundbreaking** institutional design fits with the **work in progress** of Italian urban governance. The recent decentralisation reforms (see Chapter Four) gave local governments increased opportunities to create more independent and effective governance systems (Carson and Lewanski, 2008; Ferrari, 2008), but for now leave undecided whether these reforms will turn out to be real windows of opportunity or mere window dressing (Bussu and Bartels, 2014). The danger is that citizen participation turn into no more than a legal requirement in the so called 'Strategic Planning' systems. These project-based collaborative networks are supposed to facilitate partnership between municipalities, private landowners, public service delivery agencies, entrepreneurs, and civic associations (Franz, 2001; Capano and Gualmini, 2006). Innovative participatory methods are often used to involve citizens in the planning system and revitalise relationships between citizens and local authorities (Sclavi et al, 2002). However, the extent of actual change is likely to depend on local conditions because the legal, political and administrative capacity to break with histories of politicised participation, conflict and stalemate is often low (Cognetti and Cottino, 2003; Dente et al, 2005; Healey, 2007b; Scarciglia, 2007).

In sum, the PSC offers an institutional format for making concrete decisions about specific urban planning projects. In a challenging *situation* with an overwhelming amount of **work in progress**, public professionals and residents set strict limits on who could say and do what, when and how. By insulating a deliberative space

for constructive communication, the institutional format enabled concrete and consensual decisions about specific goals and topics as well as new relationships between participants. These unexpected and unprecedented results generated a dominant narrative that depicts the participatory institutions as **groundbreaking** for the *situation*. At the same time, a counter narrative emerged about the constraints imposed by the institutional design, asserting that the participative workshops have only scratched the surface of local problems. Thus, cultivating an **ongoing business** that considers the *situation* solely in terms of institutional design will only reaffirm these two conflicting narratives rather than include ever more elements of the *total situation*. Therefore, public professionals and residents in Bologna need to develop their capacity to communicate about **work in progress** beyond the boundaries of their participatory institutions.

Summary and implications: communicative capacity and work in progress

This chapter illuminates how the *situation* in which public professionals and citizens meet is related to their ability to recognise and break through habitual communicative patterns. The *situation* is a complex, ambiguous and changeable **work in progress**, with which they tend to engage by enacting a habitual pattern of communication. As they are confronted with new participatory institutions, the intricacies of local problems and people of every stripe, public professionals and citizens talk about what rules and structures should be adopted, what could work to address a problem, and who should do what, when and how. The *situation* constantly feeds them with new policies, events and issues that need to be made sense of and acted upon. In the process of engaging with this **work in progress**, public professionals and citizens get into the habit of communicating according to a static, recurring pattern rather than adapting the course of the conversation to the *law of the situation*. They can nevertheless enhance their capacity to communicate about the *situation* by integrating their situated performances of the **ongoing business** with the *total situation*.

   Work in progress explains how a discrepancy can exist between the *total situation* and the **ongoing business** public professionals and citizens habitually engage with. The *situation* consists of regularly revised or replaced policies, the nature and implications of which are not always clear to everyone; a variety of organisations and individuals, all with different remits and commitments; and problems which tend to be too complex and variable for any one person to fully grasp. While the

situation is constantly evolving, with many people, problems and policies interacting in high paced and unpredictable ways, public professionals and citizens tend to develop a habit of communicating as if the **ongoing business** was static. However, in reality the context changes and the *situation* evolves all the time into the *total situation* and their communication about the **ongoing business** needs to recognise and take account of this. Their habitual pattern both enables and limits them in talking about what is going on and who should do what, when and how.

Engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation* demands communicative capacity: that is, integrating the **ongoing business** with the *total situation*. If, for example, public professionals and citizens sense that their participatory institutions provide insufficient guidance and coherence, as in Amsterdam, they could work on being more **groundbreaking** by establishing a deliberative space that enables them to effectively exchange views and formulate joint plans. In contrast, when public professionals and citizens find that their institutional format forms an overly rigid straightjacket, as in Bologna, they could start having more open ended conversations for **getting to grips** with the nitty-gritty of a greater variety of local people, problems and policies. If, finally, public professionals and citizens realise that they are spending more time on contesting the latest institutional reform rather than on addressing local needs and problems, as in Glasgow, they could integrate **groundbreaking** practices and **getting to grips** *with problems* by searching for common ground and a shared vision, as well as jointly identifying and carrying out small, practical activities. More specifically, public professionals and citizens can overcome their habitual pattern by adapting the situated performances of their **ongoing business** in three ways.

First, the way in which participatory institutions are introduced affects how public professionals and citizens address each other. The introduction of new institutional designs can imply a drastic break with the **ongoing business** of the *situation* or merely add another element of complexity and ambiguity to its **work in progress**. It can provoke sudden conflict, enable new forms of collaboration, or reinforce existing patterns. The key issue is whether public professionals and citizens see it as a legitimate starting point and useful format for their encounters. Institutional design of the *situation* is not enough in itself, as new formal and informal institutions provide 'standard grids' (Scott, 1998, pp 2-3) which are placed over existing practices, areas and problems. The meaning and value of these institutions depends on how public professionals and citizens come to use them as reference points for making sense of the **work in progress** of their *situation*. In other

words, public professionals and residents have to communicate about *how* the introduction of participatory institutions has come to mean.

In Glasgow and Bologna, the introduction of new participatory institutions significantly restructured the *situation* in which public professionals and citizens meet. While the **groundbreaking** approach taken in Bologna enabled them to work together and make joint decisions, in Glasgow existing practices and relationships were seriously disrupted by **starting from scratch** with superimposed institutions. The institutional design of the PSC "managed to have credibility" (Corrado), whereas the GCPP led to a situation in which people were "not actually doing what we believe is our role" (Liam). In Amsterdam, the participatory institutions were almost naturally incorporated into the *situation* as yet another thing that public professionals and citizens needed to *get to grips* with. As they "constantly get … engulfed by all kinds of things" (Yvonne), the institutions of the AW offered them little guidance in how to focus their attention and energy on structural decisions and outcomes.

Second, the vocabulary public professionals and citizens use influences their capacity to communicate productively. They either have a set of words they all refer to regularly or they lack any common language. A shared vocabulary does not guarantee shared understanding; public professionals and citizens can still be in strong disagreement over what these words signify. For example, they can be engaged in an explicit quarrel over the exclusionary effects of constantly referring to specific words or giving them a particular meaning. But at the same time, they might be unaware of the words they use and the differences between their various meanings. In any case, public professionals and citizens need to question the meaning of their vocabulary: Are we using the same words? What meanings do these words have for different people? Is everyone familiar with these different meanings? How can we come to an agreement about practical working definitions?

In Amsterdam, public professionals and citizens lack a shared vocabulary as their conversations are mostly concerned with the idiosyncratic details of specific issues. This enables them to be flexible in **getting to grips** with what is going on, but often inhibits them in focusing their conversations on concrete and widespread results. In contrast, public professionals and citizens in Glasgow use evocative words that form a shared vocabulary. For example, 'community' was used on average 118 times in interviews. However, they are engaged in a constant (yet mainly implicit) discursive struggle about the actual meaning of such floating signifiers. In Bologna, public professionals and citizens also use a shared vocabulary, which on the one hand facilitated

joint thinking but on the other hand excluded certain people and topics from the conversation. Such empty signifiers as 'project' endow the vocabulary with an air of single and shared meanings, but are of limited use for talking meaningfully about complex and hidden problems.

Third, the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens is shaped by the dynamics of many **seemingly small problems**, such as community building, domestic violence, bread throwing, playground renovation, reconstruction of housing estates, hidden criminality, and illegality. Public professionals and citizens stumble upon problematic situations that at first sight seem to be fairly easy to define and straightforward to solve, but quickly appear to be extremely complicated and difficult to change. As they get drawn further into the conflicts between multiple problem analyses, the need for detailed knowledge and the interdependence of different people for generating change, their frustration over the lack of concrete results grows, and their ability to communicate about the problems decreases. Seemingly small problems do not just affect the ways in which public professionals and citizens communicate because they are 'wicked' – that is, unique situations which have multiple competing definitions and no final resolutions (Rittel and Webber, 1973) – but more fundamentally because dealing with them "takes a lot of energy" (Diana) and still gets "completely stuck on all fronts", which is "unexplainable" to outsiders (Tineke). Thus, public professionals and citizens need to be patient and open in talking about the complexity and frustrations under the surface of **seemingly small problems**.

Public professionals and citizens in Amsterdam demonstrate a keen awareness of the presence and intricacies of **seemingly small problems**, as people like Diana and Tineke are constantly **getting to grips** with what is going on in specific cases and what could be done. Nevertheless, that does not mean that they are always able to change or solve these problems; and if they do, the idiosyncrasies of their efforts inhibit translation into widespread and structural solutions. The attention given to the **seemingly small problems** around the *Ex-Mercato* area by several citizens in Bologna was the main trigger for a productive turn in their conversations with public professionals.[48] At the same time, stories by people like Dusnella reveal that their **groundbreaking** communication does not continue to facilitate them in exploring other **seemingly small problems** in the neighbourhood. Despite their gravity, public professionals and citizens in Glasgow spend little time on actually exploring **seemingly small problems** together. While they were debating whether their participatory institutions should have **started from scratch** , problems with safety, health, and

poverty (among others) continue to confound their *situation* as heavily as they did before.

Exercising communicative capacity also requires extensive substantive knowledge of everything that is part of the *total situation*. As they engage with their *situation*, public professionals and citizens (need to) take into account how their **ongoing business** is shaped by, and evokes, for example, the historical evolution of national and local government (Rhodes, 1988; Raadschelders and Rutgers, 1996; Vandelli, 2007); local governance actors and networks (Wilson and Game, 2011); the distribution of legal decision–making powers, service delivery tasks, and fiscal responsibilities (Page and Goldsmith, 1987; Ferrari, 2008); and urban planning procedures (Adams, 1994). As no individual can have a comprehensive understanding of the role and dynamic interactions of all these factors, public professionals and citizens need to be able to integrate their specific knowledge and experiences in a holistic understanding of the *total situation*. The next chapter will discuss how public professionals and citizens communicate about the *substantive issues* at hand.

Table 5.1: Use of signifiers per interviewee, Glasgow

Signifiers/Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Tot	Av
Community	134	140	179	211	164	190	133	68	135	22	88	92	24	104	78	100	141	124	123	2,250	118
Engage/involve	104	85	120	122	72	24	34	9	31	11	54	20	5	38	32	54	32	70	55	972	51
Group	46	36	82	142	111	38	46	12	49	34	51	7	7	60	37	15	68	70	32	943	50
Area	34	37	32	10	66	38	23	23	78	33	78	46	16	43	15	48	10	70	41	741	39
Partnership/join-up	35	67	51	39	13	22	1	5	25	8	6	21	0	11	3	47	5	109	58	526	28
Service	21	40	32	10	5	18	9	6	38	15	3	29	2	6	20	31	1	43	39	368	19
Represent	11	4	20	9	21	18	8	3	18	9	18	6	0	16	3	15	19	4	8	210	11

Table 5.2: Use of signifiers per interviewee, Amsterdam

Signifiers/Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Tot	Av
(the) Quarter	85	46	25	49	39	33	31	50	18	17	81	74	49	31	14	32	4	39	108	100	925	46
(the) Residents	66	37	37	36	15	28	14	48	19	19	68	54	107	39	15	12	1	31	39	14	699	35
(the) Neighbourhood	2	17	5	8	26	38	8	22	11	9	1	5	3	39	1	0	8	5	23	2	233	12
Physical/social	22	6	4	7	0	2	3	8	0	0	11	0	18	0	0	0	0	14	28	6	129	6
Involve/engage	6	12	4	1	4	3	5	5	3	0	10	13	28	2	5	0	0	17	4	5	127	6
Participation	5	2	8	1	1	0	0	0	6	0	27	3	46	0	0	0	0	8	17	1	125	6
Livability	0	9	3	3	0	2	0	3	0	0	3	0	27	13	0	2	0	0	7	0	72	4
Public domain	9	4	5	1	0	10	0	2	1	1	0	12	10	0	0	0	0	4	3	2	64	3
Partners	3	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	2	28	1
Clean, whole, safe	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	13	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	24	1
Area focused working	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	2	0	1	0	0	0	8	2	0	22	1
Integrality	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	9	0

Table 5.3: Use of signifiers per interviewee, Bologna

Signifiers/Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Tot	Av
(the) Citizen(s)	40	67	82	61	85	19	54	12	54	10	24	50	13	66	94	7	17	83	19	28	885	44
(the) Neighbourhood	5	25	18	31	9	15	8	26	20	46	26	37	41	39	49	30	15	21	26	14	501	25
Project	0	38	9	17	13	16	15	5	91	9	85	12	24	7	18	8	49	0	6	38	460	23
Area	6	27	57	29	43	7	37	3	23	5	31	39	19	28	17	0	15	19	8	8	421	21
Participation	14	27	9	8	26	5	15	12	39	18	12	33	17	6	55	16	17	1	19	30	379	19
(the) Municipality	23	21	10	34	7	7	1	1	39	17	14	0	26	4	50	1	12	8	9	4	288	14
(the) City	0	10	3	64	0	3	6	4	8	13	18	0	2	7	15	2	11	7	3	5	181	9
Transformation	0	6	0	43	0	3	0	0	12	3	8	1	9	5	0	0	7	1	4	16	118	6
Zone	8	0	0	0	3	7	0	18	3	36	3	0	0	0	0	10	11	0	9	7	115	6

Struggling: discussing the substantive issues at hand

'[S]uch a person needs years before he has recognition … and then from what the residents are saying he is able to translate that in concrete steps in his organisation. And yeah … that's of course a continuous process.' (Mohammed – resident, Amsterdam)

After having seen how public professionals and citizens engage with the *situation* in which they meet, this chapter looks at what they talk about and in what ways. Discussing the *substantive issues* at hand is a continuous **struggling** with taking on board unknown knowledge about rules, structures, and policies, and acknowledging the feelings, beliefs and experiences of others. The opening quote from Mohammed (a brisk and assertive young man with a migrant background, a lot of participatory experience and a sceptical attitude towards the authorities) reveals that discussing *substantive issues* is anything but a neutral and straightforward transmission of information: it is 'a continuous process' of getting recognition to take part in conversations and learning to translate their content in meaningful ways. Merely facilitating public professionals and citizens to discuss *substantive issues* is not enough to get them to *integrate* their **actionable understandings**; truly *unifying differences* comes down to a subtle activity of recognising, empathising and appreciating what is being communicated. Public professionals and citizens will not manage to overcome their habitual pattern of communication if they lack the capacity to communicate about their **struggling** with the beliefs, perceptions, and feelings inherent to their **actionable understandings**.

Public professionals and residents in Glasgow are confronted with so many different pieces of information, knowledge and experience that they tend to defend their own expertise by **taking a stance** rather than recognising the value of others' expertise. In Amsterdam, public professionals and residents are entangled in a process of getting **under the skin** (of problems, issues, people, experiences, events, relationships and so on): investing a great amount of time and energy in understanding the particulars of individual local problems, without being able to articulate or extrapolate this know-how to other

situations. Having clearly established what counts as relevant expertise, public professionals and residents in Bologna are not able to consider local problems beyond the **nuts and bolts** of urban regeneration projects. As such, each case shows that discussing the *substantive issues* at hand is limited by a habitual pattern of exchanging **actionable understandings** rather than recognising the **struggling** involved in this and the communicative capacity needed to *unify differences*.

Glasgow: taking a stance

> '[Y]ou can imagine the challenges of breaking down what … Community Planning is and how it brings people together … into something that's put straightforward out for people to understand and get their heads round and feel comfortable with' (Gail – Community Planning officer)

Gail, who once again provides a helpful starting point, conveys how the case of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) is characterised by a desire to integrate different **actionable understandings** as well as an inability to do so. This discrepancy can be explained with the pattern of **taking a stance**, which refers to the inclination of public professionals and residents to defend their own expertise in the face of an overwhelming number of viewpoints and pieces of information. The GCPP was founded on the idea that all relevant forms of local expertise need to be taken into account. However, in practice individuals are inclined to hang on to the partial understandings deriving from their professional training, social environment and personal experiences. They often fail to acknowledge that integrating **actionable understandings** is a matter of **struggling**. As a result, the GCPP has not turned into the integrative platform it was intended to be. Instead, public professionals and residents tend toward **taking a stance** by defending their own knowledge and experiences while contesting the value of those of others rather than by *unifying differences*.

That is not to say that public professionals and residents are not willing to consider different **actionable understandings**. Each of them expresses a strong commitment to **making a difference** to local communities and a willingness to collaborate with each other in doing so. Everyone considers collaboration necessary for coming up with better informed solutions to local problems. In the interviews, most of them could provide examples of successful ways in which different bits and pieces of knowledge and experience had been

integrated. A local police officer, for instance, told me how he had managed to resolve safety problems caused by gangs of youths in one area by collaborating with residents and a number of public agencies on an innovative solution. However, even such seemingly successful collaborations follow a habitual pattern of communication that, in subtle ways, neglects certain **actionable understandings**. This is not so much the result of deliberate attempts to exclude knowledge and experiences held by particular individuals, but rather from lacking awareness of the **struggling** underlying their discussions of the *substantive issues*. Public professionals and residents in Glasgow often fail to display sensitivity to resulting feelings of misunderstanding, exclusion and frustration, driving each other to **taking a stance** about what they consider legitimate expertise. Therefore, they need to develop communicative capacity to change their limited, habitual ability for collaborating, listening, and trusting each other.

The GCPP policy made an explicit commitment to integrate a wide variety of viewpoints, experiences, and sources of information:

> We will **work in such a way** that it supports the values of openness, parity between partners and achieving progress through consensus… We will develop **joint approaches** to improving service delivery and the quality of life for the citizens of Glasgow. (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2004, p 6)

Notice that the commitment made to 'the values of openness, parity … and … consensus' leaves unspecified how public professionals and residents should go about developing 'joint approaches'. Stating that they can simply 'work in such a way' to accomplish these values reveals the belief that *unifying differences* is a straightforward process of bringing together all 'partners' and 'the community' for joint decision making. As Mark, who, as already explained in Chapter Five, is responsible for making this happen, explains:

> '[T]hese [Community Reference] Groups are **ideally all things to all people at all times**. In terms of representation they are meant to cut across all walks of life, all aspects of society, so that they are representative effectively from cradle to grave, all these groups, all nationalities, you know, ethnic origin, you know, sexual orientation …' (Mark – Community Planning officer)

The goal of being "ideally all things to all people at all times" neglects the practical limitations on discussing *substantive issues*. Public professionals and residents are expected to keep a 'feel' for the nitty-gritty of many local circumstances and individual situations as well as consider problems and solutions at the neighbourhood, area, city, and national level. They need to take statistics, policy goals, time lines, budgets, physical constraints, political dynamics, partner organisation practices, and directly voiced community needs and demands into account about the complex nature of and relationships between safety, health, unemployment, housing, and so on. Of course, each individual can only mentally process a limited amount of information, knowledge and experience and translate this into concrete action. The most acute example of this is Sadiqua (an elderly woman with an immigrant background) who was so overwhelmed by the intense discussion in a Community Reference Group meeting that she sat it out without saying a word. Later she told me that she found the other participating residents "really better than me, because they've got more experience, by education as well, more experience". Being confronted with different bits of knowledge and experiences can definitely enhance awareness of the partiality of individual **actionable understandings** and the need to integrate these. But in Glasgow it leads public professionals and residents to dig in their heels to defend their own expertise. Why does this happen?

The previous chapter showed that the *situation* is a complex, ambiguous and changeable **work in progress** complicating any straightforward exchange of expertise held by different people. This renders communication about problems and solutions a process of **struggling** to determine which information, experiences and emotions form a legitimate basis for action. Once more we turn to Gail:

> '[W]**e don't have local autonomy over priorities and outcomes**. We have our Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government that says that at Glasgow city level we have to deliver these outcomes. So we can't just come up with these outcomes that we might like at a local level if they bear no relationship to the city strategic goal, if you like, and the national. So **we've got to find a way of having a local dimension to our decision making, but one that feeds directly into the city objectives** … So, it's complex. And in all of that our Community Reference Groups need to understand what the Single Outcome Agreement is and they need to try and understand

this process for agreeing priorities at local level. And, um, what we need to do is a more effective engagement with them on that, and **that's the real goal of how do we actually involve them**. **It's a complex process we're not fully in control of, of all the factors**. Um, we need to engage them earlier in the process and yet often the time scales don't allow that. Yeah? ... For example, we are looking at our planning for the priorities for next financial year, we have very, very little time to bring the Community Reference Groups up to speed on that, and we have very little time for them to go to talk to their local groups about that. And the risk is that if we don't ask them to go out and talk to their local groups…, then we don't get an effective input from them ... But if we do do it, we might be criticised for being rushed about it. **So, you have these dilemmas, you know, in the context that we're operating in you have to make a judgement** ... And then the other dilemma is, you know, strategy needs to be ... based on evidence of need. **So if the evidence and statistics tells us that … the main health issues are around alcohol, but all our community engagement tells us that local people are more concerned about drugs, you know, what do we then do?** Because we're, you know [laughs frantically], then you're in a difficulty there, so, you know, **it's quite a challenge to do this kind of effective engagement** at that strategic level. It is ... [laughs]...' (Gail – Community Planning officer)

Gail's narrative illuminates how *unifying differences* in the face of opposing knowledge claims is complicated by the practical constraints of the *situation*. Ideally, public professionals and residents come up with smart and creative strategies for meaningfully defining, measuring and acting upon such complicated problems as public health within the existing policy limits. But what is she supposed to do if statistics point in one direction and the personal experiences of residents in another? On the one hand Gail has to respect the boundaries set by the Single Outcome Agreement, but on the other hand she also wants to genuinely engage with residents. The actual prospects for having productive conversations about local problems are quite limited as they are "not fully in control … of all the factors" (such as the time scales). Indeed, as her frantic laughing at the end of the story indicates,

struggling with *substantive issues* "is quite a challenge" which they have still "got to find a way" to deal with.

Instead of recognising how this **struggling** is limiting their ability to communicate productively about local problems, public professionals and residents are **taking a stance**: having tacit and overt disputes about what type of knowledge, experiences and emotions count as legitimate expertise. The narratives of Mike (a local police officer who patrols the streets and also collects data for strategic decision making as a middle level manager) and Mary (an assertive resident active in a number of community groups who strongly believes in the value of the community) are the most powerful illustrations:

> '[I]t's looking at, right, how can we pull things together, seeing what areas are we lacking in. And again, that's where you need an awful lot of the public consultation stuff. **We're looking at the results from the Neighbourhood Management Survey, … [our own] survey,** we're looking at results from what [other agency] have with their surveys, saying '[W]e have got an issue in this neighbourhood here … in relation to … antisocial behaviour … **What … resources are already in place there, what additional resources can we put in to that?** And more importantly, how can we involve the community in that, to try and address it?' And that's where **a lot of it is trying to get back to … the communities, for them … to become actively engaged in what we're doing** … "It's maybe been the perception of this what it should be", or "No, **what we're coming across, you're giving us information, we assess that information, and this is what we're giving back**." And that's where we're gonna have to try and get that balance, … so that people know that they're having an input, where their input is going to, and the result of that input, what the outcome is that's coming from there.' (Mike – police officer)

> 'Workers of Community Planning attend meetings, … but all they're doing is meeting other workers and a specific kind of resident who is already active. **What would be much more interesting if they went out and would actively sought feedback from people who aren't activists, people who they could approach at bus stops** … Maybe it sounds a bit crazy, but, you know, go

and arrange with a butcher … to allow you to sit in their shop for a morning and talk to the people that are coming in. And you get a snapshot, you know. People like me, everybody knows what we think because we tell it all the time. It is so much more important to go out and seek the opinions of the people who don't go to meetings, aren't activists. That's going to be the challenge, if they actually want … community engagement … Go and stand outside a school at three o'clock and seek the opinions of mommies and daddies picking up their kids, you know. Or go and stand outside a subway station and … speak to people there. I mean, **it's completely random, but I would suggest that you would get a broader view of, you know, what people actually need**.' (Mary – resident)

These stories set out conflicting diagnoses of the needs of 'the community' and prescribe different ways of discussing *substantive issues*. Mike describes it as residents "giving us information" and public professionals who "assess that information" to determine which "resources are already in place" and "what additional resources can we put in". Within this **Planning** narrative, participatory encounters help to identify whether a problem is real or perceived, and, if real, to determine where, when, and how to target it. This means that public professionals and residents need to engage in comprehensive knowledge gathering, drawing up plans to adequately allocate resources, and feeding back decisions to "the communities, *for them … to become actively engaged in what we're doing*". Conversely, Mary stresses that *public professionals need to become actively engaged in what residents are doing* instead of the other way around. In this **Community** narrative, **actionable understandings** have to emerge from talking to customers in shops, parents in front of schools, and subway passengers. Although this might be an unconventional, time consuming and "completely random" approach, it will lead to better understandings of what local problems actually are and how they could be solved rather than using official channels for gathering and feeding back knowledge.

  These conflicting narratives could certainly complement each other if public professionals and residents recognised the value of both **actionable understandings** as well as the contradictions in diagnosis and prescription of who needs to engage in whose world. This could lead them to explore the practical possibilities for constructive **struggling** and *unifying differences* in their expertise into new shared understandings of how to jointly address the issue at hand (see Chapter

Two, pp 43–5). But underlying beliefs and feelings are usually left out of the conversation. Collaboration is merely treated as an instrumental exchange of expertise to resolve problems which up to that point they have been unable to do anything about. For example, Bill (a manager at an employment agency) thought that collaborating with other agencies and residents would enable him to help more people into a job. The narrative of Annette (a middle-level manager in a housing agency) about a collaborative project for reducing 'youth disorder' is a good illustration of how all their success stories have the same narrative structure.

> '[Y]ou might have heard of **the Stuff Bus**? Where, um, Glasgow Housing Association, um, TCAS, Community Safety Services, um, … and Culture and Sport Glasgow, several of the Community Planning Partners, got together and we developed a response to, kinda, youth disorder in the South of the city. So a lot of the problems that, you know, the Police were having to deal with, Fire responding to, and us as a landlord paying the price, **youths causing mayhem, because they have nothing better to do**. So we got together and we did that through Community Planning, and got some Community Planning funding, Fairer Scotland Funding, but all the partners put their hands in their pockets as well. Basically what we got was a minibus trailer and converted it and put into the bus things that would keep kids amused. So basically **it visits the local areas, the local hotspots, where there's plenty of youths, um, and hopefully stops them ripping up the area**. Because they can go in, play videogames, we have kind of five a side football arrangements that follow the Stuff Bus. So the kids now generally know when it's coming to their area and can plan their evening. When they go there, there's youth support workers that will **maybe try and get them into other things, work, education, other things than, you know, drink, drugs, anti social behaviour** … So that was very successful as well, and very visible as a Community Planning project. And one we worked closely on, um, one we put money into, we put in resources as well to actually develop the project, write all the bids to get lottery funding, we went to one of the big supermarkets over in the South area, got some money out of them as well … So that was a bit, **we genuinely did**

> **Community Planning**. Um, the resident surveys were saying youth disorder was a big issue. So the surveys we were doing at a CPP level said 'This is an issue for us.' So, yes, that was one of the ones where you could see there was a community message saying "We need this fixed", the Community Planning board, together **the partners** together took that issue and **developed a very successful response**.' (Annette – housing manager)

Annette tells us about the way in which "the partners" found a collaborative solution in response to "a community message" about youth disorder. In the first instance, we might tend to agree that the problem was addressed more effectively than before because public professionals and residents shared their knowledge and experience. However, this narrative actually reveals a habitual pattern of communicating about how to discuss *substantive issues*. The narrative follows a 'storyline of helplessness and control' (see Chapter Four) because they "genuinely did Community Planning", it suddenly became possible to resolve this grave and stubborn problem of youth disorder. This storyline aids Annette in framing the problem as "youths causing mayhem, because they have nothing better to do" and the solution as giving them the opportunity to play games once a week and "stop them ripping up the area" and getting involved in "drink, drugs, antisocial behaviour". Although such outreach work is a widely accepted method for dealing with youth disorder, we could ask ourselves whether it is really the case that youngsters just "have nothing better to do" or whether their disorderly behaviour is an expression of a life of deprivation, unemployment and gang culture. Is this bus really a structural solution or are results only marginal, temporal and local? Is the perception of success shared by all public professionals and residents or have certain voices been excluded? How have residents been involved in decision making, implementation and evaluation? And how does this collaborative approach relate to other local problems?

All these questions are not meant to discredit Annette's positive experience, but rather to emphasise that each public professional and resident is unconsciously **taking a stance** based on beliefs, values and experiences which tend to be ignored and kept out of the conversation. The conversations of public professionals and residents in Glasgow have the tendency to take different **actionable understandings** for granted and link them instrumentally while discussing *substantive issues*. Instead of pragmatically exploring how different **actionable understandings** could supplement each other and be integrated,

this sustains a habitual pattern of **taking a stance** in which public professionals and residents implicitly and explicitly contest the value of each other's expertise. Consider the stories of Kelly and George, two active and aggrieved senior residents involved in the CRG and community groups in their areas:

> **'I do go in blind down and I do fight** and I have several fights over the issue that the [Community Health] Forums are shut down. They were doing what they were set up to do, differently in other areas ... but if at the end of the day **if it's local people run you've got what local people are looking for**. If you as a funder want to come in and actually do more, you have to give them an idea of what you want them to be. **You can't come in with this approach ... "We'll set up our own structures",** which Community Planning has been doing ... I live in one of the worst areas for health ... and our health initiatives have been pared back to the bone. Our local health projects that drew a lot, smoking cessation groups, you know, weight loss things, you know, confidence boosting to get you out of depression therapies, you know, alternative therapies for residents ... The only way to really fix Glasgow is by using the communities. And to get some kind of health employer coming in and saying "We should be doing that,"... Glasgow folk turn away and say "On *yer* way." ... People will come into a health club ... locally ... That's where a big Glasgow strategy should be feeding into ... **They should be saying "What is it that you're doing that got the results and how can we help you get more results?"'** (Kelly – resident)

> '[W]e've had various meetings … over the past two years … about **various issues, which we've been trying to raise, that were impaired**, um, by the involvement … of superior powers, … by the guidelines they bring down. And **they don't give us the freedom**, actually, of expressing or motivating these actions which we would like to be involved in. And get them to give us that service and provide it with that information and any projects, actually, which could be developed for the benefit of the community and **the area should be looked at more seriously**. And open discussions and dialogue on it.' (George – resident)

Both Kelly and George fervently express their frustration at the dismissive way in which their knowledge and experience is treated. As active residents, they have a long history of living in and working with their communities. Their discussions of *substantive issues* are determined by them **taking a stance** against the "superior powers" and the decisions and "guidelines they bring down". This antagonistic pattern of communication is supported by a 'frame' (see Chapter Three) that connects their 'actions' of going "in blind down and … fight" with the 'value' that "the area should be looked at more seriously" through the 'causal belief' that "if it's local people run you've got what local people are looking for". That is, Kelly and George both believe that 'the community' possesses the right kind of expertise for solving local problems and therefore needs to be adequately supported by the public agencies. In this frame, public professionals 'impair' residents in their "freedom" instead of saying "What is it that you're doing that got the results and how can we help you get more results?" Therefore, they are **taking a stance** by defending the value of their own knowledge and experience and discarding the value of public professionals' expertise. As a result, these residents are less inclined to openly and respectfully consider what public professionals have to say and express a limited ability to collaborate, listen and trust others in order to *unify differences*.

In sum, the GCPP was founded on the idea that bringing public professionals and residents together would be enough to unify *differences*. However, public professionals and residents have conflicting **actionable understandings** and are engaged in an antagonistic pattern of **struggling** over what counts as legitimate expertise. Being confronted with an overwhelming amount of information, knowledge and experiences, they are **taking a stance** to defend the value of their individual **actionable understandings** and discard those of others. As such, they disregard how their conversations are a process of **struggling** with the content as well as the value of their knowledge, experiences and emotions. Although there are certainly instances in which they are **struggling** in a productive way, public professionals and residents in Glasgow do not cultivate their capacity for communicating about the value and limits of individual knowledge, experience and beliefs as well as the importance of and opportunities for *unifying differences*.

Amsterdam: under the skin

'Often they just throw [things] into the group, you know, it really comes out of nothing … So … in the beginning I felt a lot of resistance against that, you actually go into defence immediately …

> And of course you shouldn't do that, because … eventually you
> hear the underlying story.' (Yvonne – police officer)

In contrast to the Glasgow case, discussions of the *substantive issues* at hand in the Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*) display a common awareness that community participation requires recognition of the value of multiple **actionable understandings**. Although they are not always able to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, public professionals and residents are usually open to considering various bits and pieces of information, experiences and emotions to get **under the skin** of complex local problems. Yvonne (the police officer we met in the previous chapter) illuminates how **struggling** in Amsterdam takes shape through a habitual pattern of getting **under the skin**: rather than going "into defence immediately" when people "just throw [things] into the group", being open and patient leads you to hearing "the underlying story". Public professionals and residents think that appropriate solutions for local problems can only be found by getting **under the skin** of people and their perceptions, knowledge and beliefs. This means that it usually takes a great deal of time, patience, and energy to get to the bottom of things, so that the **struggling** has a somewhat idiosyncratic character and is very much dependent on who meets who at a particular time and place. Public professionals and residents, then, demonstrate capacity for communicating about underlying beliefs, values and experiences, but often fail to render this *unifying of differences* more durable and widespread.

As public professionals and residents tend to take a large amount of practical details, nuances and ambiguities into account, they are continuously **struggling** to develop their joint understandings beyond concrete situations. They regularly manage to integrate **actionable understandings** to resolve particular problems, but this involves such intensive work on the specific details of the issue at hand that they are not always able to learn from such experiences how to act in future situations. For instance, during an interview, Sevgi (a resident who organises small group events such as sewing classes and language lessons for immigrant women) could reproduce little of the discussion with public professionals of the City District Maintenance Department about dealing with garbage and litter problems at the resident meeting she had attended a few days before. But she has detailed knowledge of all the small scale social activities of immigrant women in the neighbourhood who "do that unnoticed I think. But still it works out well." Public professionals and residents are often unable to deepen and broaden their

productive **struggling** with such detailed and secluded **actionable understandings**. Regularly, subtle differences of interpretation and emotional signals remain unnoticed or unaddressed, and, where these are picked up by specific individuals, they may not be able to communicate them to others who have not been involved in the *situation*. In other words, the capacity to communicate about *substantive issues* remains **under the skin** of particular persons and situations rather than *unifying differences* with an ever-expanding whole of views, knowledge, experiences, feelings, and values in the *total situation*.

Public professionals and residents in Bos & Lommer have a great deal of detailed knowledge and know-how about the many **seemingly small problems** (see Chapter Five) which are present in the neighbourhood. They constantly run into a complex array of minutiae, ambiguities, perceptions and emotions that they cannot solve on their own or at that particular moment. For example, through several interviews and meetings I found out that something seemingly simple like excessive kerbside garbage disposal and street litter was related to:

- the ongoing – and regularly protracted – demolition, reconstruction and relocation projects of the various housing corporations;
- a lack of awareness and understanding of, or respect for, the rules for keeping public spaces clean among residents;
- insufficient police resources to monitor violations;
- the routes and timetables of the garbage disposal service;
- the lack of resources and time to communicate the rules to all residents in languages they understand;
- poor communication between housing corporations, the City District and contractors about changes to plans or exceptions to rules.

Therefore, exchanging information, knowledge and experience is a continuous process of **struggling** by public professionals and residents trying to get **under the skin** of local problems.

We return to Yvonne, who further explains how she struggles with deciding what to do with the information she is confronted with during her encounters with residents:

> '…with resident participation … you actually don't do anything else than responding to complaints and reports that come in. There are so many of those that it's impossible to deal with all of them. Those are complaints about, um, hey, nuisance by neighbours, but **it then appears that there**

are very long stories behind that, **or you don't really find out.** People complain or feel unsafe because of those neighbours or sometimes hear things that aren't there, they hear that in gossip, and you have to, **you're then digging a lot for the concrete complaint that's behind it and also … you can do something with**. Reports about … things that happen in the street, um, where you're usually not present at the moment it happens, or just too late, then it already stopped… With a lot of complaints that we get I can't immediately, um, act upon. And strangely enough, that's a shame sometimes, because you're also a do-er, you also want to solve problems, but **sometimes it helps more to take it in like a sponge**. Actually just accepting that you can't do much except lending an ear, sometimes registering it and sometimes there is a moment later when you can address it. This way you *do* get to know a neighbourhood like this very well of course. And all sorts of complaints that are behind it.' (Yvonne – police officer)

Yvonne explains that being responsive to all the demands and complaints of residents is very difficult, because of their complexity, quantity and unexpected emergence. Therefore, she organises this narrative of expertise around the metaphor of a "sponge": "to take it in" and accept "that you can't do much except lending an ear, sometimes registering it and sometimes there is a moment later when you can address it". Although she feels the inclination to respond immediately with words or actions, the conversation benefits much more from being open, comforting and patient in listening to the "very long stories behind" concrete statements until she arrives at a piece of information "you can do something with". Public professionals and residents are therefore **struggling** to interpret and manage emotions, perceptions, and relationships, find out underlying stories, accept that many problems cannot be solved immediately, and look for creative solutions. Communicating about expertise, then, comes down to public professionals and residents trying to get **under the skin** of concrete situations, exploring their intricacies together, and tailoring solutions to what seems appropriate in the situation at hand.

The AW was set up to provide extra commitment to, and resources for, broadening and deepening the already existing discussions of *substantive issues*. The narrative of Mourad (a social worker who manages encounters between residents and public professionals) illustrates how

getting **under the skin** of a problem which a resident observes with a playground facility can lead to a productive process of **struggling**:

> '[S]o for example to change a playground facility, um, that you've got a half pipe … for skaters … [and] a resident has something like "Yeah, … skaters … don't make use of it, … [it's] rusting away and … there are children … climbing on it… Is it not possible then to take that thing away and put in its place a few small playing facilities for those children?" … [So] **that [resident] signals it because she lives across it**. And then you see that we have such a construction through which … there is contact, hey, between that woman … and the one concerned with public space, to see like "Okay, **how could you give shape to that in practical terms** so that it's good for the resident, it's good for the one using it, … and that it's also good for the one who has to place the facility". So then you get a, yeah, I personally think … **very good contact between that system and life world**. And yeah, within that **we operate as a kind of catalyst**, … without taking part in the process you make sure that something results from it.'
> (Mourad – social worker)

Mourad operates, in his own words, between the "system world" and the "life world" by organising resident meetings, supporting residents in developing and carrying out initiatives and mediating between the public agencies and the community. Using the metaphor of a "catalyst", he depicts his work as a dynamic process in which he is a change agent who "without taking part in the process … make[s] sure that something results from it". In this narrative, catalysing discussions of *substantive issues* benefits public professionals because they obtain knowledge from residents' lived experience that they otherwise would not have access to, as well as residents because they get access to the right persons and resources for getting their problems solved. Houssain, a local police officer who portrays his understanding of the neighbourhood as the street view of Google Earth as compared to the top down Google Maps view which colleagues in other parts of the organisation have, provides a similar narrative. He was able to find the perpetrator of a murder in his neighbourhood because he knew that a resident living in the street where it took place was always sitting behind his window at that time and must have seen something. Through his personal relations with the resident he was able to obtain the information that

led to the arrest. Thus, getting **under the skin** of problems people, and the neighbourhood can lead to *unifying differences*.

At the same time, Mourad's narrative also shows that, going back to the half pipe example, his practices of catalysing discussions of *substantive issues* is a constant **struggling**:

> **'[But] … then the municipality has to take liability into account**, a bit of safety. If they place something they have to take into account how big it can be according to the law … So also in terms of, um, if children fall then the surface for example has to be rubber, or it can't be within so many metres of another facility or something, those kinds of things. **Also that there are agreements that you can have an X amount of playing facilities in a … neighbourhood**. So yeah, if you already have exceeded that amount then it's of course not handy to put another playing facility, um, there. **While a resident for example says "Yeah, it's really necessary for my place." Very understandable from the viewpoint of the resident, but from that system world it's still like "Yeah fine, we have agreed this within the system** that there are no more than ten playing facilities in this area." **So then it's not always that easy.** Also when it's about putting oneself in someone else's position, **the empathy of, um, of the both worlds so to say.'** (Mourad – social worker)

Mourad explains that exchanging knowledge and experience is "not always that easy", because life world (**Community**) and system world (**Planning**) comprise divergent underlying logics. While a resident spontaneously signals a problem and offers a creative solution, public professionals tend to respond by framing the problem in terms of regulations intended to assure a fair, safe and equitable distribution of facilities and finances. Mourad is in a position in which he can understand both viewpoints, but observes that "the empathy of … the both worlds" is often lacking. Facilitating real *integration* of different **actionable understandings**, then, is a continuous **struggling** to get **under the skin** of all public professionals and residents involved.

To further elucidate the differences between **Community** and **Planning** narratives, in the next two stories, Riet (the proactive resident who told the story about the meeting which she turned around at the beginning of Chapter One) and Dennis (the neighbourhood manager who portrayed the *situation* of the AW as an 'obscure pallette'

in Chapter Five) share their experiences with refurbishing one of the many playgrounds in the area:

'Um, **I have asked for a toilet for gents in that swimming pool**. I say "**It's dead easy**, in the corner… If you make a T-junction there to the drain of the janitor office … there's a toilet for children"… I also requested all that, there's a changing facility for mothers … that they can go with their baby stuff and a clean diaper, garbage can, everything's taken care of. I say "If there's a toilet there already anyway, why can't there be a T-junction, so that gents toilet is also connected to that?" "Yeah, but then a cleaning service has to come as well." I say "What's this? … **Is that so difficult?** Just send someone? The janitor office also has to be cleaned, then it's not that difficult for him to also do that toilet seat or just, he has the stuff in the cart anyway. Or do I see, am I blind?" **I say "You just can't organise anything, you just don't see it**, you're being so stupid"… No, **they're now pissing against all the trees**. With the consequence that those children are watching how those men are peeing. And it smells. So? Well, they took pictures now and they were in the pool this week and they looked, so I suspect that a gent's toilet will come now, because **it's just terrible**. Because if in the summer those men are going to drink over there and they have beers, well, then you know how it goes … But there are all kinds of bushes and plants there, well, they're completely destroyed now… And it smells horribly. **Because … that guy that lives there on the first floor gets all that smell up there.** Beh! Well, that doesn't make you very happy. So there I asked for a gent's toilet.' (Riet – resident)

'**At a certain moment … they had discovered that [playground] as City District Board**, because the playground board … didn't cope anymore financially. The ground was owned by the City District appeared later and the buildings as well … . Um, … someone of Wellbeing had … refurbished it, and also wrote an entire plan … . Well, because the lines between the City District and that caretaker were not that well, that caretaker quit at a certain moment and, yeah, **there was a deadlock**. And I got complaints from residents like "Yeah, we have such a

nice pool and we have a nice playground, but it's not open anymore.''… **The problems were stacking up**. Because … there would be a renovation of those buildings, there was money for that, yes or no, eventually it appeared to be no. So then you need Real Estate. The support of that playground by Wellbeing was minimal and the caretaking of the playing apparatus was also not well arranged, so the Caretaking Department shied away. So those people were completely on their own … . I finally took some steps, so that Real Estate went to look … Now it is the case that **we're still talking about it while the playground is already closed for a year, because departments are just looking at each other and nobody takes up the initiative to do something structural with it** … But then you're dealing with so many different parts … with Caretaking, with Real Estate, with Wellbeing, … Neighbourhood Participation, residents … In the meantime a lot of old energy bills and water bills of that club got stacked up, they never paid them, … in the end they never got the know-how to run such an association … Well, we're still dealing with that at Wellbeing to sort it out and make arrangements with [the water company and the energy company] to make sure everything is definitely taken care of. Yeah, **those kind of things are terribly frustrating because you're pumping energy in it the whole time and you're trying to bring people together and then eventually, um, the result is still unsatisfactory** because you can't, um, yeah, get everyone working together … to make sure that there's actually something happening in your organisation.' (Dennis – neighbourhood manager)

These narratives describe a persistent problem that causes a lot of frustration and puts pressure on the *relationships* between public professionals and residents. Both Riet and Dennis use a 'tragic plotline' in which they are the 'heroes' who want to solve the problems but are powerless in making it happen. As a resident, Riet is regularly confronted with the urine smell that a group of homeless men is (allegedly) causing. She feels that the seriousness of the problem is insufficiently recognised. The situation is "just terrible", while it would be "dead easy" to solve the problem by placing an extra toilet. But in her view public professionals are lacking in assertiveness: they "just don't see it" and "are being so stupid". In turn, as neighbourhood

manager, Dennis faces many uncertainties about budgets, rules, responsibilities and options, as well as interdependent organisations who are "just looking at each other" and do not take "up the initiative to do something structural with it". From the "moment ... they had discovered that [playground] as City District Board" until a year later, he has been "pumping energy in it the whole time" and "trying to bring people together". But in the end "the result is still unsatisfactory because you can't … get everyone working together". As such, the diverging knowledge, experiences and emotions involved with **Community** and **Planning** limit the ability of public professionals and residents to get **under the skin** and *unify differences* in more durable and widespread ways.

Getting **under the skin**, then, is a complex and messy process in which the great amount of effort and energy put into it does not always translate into concrete outcomes. As a result, discussing *substantive issues* draws public professionals and residents into a habitual pattern of communication in which they forego critical questioning of the framing of the actual problems and solutions. For example: Why are these homeless men actually there? Will they really start using a toilet? Would physical changes to the relatively closed architecture, more police surveillance, social control by residents, or shelter and care for the homeless not be more effective? Would a different kind of leadership help to get the different local actors to work together? Public professionals and residents could render their **struggling** more productive by recognising mutual efforts, frustrations and expertise and exploring, adapting and integrating their various **actionable understandings**. For instance, Riet might try to understand just how deeply embedded fragmentation and technical specialisation are in local governance because the dense Dutch legal system strictly circumscribes competences and legal procedures (Van Roosmalen, 2007) and public organisations are free to develop their own policies and personnel management systems (Van der Meer and Raadschelders, 1999; Van der Meer and Dijkstra, 2000). Conversely, Dennis might invite other public professionals to gather on the playground to experience the problems at first hand in order to motivate them to break through their deadlock.

In many situations, public professionals and residents are **struggling** *equally* to solve particular problems andto get recognition for their expertise. People like Riet and Dennis have different backgrounds and experiences and therefore do not see things the same way in the complex and ambiguous jungle of problems, policies and people. Negative mutual perceptions often emerge when getting **under the skin** of local problems. Consider for example some angry residents who

complain during resident meetings that they have not heard anything back about a reported violation of garbage disposal and a filed request for bicycle racks. Or, on the other hand, consider Mark (the housing manager from Chapter Four) who is faced with recurring damages in the same housing block, but gets a low turnout at several meetings aimed at addressing the problem. Although public professionals and residents have the ability to recognise the value of the experiences, emotions and knowledge that others have **under the skin**, frustrations and misunderstandings regularly limit their ability to make their **struggling** more productive.

In conclusion, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam confront each other with a great many different **actionable understandings**. They actively participate in each other's 'worlds' in order to exchange information, experiences and emotions across the boundaries of **Community** and **Planning**. By trying to get **under the skin** of people, problems and perceptions, public professionals and residents demonstrate awareness of the need to integrate the associated individual beliefs, experiences and emotions. However, their inclination to be responsive to the details of the *substantive issues* at hand demands a lot of time, energ, and patience while not always leading to concrete results or durable relationships. As such, they are constantly **struggling** with how to *unify differences*. Thus, while public professionals and residents demonstrate capacity to communicate about *substantive issues*, they often do not manage to *unify differences* beyond the details **under the skin** of the specific *situations*.

Bologna: nuts and bolts

> '[Y]ou don't have a … [blank] sheet, to say "Yes, I want this."
> So you have to stay there and you have to talk about benches
> or the fountain and the table and the bar and the bicycle path.'
> (Elisa – resident)

From a case in which public professionals and residents are **struggling** with many different details, beliefs and emotions, we now move to a case in which *substantive issues* are discussed through structured deliberative encounters that lead to concrete decisions. In contrast to Amsterdam, in Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano Strutturale Comunale*), public professionals and residents are not in a position to have free floating conversations and delve into the nitty-gritty of complex local problems. As Elisa (who we already met in Chapter Four) puts it "you don't have a … [blank] sheet, to say 'Yes,

I want this.'" Instead, they discuss *substantive issues* by specifying the **nuts and bolts** ("benches or the fountain and the table and the bar and the bicycle path") of the physical interventions to be made in the neighbourhood. The code **nuts and bolts** neatly characterises how **struggling** in Bologna is subject to clear limits on what counts as relevant expertise. Although this aids public professionals and residents in openly articulating their **actionable understandings** and formulating detailed decisions, it does little to widen their capacity to communicate about *unifying differences* beyond the formal remit of their encounters.

The institutional format of the participative workshops (see Chapter Four and Five) determined the scope, content and length of encounters, and, as such, curbed **struggling** about what kind of **actionable understanding** should be recognised. By taking part in the participative workshops, public professionals and residents certainly learned to consider different types of knowledge, emotions and experiences. On the one hand, this enhanced their ability to understand how the **nuts and bolts** of technical plans and legal requirements are related to the social dynamics, identity and problems in the area. At the meeting I attended, residents were shown maps, architectural designs, and a scale model of the revised intervention, which were explained in relation to the relevant legal rules as well as their implications for the types and size of greenery and pavement that the residents had originally agreed upon. At the same time, however, residents continue to face grave problems, while the options for public professionals solving these problems are by and large limited to long-term regeneration projects. Being endowed with the **nuts and bolts** of the *substantive issues*, public professionals and residents still have a long process of **struggling** ahead before they achieve the communicative capacity needed to break through this habitual pattern of communication and truly *unify differences*.

The public professionals and residents who took part in the participative workshops focused their discussions of the *substantive issues* at hand on specific themes. During the *Laboratorio Mercato*, the themes were: 1) the relationship of the area with the rest of the neighbourhood; 2) social impact, services and accessibility; 3) greenery and landscape; 4) environmental sustainability and technological innovation; and 5) mobility. During the *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est*, the themes were 1) the 'linear park'; 2) greenery; 3) the square; 4) connectivity; 5) services and public spaces; 6) architectural quality; 7) commerce; 8) liveability and safety; 9) mobility; and 10) urgent measures against further degeneration. Each of these themes was discussed in one or more

meetings in order to move on from broad plans, ideas and desires to concrete proposals. The following story of Fabrizio (an urban planner who became the key figure in preparing and facilitating both *laboratori*) makes clear how the shared **actionable understanding** took the form of **nuts and bolts** of, for example, squares and parks:

> '[S]omething very typical is **the discussion about public spaces**. So we have this, um, regeneration of Bolognina Est … we have to build new public spaces. For example, … "We don't have a square, we would like to have a square." And people discussing about … what kind of square. Will there be **shops** or not? **Trees** or not? **Where** the square should be. Um, and some things like that. Or, um, something about the green areas … **Because every time people say "We want new green areas," but then you have to discuss with them what kind of green**, because we have many different kinds of green for different … users. How we can manage these green areas, making them safe? So people talking about "We want to have a … **fence**", um, a closed green area, something that is open from nine to five, or nine to nine, and then it's closed, or maybe it's better to have an **open area**. Um, "We should have something inside for example **ice cream shops**, … **a bar** or maybe it's better not to have it, something for **sport** or not". You have many different examples of this kind of discussion.' (Fabrizio – facilitator)

This narrative shows that the desire to change the area means that a lot of detailed decisions need to be taken. Translating a desire such as "We want new green areas" asks for sorting out the **nuts and bolts** of "what kind of green": should it be closed or open, what should be the opening times if it is fenced, should there be commercial activities such as bars, should there be sports facilities, what kinds of trees and flowers, how much grass, and so on. Notice how Fabrizio makes a *normative leap* by stating that if residents say they want a new green area, "then *you have to* discuss with them" the concrete decisions. This narrative prescribes **nuts and bolts** as ideal expertise, based on the assumption that each single detail could affect how the park will be used and how satisfactory the physical intervention has been. If these details are not decided on the basis of resident input, in the end the park may match their ideas and needs leading to all kinds of unanticipated or perverse consequences, and moreover, making the whole operation a waste of

money, time and effort. By focusing on **nuts and bolts**, then, public professionals and residents strive to avoid the situation where discussions of *substantive issues* get stuck in all kinds of abstract ideas and desires. It concretises the changes they need to make to the physical appearance, social patterns and liveability of the neighbourhood.

In the interviews, the park often featured as an example of the *substantive issues* public professionals and residents were discussing. The input of residents was not just written down, but was discussed in terms of their motivations, consequences and quality. For example, facilitators would ask "Why do you want a park?", "What does it add to the area?", "What concrete form will improve safety?" Residents were asked to formulate their perceptions and feelings in terms of current and future problems and opportunities. The facilitators constantly strived to make different ideas concrete and reveal the discrepancies, tensions and connections between diverging points of view. Angelo (an architect and one of the facilitators in *Laboratorio Bolognina Est*) explains how he gave shape to their **actionable understanding**:

> 'I've received at the beginning of the *Laboratorio* the plan … a technical design… that's not easy to read for the working woman, um, … or for the medic or for the barber. So, … the first thing I've done is … searching to transform it, maintaining the project and to break down … the single pieces. Um, there's a park, um, "How big is this park?" **If I say that it is 2000 m² big, nobody, for few this means something. If I say that is has the size of, um, five basketball courts or seven football fields it starts to have a meaning.** In this first phase the main thing that, that I've done was, um, preparing the designs like this, … **simplifying, um, the content**, making nodal points, um, which are the bicycle lanes, these, these, and these, marked in red, um, to explain to them which measurements they have, to let them see what this means with respect to the bicycle lanes, um, that are already there in Bologna. **[T]his … line … means the bicycle lane like in this image, like this photo made over there, big like two bicycles passing each other at the same time**… I especially had to be present in the *Laboratorio* **to say what was possible and understand what was requested**… And when the citizens asked if we couldn't construct a single house and make only one big park, there was a need to say … that the landowner has an intention to build, to earn money, to

invest… And so I had to mediate a bit in this too.' (Angelo
– facilitator)

As the participative workshops were part of the new comprehensive
urban planning system, the conversations of public professionals and
residents often referred to cartographic representations of the area in
which specific interventions were indicated with lines, symbols, and
colours. Therefore, the facilitators helped residents to imagine how
these interventions and their proposals would look in real life by giving
practical examples, making drawings of the street view, using maps,
photos and 3D models, and accumulating proposals in lists and tables.
They then reported the results of the discussion to the Municipality
without changing the style of the proposals into technically precise
indications, so that residents could still recognise their specific input.
According to Angelo, the exchange of expertise required "simplifying
… the content" of "a technical design" and "to say what was possible and
understand what was requested". In this narrative, specifying the **nuts
and bolts** of the regeneration plan within predetermined boundaries
is seen as a seamless *integration* of **Community** and **Planning**.

Indeed, public professionals and residents in Bologna managed
to develop a joint **actionable understanding** that transcended
their individual knowledge and experiences. Residents could now
better understand the technical and legal considerations of public
professionals, who in turn were better able to imagine the area from
the lived experiences of residents. For example, Vito (the planner
from Chapter Five who is working on transforming an old railway
track running through the entire neighbourhood into a bicycle lane)
learned through the meetings about the criminal activities and dog
fouling that often happens on several spots along the route. Through
his deliberations with residents, the idea emerged of transforming the
railway track into a 'linear park' that combined the bicycle lane with
a pedestrian walkway, greenery, benches and street lighting. However,
the deeply ingrained barriers between **Community** and **Planning**
all but disappeared. Compare, for example, these stories of Alberto, an
urban planner whose role it was to explain the legal rules that applied
to the residents' proposal, and Kin Sang, one of the few participating
young residents with an immigrant background, who explains his
impulsive way of making proposals:

'[T]he discussion was in a way that they rightly looked from
their point of view and asked, … because [according to
them] there is a need to construct all this greenery. And so

there was a need to try and explain that nevertheless, um, there are legal rules, **there are, um, numerical limits**… They understand … what the law says. … in fact, they asked a lot of numbers, because when there could be a need to make 250 parking spaces, fine, there are 250, but [what] if there [would be] 251…? Yes, … they were very attentive. **However, within the limits they understand** … For example, in Bolognina there is also the discussion about the bicycle lanes, … you can't make bicycle lanes everywhere or, [chuckles] **there's really a need to use some criteria**. It is better to ask them what their proposals actually are …. And then see if … they can be constructed there, … because **they don't look at the law, they don't even look at the dimensions of a street, for example**. … The legal rule decides that the street needs to be six metres wide, … and … you can't restrain that … But it is also true that in moments in which you say [this] … they search for the solution thinking about that which has been said.' (Alberto – urban planner)

'One evening I said that, um, the military [area] can be replaced by a university campus. Because all the people said "There is a problem of [safety] in the night, there [is no street lighting]... And if you will build shops here it will be like now, because in the night all the shoppers go home in the other neighbourhood and this neighbourhood becomes like a ghost town." So I said "If you need some human presence there … [to create] a better atmosphere, … Bologna is a university town, we've got 100,000 young people in the winter time. So make another place with, um, apartments with, um, public price, a little bit lower than the private price, it's not so bad. **This is a little strange idea that I said in this [meeting], so I said "Why not?" Um, they [wrote it down], but I don't know where it finished** this idea. But, um, I tried to say that, because if you don't … you can't in the future, um, only say bad words … **you have to try to achieve something**.' (Kin Sang – resident)

Both Alberto and Kin Sang value the discussions of *substantive issues* in the participative workshops, but their narratives express different beliefs about what constitutes legitimate expertise. Alberto appreciates the ability of residents to come up with creative ideas and understand

the practical and legal limits of their proposals, but also emphasises that "there was a need to try and explain that … there are legal rules … [and] numerical limits". This **Planning** narrative is based on the *causal belief* that expertise is only relevant if it follows pre-determined regulations, technical procedures and political mandate. However, this belief undermines the creativity and spontaneity needed to deal with complex problems that stretch beyond the fixed limits of the specific project at hand. The **Community** narrative of Kin Sang illustrates how residents participated by suggesting impulsive ideas which often got lost on the way to drafting the final plans. Based on the *causal belief* that "you have to try to achieve something", residents thought freely about how it might be to live in the area in the future rather than "look[ing] at the law … [or] the dimensions of a street". Although this latter type of **actionable understanding** was certainly valued, it did not have the same standing as that of the public professionals.

The primacy given to an **actionable understanding** of formal procedures, legal rules and political mandate fits with the nature of expertise in the Italian public sector. Italian civil servants are renowned for having a strong formalistic legalistic culture (Capano, 2003) that sustains a tendency to favour applying procedures over attaining results. Public professionals primarily have training in law, engineering or architecture, are mainly responsible for dealing with a great deal of administrative law and jurisprudence, and often hold

> a dominant view of urban policy based on large-scale projects, which are assumed per se to improve the quality of the urban fabric… This dominant culture … sees the solutions to problems of urban decay and consequent social polarisation in the concentration of urban functions… In this view urban welfare results from adherence to specific standards of density and ratio of infrastructure and services, for which adequate space should be allocated. (Vicari, 2001, pp 109–110)

To be sure, in Bologna the knowledge and experience of residents is not treated instrumentally based on authoritative arrogance. Rather, public professionals have a sincere commitment to enabling the realisation of residents' ideas, needs and desires within the present practical, legal and political limits. This conformity with the formal boundaries set to the process implies that *unifying differences* is restricted. It is out of the question to take the lived experience of residents as a starting point or to contest the formal boundaries. Consider the consequences of

excluding the experience which Dusnella (who we met in the previous chapter) has of many grave problems in the neighbourhood around hidden criminality:

> 'Currently it is a zone that for its structure, … and for the buildings like the social housing, … very cheap, has a lot … of Chinese … a lot of Nigerians, who have almost taken complete rule over some streets, Pakistani, a few Moroccans … and Tunisians, okay. Then there's the whole Ex-Mercato zone where there are shops run by … mostly Nigerians … The Nigerians who are in this zone tell me that **almost always shops are forms of cover up, I mean, drugs, prostitution**, and of **a reality apparently invisible but everyone knows it** … Then … there are Pakistani, Indian, Egyptian and Moroccan shops. **These commercial activities are apparently legal**, … are normal, also I go there to buy things … Well then, all this is not a peaceful business, this is in my view a business that **escapes all control**. Because around a commercial activity they make their countrymen come, okay, as shop attendants, okay. I give you a working request, you come here as shop attendant in my shop, after six months I get you a permit, and you remain illegally in Italy, … and you go to do whatever you want, usually expanding the files on organised crime. … And the horrible thing is that … there's a unification of the Italian mafia, Sicilian and this immigrant criminality … A small shop that sells fruit and vegetables that for the largest part of the week doesn't have almost anything, then one day it is stuffed with fruit and vegetables and then you find that he is catching flies all the days. However, he stays there, I mean, he has interests. Well, **who looks beyond the obvious,** and doesn't organise workshops that much about projects, **goes to do something about these things here**. Well, … **this is the territorial situation, but to understand it you would have to go to get to know it**.' (Dusnella – resident)

This narrative confronts us with a completely different type of **actionable understanding** than **nuts and bolts**. Dusnella talks about problems in the neighbourhood which are "apparently invisible, but everyone knows it". In this narrative, Dusnella frames herself as the hero of the story who "looks beyond the obvious" in contrast to others who

are only concerned with "organis[ing] workshops … about projects". This sustains the view that "to understand it you would have to go to get to know it"; i.e., going into the neighbourhood, especially after dark, and looking critically at what is going on behind the façade of everyday commercial activity and private housing. Dusnella explained during the interview that these problems are related to the cheap housing, socioeconomic inequalities, a growing foothold of organised crime, absence of control by local law enforcement authorities, Italy having changed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration over the previous decades, and deficient systems of social welfare and integration. These issues have not been addressed in the conversations that public professionals and residents have had and an imminent solution is not likely to follow from their current **actionable understanding**. To change this, public professionals and residents would require the communicative capacity for **struggling** with the complexities of many serious local problems.

   In conclusion, public professionals and residents in Bologna managed to turn different types of knowledge, experience and emotions into concrete proposals by focusing their communication on translating broad ideas, plans and desires into the **nuts and bolts** of plans for the physical regeneration of the neighbourhood. The *substantive issues* at hand took shape through a structured deliberative process which inhibits **struggling** about the nature and boundaries of knowledge and experiences. As a result, their **actionable understanding** is mainly based on a **Planning** rather than a **Community** narrative. However, the complex nature of local problems requires public professionals and residents to extend their communicative capacity to *unify differences* beyond the formal boundaries of their conversations. Therefore, they will have to recognise the **struggling** involved in discussing *substantive issues* and adapt their **actionable understanding** beyond what can be translated into **nuts and bolts**.

Summary and implications: communicative capacity and struggling

Habitual communicative patterns are not just kept in place by the ways in which the *situation* is enacted, but also by the *substantive issues* that emerge when public professionals and citizens encounter each other. Discussing *substantive issues* is a process of constant **struggling** with a great many different bits and pieces of information, experiences and emotions. Public professionals and citizens are often lacking in their communicative capacity for recognising the nature and value of others'

actionable understandings as their conversations tend to follow habitual patterns. This is not out of ignorance or ill will; they simply need to take on board a great deal of information and knowledge about problems, rules, policies, people, (recent) history, changes and solutions, as well as experiences with and emotions about certain ways of working, suffering from problems, being excluded, and success and failure. While discussing *substantive issues*, public professionals and citizens tend to limit their **struggling** to a habitual pattern of communication instead of seeking new, creative ways of *unifying differences*. They can improve their capacity to communicate about *substantive issues* by enquiring into how their situated performances of their **actionable understanding** (cognitive boundaries, grounded experiences and definitions of expertise) can be integrated to *unify differences*.

Struggling clarifies why the **actionable understanding** public professionals and citizens have of participatory practice does not always facilitate them in *unifying differences*. Discussing *substantive issues* involves a great many bits and pieces of information, experiences and emotions which public professionals and citizens communicate to influence understanding of the issue at hand as well as to be recognised as a legitimate participant in the conversation. They tend to get into the habit of discussing *substantive issues* according to an **actionable understanding** of what they need to know in order to act, how to come by this expertise, and who or what can provide it. While this communicative pattern does enable them to discuss *substantive issues* in certain ways, it limits their sensitivity to the **struggling** involved with making sense of what is said and what this means.

Hence, public professionals and citizens need communicative capacity for integrating **actionable understandings** in ways that *unify differences*. That means, for instance, that when some of them signal, as in Bologna, that talking about concrete decisions and implications of formal plans leads them to neglect many relevant and significant experiences and problems, they could work on getting **under the skin** of particular people, problems and processes. In contrast, when they realise, as in Amsterdam, that they are spending most of their time delving into the nitty-gritty of specific issues without much in the way of lasting results, they could try to direct their conversations toward pinpointing the **nuts and bolts** of more structural solutions. In both cases, public professionals and citizens should be sensitive to people **taking a stance**, as in Glasgow, to defend their own knowledge and experiences and dismiss the value of those of others. They should both treat this as a sign that their conversations are following a restrictive habitual pattern, as well as actively work on turning hard-and-fast

stances into practical agreements. More specifically, public professionals and citizens can overcome their habitual pattern by adapting the situated performances of their **actionable understanding** in three ways.

First, the capacity of public professionals and citizens to communicate about *substantive issues* is limited by their cognitive boundaries. Everyone naturally has a *bounded rationality* (Simon, 1945/1997) – cognitive limits on processing information formed by individual experiences and influences from the organisation or social environment – for taking in, meaningfully translating and acting upon all the information, experiences and emotions they are confronted with. Some people have a natural ability to absorb and balance a lot of different bits and pieces of knowledge, views and experiences, while others are barely able to keep track of what is going on at a meeting beyond their own standpoint and interests. This is related to their position in participatory practice; for example, facilitators have to mediate between different views, information and emotions, while some people are just there to promote or defend their own particular project or activity. This does not mean that they cannot overcome their cognitive boundaries and integrate. But doing so requires communicative capacity for recognising, lowering and adapting the cognitive boundaries which limit mutual understanding.

The discrepancy between policy ambitions to *unify differences* and practical opportunities for actually doing so is most glaring in Glasgow. Here, public professionals and citizens have to take into account the views and needs of all the 'partners' and the 'community', as well as policy objectives and statistics at the urban and national levels. As they only have limited discretion to "get their heads round and feel comfortable with" (Gail) all of this, they are **taking a stance** by only taking in what fits with their own beliefs, feelings and knowledge. In Amsterdam and Bologna, public professionals and citizens demonstrate greater capacity to communicate across their cognitive boundaries, but here also practical limits on getting **under the skin** or pinpointing **nuts and bolts** inhibit their ability to adapt their **actionable understandings** in order to *unify differences*.

Second, communicative capacity for discussing *substantive issues* is influenced by experiences grounded in the 'system world' and the 'life world' (Habermas, 1984b; Hartman and Tops, 2005). Despite well intended and often successful attempts at *integrating* differently grounded experiences, deep seated barriers continue to exist between the worlds of **Planning** and **Community** (see Chapter Four). Working for a public agency and aiming for long-term structural solutions, public professionals like Mike, Angelo, and Alberto take a 'bird's eye view'

(Le Corbusier, 1967) of statistical data for the entire neighbourhood or city, regulative norms and legal procedures that need to be adhered to, and the technical or allocative implications of alternative solutions. In contrast, citizens like Kelly, Riet, and Dusnella are the 'eyes on the street' (Jacobs, 1961), experiencing such local problems as health issues including smoking, obesity, and depression, homeless men urinating next to a playground, or shops being used as fronts for criminal activities in a concrete, embodied way , that is, seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling these problems for themselves. Participatory encounters, of course, bring public professionals into contact with everyday life and problems, while citizens gain understanding of laws, budgets and plans. But they need to stay alert to the **struggling** that might be taking place under the surface of apparently *integrated* experiences grounded in the system world and the life world.

Participatory encounters in Amsterdam seem to bring public professionals and citizens into contact with each other's worlds, enabling them to understand, for example, their mutual needs, practical opportunities and limitations in doing something about a dilapidated half pipe facility. Nevertheless, when a conflict emerges, it turns out that there is not always that much mutual "empathy of… both worlds" (Mourad). In Glasgow and Bologna, the worlds of **Community** and **Planning** are much further apart, with public professionals and citizens much more inclined to be drawn into the logic and dynamics of their own experiences. Although they appeared to manage to *unify differences* effectively in Bologna, this was more in terms of the system world than the life world, restricting their **actionable understanding** of the **nuts and bolts** of the *substantive issues* at hand.

Third, the definition of what constitutes relevant and legitimate expertise affects the capacity of public professionals and citizens for productive conversations. Such definitions can range from strict and narrow to vague and comprehensive, and they can be explicit or underlying, and generally accepted or contested. While the issues at hand and the ways in which these are addressed might seem natural to those involved in the encounter, closer inspection often reveals how underlying beliefs, values and feelings are subtly excluded from the conversation. Ostensibly effective discussions of *substantive issues* can easily become unproductive because public professionals and citizens neglect, misinterpret or misunderstand each other in relatively small scale, often hidden, and seemingly erratic and idiosyncratic ways. Such 'internal exclusion' (Young, 1996) is anything but harmless, as it can create a situation in which one side (usually citizens) have the feeling they are not being listened to or taken seriously, while the other side

(usually public professionals) cannot understand why the others do not appreciate the conversations they have worked so hard to facilitate. Acts of 'passive resistance' (Scott, 1985) then start to dominate the discussions of *substantive issues*, feeding into further frustration, engrained beliefs and antagonism, and, as such, limiting the ability of public professionals and citizens to *unify differences*.

Of the three cases, public professionals and citizens in Bologna adopt the strictest definition of what counts as relevant and legitimate expertise. On the one hand, this enables them to communicate about how broad ideas and desires can be translated into concrete proposals. On the other hand, expertise on many 'hidden' problems is excluded because it cannot be captured in formal regeneration plans. In Glasgow, the goal is to comprehensively cover the particulars of all local problems and recognise everyone's expertise, but a clear idea of the kind of capacity needed to do so is absent. Different definitions of expertise are pitted against each other, with stories of success subtly ignoring the value of citizens' lived experiences or the understanding of the needs of 'the community' gained by walking around in the area rather than relying on surveys. Public professionals and citizens in Amsterdam share a tacit understanding that the details and stories of specific issues need to be absorbed "like a sponge" (Yvonne). But, as the huge effort involved in doing this does not always lead to solutions, frustrations, misunderstandings and antagonism also regularly surface in this case.

Discussing *substantive issues* is intimately related to the *relationships* between public professionals and citizens. Integrating **actionable understandings** is not a neutral process of connecting the dots between various bits and pieces of information, but a *social* process of recognising, empathising and appreciating. **Struggling** comes down to the capacity of public professionals and citizens to communicate the nature, meaning and value of their knowledge and experience in ways that others will acknowledge, and, similarly, to being willing to recognise the value of others' expertise. When public professionals and citizens fail to really *unify differences*, their **actionable understanding** can take the shape of interwoven threads hanging loosely together like a badly knitted sweater. Discussions of *substantive issues* can easily be dominated by **struggling** for recognition and stalemate between oppositional beliefs, putting the benevolence and sustainability of the *relationships* that public professionals and citizens have under serious strain. The next chapter will discuss how the situated performances through which public professionals and citizens build and maintain their *relationships* affect how they address each other and whether they manage to *unify differences* and develop *cooperative styles of relating*.

Making connections: building and maintaining relationships

*'[I]t all depends on the relationships that you build up …
There are a lot of actors who each have their own interests.
So it's always balancing … how you get those actors into
a conversation and keep them talking.'* (Margreet – area
manager, Amsterdam)

The previous chapter revealed that bringing public professionals
and citizens together is not sufficient in itself for *integration* because
discussing *substantive issues* is a social process strongly intertwined with
their *relationships*. This chapter turns to how they build and maintain
their *relationships* by constantly **making connections** between a
great number of people, policies and problems, although the potential
connections far exceed the prospects of actually doing so. As Margreet
(the area manager from Amsterdam who we met in Chapter Four)
states in the opening quote, "it all depends on the relationships that
you build up ... [and] how you get [local] actors into a conversation
and keep them talking". Building and maintaining *relationships* requires
much more than a mutual commitment to empowerment. Of course,
their encounters would be futile if public professionals and citizens did
not recognise each other as valuable partners or were not willing to
invest in social bonding. However, **making connections** is far from
straightforward, since public professionals and citizens enact **regimes of
competence** which stir up countless emotional and functional needs
that motivate collaboration, while at the same time bringing about many
tensions, barriers and misunderstandings that frustrate their *relationships*.
Therefore, they need the capacity to communicate about how to enact
cooperative styles of relating: in other words, ways of empowering each
other to participate in discussions, take decisions and act on problems.

In Glasgow, public professionals and citizens try to improve their
relationships by **converting each other** to what each one of them
considers to be 'genuine' collaboration rather than exploring what
they themselves actually mean by collaboration or practical ways
of integrating their different interpretations. In contrast, public
professionals and citizens in Amsterdam **approach each other** by

converging and clashing about the functional and emotional grounding of their *relationships*, which, as a result, do not often stabilise or yield structural changes. Having experienced new types of *relationships*, public professionals and citizens in Bologna *keep a distance* from each other by not developing their *relationships* beyond formal rules and roles. In each case, then, building and maintaining *relationships* happens according to a habitual pattern instead of nurturing the capacity to communicate about how to *integrate* their divergent **regimes of competence** to sustain *cooperative styles of relating*.

Glasgow: converting each other

> 'I want to see people empowered, because I think they're dead disenfranchised… [T]his community should be supported in its aspirations and shouldn't be told what its aspirations are and then how they're going to do it.' (Mary – resident)

The *relationships* between public professionals and residents in the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) are determined by an inclination to prioritise strong personal beliefs about the commitment that others need to make to empowerment over the ability to actually empower their *relationships*. The statement of Mary (the assertive resident who praised community expertise in the previous chapter) that people are "dead disenfranchised" is illustrative of the commitment among public professionals and residents in Glasgow to breaking new ground for a different **regime of competence** to guide their encounters. By **converting each other**, like Mary, they try to convince each other to pledge to empowerment rather than exploring the differences in their interpretations of what this might mean in practice. By trying to transform their *relationships* into what they believe to be 'genuine' participation, public professionals and residents devalue their capacity to communicate about concrete options for **making connections** through *cooperative styles of relating* that could move their conversations forward.

To be sure, public professionals and residents in Glasgow are not fighting all the time about their beliefs, and positive personal *relationships* certainly exist. During meetings I attended, they were friendly with each other and tried to collaborate in solving local problems. Before and after meetings, they chitchatted while taking a bite and a drink from the light buffet that compensated for the evening hours in which the meetings took place. Nevertheless, they experience difficulties in **making connections**; that is, they do not often manage to link up

their practices to yield concrete, visible results and strengthen their social bond. Public professionals and residents indicate that they first have to get others to adopt their own deeply held, and yet poorly defined, ideals of participation before they can turn to exploring the possibilities for solving local problems. These attempts at **converting each other** are grounded in divergent **regimes of competence** that inhibit *cooperative styles of relating* and hence their capacity to communicate about productive ways of **making connections** between people, problems and policies.

As the analysis in Chapter Five demonstrated, about half of the public professionals and residents in Glasgow think that the GCPP is not **doing it right** unless everyone internalises the belief that 'the community' has to be properly supported. The narratives of such active residents as Kelly, Mary, Alastair and George support the view that the GCPP does not bring about 'real' or 'meaningful' engagement and it attempts to "educate or re-educate the people away from the way Glasgow City Council has been educating them and telling them how Glasgow City Council wants to do it … [to] tell them 'Here's another way'…" (Alastair). But more is going on than just residents fighting to **convert** public professionals to a more empowered **regime of competence**. Public professionals like Liam (the somewhat disillusioned manager we met in Chapter Five who says he still believes in community empowerment) and Louise (a Community Planning officer who is optimistic about her efforts to enthuse other people) are also trying to ground *relationships* in a new **regime of competence**:

> '**What the community wants is empowerment**, the ability to make decisions, locality budgeting. Why wouldn't we give the community now, let's move it to another level, say we'll give the budget to another structure that says you can commission and buy in the resources that are relevant to your community. That's … what local government should do… [B]ut **it's a tough one for people to understand**, it's really, really tough. **I'm a great believer** that we should be … handing more control to local communities who are properly regulated and can show a responsible attitude towards being able to manage resources. If you give up control, you'll get more control.' (Liam – regeneration manager)

> '**I think genuinely that people want to be involved in the decisions that affect them**, and that's the one that

captured their imagination. When decisions are made about services in their area they want to be at least informed about those decisions and at most collaborated on how those decisions came about. We were very, almost novice, almost slightly naïve in our approach, or certainly I was, in translating the vision for Glasgow on Community Planning to the letter [laughs] when we were telling people that they had an opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them and that they could be involved in the Community Planning process, and … we have to work harder to bring communities into the heart of that. **And I'm really enthusiastic and passionate about my work, and I really believe in it as well**, so that comes across to people. So **I think that caught people's imagination**.' (Louise – Community Planning officer)

Both Liam and Louise base their narratives on the *causal belief* that productive *relationships* will only be brought about if the idea of "empowerment" really catches "people's imagination". Liam indicates that moving "it to another level" is "a tough one for people to understand" if you are not "a great believer". Therefore, Louise states that the idea of "empowerment" only "comes across to people" if you are "really enthusiastic and passionate" and "really believe in it". This tendency to **convert each other** is understandable, because ideas and beliefs can provide a much more certain basis for action than 'the facts' in the complex, ambiguous and changeable **work in progress** of *situations*. During the interviews, Liam and Louise both stated that lacking factual evidence about the positive effects of community engagement does not affect their belief in its intrinsic value. In other words, for public professionals and residents in Glasgow, building and maintaining *relationships* is strongly tied to 'believing' in a new **regime of competence**.

However, this ideational approach implies that they limit their *relationships* to one-sided and ill-defined ideals rather than exploring the concrete meanings of these ideals in practice by dealing with actual problems and letting *cooperative styles of relating* emerge. The stories of Annette (the manager who told the success story of the Stuff Bus in Chapter Six) and Alastair (the proactive resident who explained why Community Planning is not **doing it right** in Chapter Five) illuminate the implications of this way of addressing each other:

'**I think we all still behave quite functionally and quite within our business silos**. In terms of coming together at Community Planning, **the funds that we see and decide together how we allocate our Fairer Scotland Funds are just topping in the scheme of things**, you know, several hundred thousand pounds for South. Um, if you take my pot of money on capital investments, that's the works done on buildings, the budget that I'll spend this year alone will be over 30 million. And that's just on, just on the fabric of the buildings. I'll spend another 6 million pounds on repairs, my staffing budget is 6 million pounds, um. So if you think of the money we're talking about at Fairer Scotland Fund level, um, and what we potentially allocate through there extra, you know, Stuff Bus, etcetera, it was 50,000 pounds we put into that. So in the grand scheme of things… And it'll be the same, the Health Board's resources for hospitals, for primary and secondary care in the South, … [the Community Health and Care Partnership] budget is huge, Police budgets are huge. **So we still have our budgets and we still do the things that are suited to our business**.' (Annette – housing manager)

'**Oatlands … had quite a nice distinctive, um, block of flats, … which, um, the local population were reasonably happy with,** because it gave them an identity and so on. **The population were moved out, these flats were knocked down, and modern flats [were] put in that place**… [E]verything was being pushed through, … because if Glasgow City Council says 'That's what's going to happen, it's on our plan', then tough, you know, **the local community has no say** … Now, the trouble was that a lot of the original people thought they were buying back into this new housing … And then it dawned on them that Glasgow City Council had obtained control of some of these flats and houses for social housing. So, **one old lady** for instance, um, she actually found the next door neighbour was a drug addict. And **the drug addict kicked her door in eventually and pinched her television set and sold it, for drugs probably**. Right? She brought this up at a meeting, and I was supporting her, … **she wanted the door strengthened to at least keep the junkie out, but she was told that Glasgow City Council didn't**

approve of that because doors have to be easy enough to kick in, in case there's fire, and she needed to be rescued. **And she was really angry. And it's that anger, … and that feeling of alienation that permeated a lot of people** in Oatlands. First of all … the houses they were proud of bulldozed down, and then the builder got money to build these things and sell them, you know. And Glasgow City Council got what they wanted, their social housing. And the people were left holding what? You know, houses, blocks of flats, full of social, immigrants and so on. There was a lot of animosity there.' (Alastair – resident)

Both narratives communicate that the absence of (sincere) commitment of among public professionals and residents is the main cause of their lack of productive *relationships*. Annette tells a 'story of change is only an illusion' (see Chapter Four): while the GCPP on paper might seem to embody a broad and structural effort of all local public agencies, they "still behave quite functionally and quite within [their] business silos". Their collaborative budget is diminutive compared to single organisational budgets, so that the GCPP in reality is "just topping in the scheme of things". Alastair tells a 'causal story' that links a concrete situation to larger problems, solutions, and value judgements (Stone, 1989): Oatlands residents (heroes) were proudly living in their housing blocks until Glasgow City Council (antihero) came in to demolish and reconstruct them, and put in social housing for their own good without giving a say to the local community. This plotline builds to a climax of desperation and anger when an old lady (hero) is robbed by a drug addict (antihero) and does not get the help that one would expect. Both stories, then, justify the view of Annette and Alastair that **converting each other** is the only way to improve things for the better.

As we already saw in Chapter Four, public professionals and residents in Glasgow have limited opportunities for lifting their *relationships* out of the sphere of beliefs about an ideal **regime of competence**. In the UK, relationships between public professionals and citizens are relatively unequal and distant because residents are not legally entitled to make public decisions, do not have any legal grounds to oppose decisions made by local government and private developers (Ellis, 2000; North, 2003), and often lack the administrative structures, expertise and financial resources to deal with complex decision-making processes (Morrison, 2003; Dinham, 2005). To illustrate, while voluntary organisations in Scotland are numerous (circa 250,000 bodies)[49] and 47% of residents are active in a community or voluntary organisation,

a striking 87% of residents are not very interested in being involved in policy making (Scottish Executive Social Research, 2005). So, *relationships* between public professionals and residents are likely to be dominated by conflicts over the **regime of competence** rather than *cooperative styles of relating*. The narrative of Sara, a resident who has become very sceptical by participating in the CRG, explains this situation nicely:

> '**[I]t's totally upside down to what it should be**… [I'm] … critical of the lack of understanding within the higher levels of Community Planning mostly. And **they're imposing the structures that they want** on, you know, the lower levels, such that the staff, at the kind of lower levels aren't been given much leeway in how they can develop things… So even though the staff in every local Community Planning area might understand how that engagement should really work, they can't implement that because it's not in line with what they've been told to do ... Which is unfortunate, because I think **it would work better if it was … less, um, forced**, you know, kind a, and if there was more understanding about how things work. And I think that's the major problem, that **there's a lack of understanding**… of the Voluntary Sector, of the structures that were in place and need to be in place. And because, and **it's then being forced down**, everything is **coming from the top down** rather than within community structures **it should always come from the bottom up** ... And to be honest, the majority of voluntary and community groups … don't want that, **they automatically resist it if they feel it's being forced on them**. And **there's a lot of good work that goes on**, and a lot of voluntary and community organisations that do a lot of work in the area, and it's unfortunate that's it's not being, um, fed into somewhere properly. **It's just a lack there in, um, involving people properly**.' (Sara – resident)

Sara's narrative portrays the *relationships* between public professionals and residents according to the conventional metaphor of top down/ bottom up. By treating the 'top' ("the higher levels of Community Planning") and 'the bottom' ("the staff in every local Community Planning area" and "voluntary and community groups") as taken-for-granted categories, Sara can draw a picture of the GCPP as caught in

an impasse between upward and downward pressures. At the moment, policies, structures and decisions are "being forced down" from the top while "it should always come from the bottom up". "[V]oluntary and community groups … automatically resist it if they feel it's being forced on them." According to Sara, the *relationships* between public professionals and residents are under constant pressure because "it's totally upside down to what it should be" and there is "just a lack … in, um, involving people properly". Until the 'top' is **converted**, public professionals and residents will continue to have a very small margin for **making connections** in ways that lead to *cooperative styles of relating*.

Public professionals and residents mainly **make connections** by having informal meetings to get to know each other, exchange information about their daily practices and local problems, and explore possibilities for collaboration. Liam and Annette both find this personal contact with other managers one of the more promising, yet poorly developed, aspects of Community Planning. The narrative of Zahraa is particularly interesting in this respect, because at the time of the research, she had just started in a newly created position for the day to day management of the Community Reference Group:

> '[J]oining the organisation **I had to obviously build a relationship** with the CRG members … So, I started to contact them as much as possible, so I would email them, I would phone them, and I would **have little introduction chats with** them, would try and arrange meetings with them to go and see them … I … would not meet them in any way formal, but make sure it was all very informal. Really to build up relationships … , **talked about myself and my background**, um, asked them what they did. Went out, … have been doing a lot of visits going out to organisations where they're either working or representing groups. Um, having them in here, explaining to some of the members, … which, um, are from an ethnic minority background, **who I don't feel have the full understanding of what is going on**. **Approaching them**, bringing them into the office, explaining, going through the rules and procedures, step by step, explaining the processes, giving them options. And I think by now I think I've got a good relationship with them… **I feel quite confident** because I think I have a good relationship with them ... But **some of them do have a number of issues** that have been raised. Either have tendencies of borderline

racism, … **they haven't said it to me directly, but have hinted towards that**. Um, or in some cases maybe just gender … and maybe they might see me as being young and not understanding too much of the communities. So they've asked me about my role and have asked me about "Where did you work before and what did you do, what background, what are your qualifications?" **So I have to maybe clarify myself, you know, repeatedly**…, which is fine, I didn't mind doing that … But **my understanding of that in their body language** was picked up really quickly.' (Zahraa – Community Planning officer)

Being new on the scene, Zahraa is investing a lot of time and energy in "little introduction chats", "go and see them", talking "about myself and my background", making "sure it was all very informal", "approaching them", and responding to "their body language". By doing so, she tries to create a sense of trust and familiarity to legitimise herself as being **converted** into a shared **regime of competence**. As a result, she states that she now feels "quite confident because I think I have a good relationship with them" even though "some of them do have a number of issues" and "I have to maybe clarify myself … repeatedly". Notice the normative leap that supports Zahraa's narrative: "joining the organisation I had to *obviously* build a relationship" with the residents. Although the ability to be amenable, honest and empathic is certainly important for **making connections**, Zahraa stops short of trying to get things done, make deals, open up previously closed opportunities and restore damages. **Making connections** requires emotionally profound *relationships* as much as effective actions aimed at helping people with their problems and bringing about concrete and visible changes. However, because public professionals and residents give such great emphasis to **converting each other**, they limit themselves to convincing each other of the sincerity of their commitment to an empowered **regime of competence**.

Thus, the way in which public professionals and residents in Glasgow build and maintain their *relationships* undermines their capacity to communicate about practical opportunities for **making connections** between people, problems and policies and letting *cooperative styles of relating* emerge. They are primarily building and maintaining *relationships* by **converting each other** to their own beliefs about a **regime of competence** of 'empowerment'. They will only fully commit to collaboration if they have the impression that others are

properly **converted** to its 'true meaning'. By enacting their **regime of competence** in this way, **making connections** becomes more a matter of striving for recognition and legitimacy than of finding ways to get things done. Therefore, public professionals and residents in Glasgow would benefit from recognising that building and maintaining *relationships* does not just come down to **converting each other**, but is an ongoing process of **making connections** that facilitates the emergence of *cooperative styles of relating*.

Amsterdam: approaching each other

> 'I was really pleased that despite the resident committee being furious with [my organisation] I managed to keep good contact on the relational level. Because I continuously, well, kept on communicating, also was being open about the dilemmas.' (Hetty – housing manager)

Public professionals and residents in the Amsterdam Neighbourhood Approach (AW – *Amsterdamse Wijkaanpak*) tend to invest a lot of time and effort in building and maintaining their *relationships* by **approaching each other**. That is, instead of focusing on the 'true' meaning of empowerment as in the Glasgow case, public professionals and residents are engaged in a continuous process of converging and clashing to create more mutual understanding and trust. This results in *relationships* like that of Hetty (the housing manager mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Five) and the "furious" residents she was facing who still "managed to keep good contact". Public professionals and residents not only **approach each other** physically through regular personal contact, but, more fundamentally, in an empathic sense by becoming more aware of others' personal circumstances and more answerable about their own practices. **Making connections** in this way enables public professionals and residents to bring about small scale solutions and develop *cooperative styles of relating*, but also makes their *relationships* vulnerable to misunderstandings, power inequalities and deep seated emotions. Thus, their communicative capacity remains dependent on the **regime of competence** inherent to the *relationships* between specific persons who regularly **approach each other**.

Although **approaching each other** does not mean that mistakes, tensions and conflicts are always avoided, the norm for finding solutions continues to be investing in mutual understanding and trust. Public professionals and residents in Amsterdam believe that only by **approaching each other** both functionally and emotionally they

will be able to **make connections** with distant persons or invisible problems, resolve or prevent tensions and conflicts, and arrive at small scale and concrete interventions that might generate unexpected results. At the same time, they indicate that *cooperative styles of relating* are very difficult to achieve and sustain in light of the high turnover of people, the criticism of mistakes that are made, and their inability to influence large scale processes, policies and budgets. Indeed, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam strive to adapt their **regime of competence** to generate more durable, large scale outcomes, but they continue with **approaching each other** in doing so.

Public professionals and residents give great emphasis in their practices to being *aanspreekbaar*, which literally means the possibility of being approachable and more generally means being answerable for one's behaviour, but more broadly signifies a willingness to be open and honest in **approaching each other** through direct personal contact. This is done, for example, by going from door to door to invite residents to participate in meetings or activities or to talk with them about their problems, organising social events, presenting new plans in the streets or community centres, having regular collective walks through the neighbourhood to see what problems need fixing, having informal chats about mutual expectations of resident initiatives, trying to respond immediately to complaints, questions, and requests, and negotiating with each other about how to get things done. The associated **regime of competence** is nicely illustrated by the following stories from Linda (a middle level manager at a housing corporation) about helping out a tenant, and Dennis, the neighbourhood manager who told us about the difficulties in renovating a playground in Chapter Six.

> 'Last year for example we had a tenant who … had a very difficult period behind him, was in debt repayment, um, almost had everything back on track and also wanted to tidy up his house, but of course didn't have any money for that. Then we said 'Well yeah, we'd like to, um, actually sponsor you, pay your paint, but then you have to paint it yourself, or you look for someone to paint it.' And **that's what happened … via our [neighbourhood] manager because after all he is a well known face in the quarter and because of that a bit more intimate**. Hey, he gets in touch with that and … [he] comes in here with it, like "Yeah, what can we do with it, what do we want with it?" Eventually the neighbours offered help, they painted and then I said to him "Now we have sponsored you, um, you

have to do something in return for the quarter, even if it is just serving coffee for a morning in the neighbourhood centre." And with that you get him … out of his isolation and, um, well, like, out of his house. Um, so … you hope for some social contacts and a bit more trust in the quarter that he's doing it. And he has a good start again that he, well, yeah, literally I think a little push, um, to get someone again, well yeah, take control of his life again in a good way. **And these are of course very small things and it's made to measure and you have to come across it**, because you're not going to ring the doorbell and ask like "How is it going here and what do you need?" Um, **but that means listening very carefully**, um, and then I think, yeah, neighbourhood managers are very important for a corporation for … **if you talk to residents, what do you hear, what do you overhear, and what can you do with that**.' (Linda – housing manager)

'But then also when you go with that request [for renovating a playground] to the Department of Maintenance **you immediately get,… "Yeah, but what is the policy?"** "Yeah", I say, "Policy.…", they were still lagging behind in that… Well, I think two years ago that play equipment was put there, um, half a year ago the policy was finally finalised. Yeah, **if you have to wait for all that, then it becomes a terrible drag**. And then it comes in handy if you, like, that the residents who supported it, that you visited that [adjacent] school, that you did all the preparation already, which **gives you that extra bit of persuasiveness to realise it**. Plus, well, all right, you have to have finance, but that was … also taken care of in the meantime. Yeah, in such a situation you notice, yeah, that **it is very difficult because people retreat into their own area**, like "Yeah, but we are Maintenance, so we only maintain." I say "But you install play equipment all the time." "Yeah, yeah, we *do* that, but then you have to follow a procedure." Well, looked into it, well, procedure appeared to be not really necessary. I said "Well, procedure is not necessary, looking into the residents is also not necessary, I already did that for you." "Um, well, ok, we'll do it then." But, it was a bit on the border and, yeah, then **you have to … collect a lot**

> **of arguments to make sure that in the end they'll
> implement it**.' (Dennis – neighbourhood manager)

Both stories are based on the 'causal belief' that *relationships* can only be
productive if public professionals and residents are **approaching each
other**. Linda talks about a colleague who found out about a tenant in
social isolation and economic hardship and managed to give "a little
push" in the right direction by talking about it with his colleagues, the
resident and neighbours. In her view, they could only 'come across'
a creative solution for this otherwise hidden problem because her
colleague was "a well known face in the quarter" and was also "listening
very carefully". In a similar vein, Dennis shares his experiences of
getting a Municipal Department to execute a plan he had come up
with together with several resident groups to refurbish a playground.
He says that he was only able to prevent "people retreat[ing] into
their own area" and "it [becoming] a terrible drag" by "collect[ing] a
lot of arguments" and having "that extra bit of persuasiveness". Thus,
public professionals and residents **make connections** between people,
problems and policies by keeping in touch with personal situations,
convincing each other to collaborate, and improvising beyond policies,
procedures and formal job descriptions.

Approaching each other is a subtle and fragile practice, though.
Taking away social barriers and getting people to approach and trust
each other is very difficult in a neighbourhood in which residents face
many serious personal problems and public professionals are overloaded
with work because they have to deal with all of these problems. The
emergence of *cooperative styles of relating* often hinges on the *relationships*
between specific people and the activities of several key individuals.
Diana (the active resident who told us about domestic violence in
Chapter Five) is such an individual: a cheerful woman who arranges a
weekly meeting of immigrant women for informal chat and discussion
of personal problems, activities such as computer lessons or gym classes,
and getting information about services from public professionals who
she invites to come along. She explains what makes **approaching
each other** both necessary and problematic:

> 'I also help people here in the quarter a lot, that's also
> something **that's very nice**. Um, and **people also come
> to talk to me a lot about their problems, because they
> have developed ties with me**, especially the women in
> the group. And also from outside… But I have to be very
> careful with that … I'm fine with supporting and listening

and if possible giving advice, but for the rest you have to do it yourself, also in terms of paperwork. But … when it is very personal then I say "It's better to go to someone who can do something for you, because if I do it and it's wrong then I'll be in trouble." And then I find someone for them, the Service Centre or the Support Point Women … And I notice that **if someone trusts someone in the neighbourhood that it's then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else**. And that's where I often get stuck. It's pretty difficult, I can't always take that role… It really takes a lot of energy, hey, really a lot, because there's a lot of problems. Here in Bos & Lommer there's also a lot of domestic violence. Yeah, **there are really very big problems, but you don't hear about it. It only goes to someone who they truly trust**. And I think **that's really terrible**. Because they're afraid to go to the police, they're afraid to go anywhere.' (Diana – resident)

Diana puts a lot of effort into **making connections** between people with problems and the right professional organisations, but is also limited in her personal time and abilities. Her narrative sustains her mixed feelings about this: on the one hand, Diana finds it "very nice" to help a lot of people by building and maintaining personal *relationships*, but on the other hand she thinks it is "really terrible" that trust forms such a crucial factor in solving problems. Sensitive personal problems like domestic violence or poverty are difficult to resolve because residents do not feel comfortable in **approaching** public professionals, as they might not speak the language properly, not know where to go, feel ashamed or afraid, or not trust the police or a housing corporation to solve their problem. As a result, public professionals find it very hard to get access to the complex and ambiguous stories behind each individual case, determine the best way to solve the specific problems, or find the time, resources and legal options to actually do something. In the case of domestic violence, for example, the police can only take action legally if they have received a formal complaint. Thus, the downside of **approaching each other** is that "if someone trusts someone in the neighbourhood that it's then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else". Constantly widening the number of people engaged in *cooperative styles of relating* means that a lot of effort has to be put into **making connections**.

Public professionals and residents devote a great deal of time and energy to **approaching each other**, often without the benefit of

feeling that their efforts are translating into concrete results. They all constantly run into a complex and ambiguous array of details that they cannot solve personally, but requires them to engage in concerted action on several issues at once over a long period of time. This requires public professionals and residents to be responsive to each others' demands, ideas, capacities and constraints, to be open and patient in negotiating and listening, and to accommodate each other in finding pragmatic solutions. However, their *relationships* are often put to the test, because the ongoing, protracted and intricate process of **approaching each other** harbours frustrations, tensions and conflicts about the low degree of perceived benefits. Therefore, some public professionals and residents employ a rather dauntless practice of **being recognised** that bypasses complexities and nuance to strive for a more effective and durable **regime of competence**. The narratives of Mohammed and Bart (respectively young and elderly proactive residents) are illustrative:

> 'There's a renewal area and at a certain moment when the demolition is almost there, then the residents who have to move can put their bulk garbage outside more often. Not once a week, but twice, three times, until the demolition takes place, and it can be increased to daily. **That's one of the things in the Interim Management Plan. But if the Department of the Environmental Police doesn't know that that applies to only a few streets, they'll continue to write out fines.** Happened. Yeah, has happened, sad, utterly sad, utterly sad. At a certain moment **I have, um, made pictures of the controlling officers to be able to prove to the City District "Look, this is what's happening."** I noted names because they said "Yeah, [Mohammed] everything's nice and all with your nice stories, but it's not true." **I stood there when the head of the Cleaning Services was called by the Environmental Police and … didn't pick up, and he docilely continued with his fine.** But, these are things that really need to be coordinated in a plan … and then of course **you need to check whether it works and all parties are in fact doing what they should do**. Because that's really the biggest problem. You can write plans to infinity, but … as long as policy remains policy … and that residents don't experience what's the impact of the policy, guys, then we don't have a policy.' (Mohammed – resident)

'And **it could be better**. Look, because … you all have the same goal, which is letting the neighbourhood bounce back up, that's actually it. Only, yeah, then I do say "Corporations, if things emerge during a meeting on which you have to act, then do it." Nowadays we have a list of action points, we already have that for some years. But we also had an action point that was there for three years. **Well I don't accept that anymore**. So then it's immediately, um, **then they get the red card**. Then we just make sure that it gets to … the City District Council. Well, that's a nice means of power. **In the open podium you can put them in the pillory. I do that without any problems**. Yeah, **you do disturb the relationship but that will be all right later. Because you need each other** and, um, often what you see happening is people want to, but people can't.' (Bart – resident)

In the first instance, we might be inclined to label these residents power hungry 'usual suspects'. However, taking a look at their narratives reveals that both stories use a structure similar to the story of Alastair earlier in this chapter to legitimise their desire for more effective and durable *relationships*. Mohammed (hero) had an encounter with Environmental Police officers (antiheroes), who were fining residents for putting bulk garbage outside while they were actually allowed to do so under an exception clause in the Interim Management Plan (plot line). He tried to convince the officers that they were wrong, but they did not believe him and, as they could not reach their superior to confirm that the hero was right, they continued with their fine (climax). Mohammed uses this story to justify his scepticism of public organisations and to legitimise his proactive behaviour of checking "whether it works and all parties are in fact doing what they should do". Similarly, Bart narrates how he (hero) is not intimidated by the power inequality between residents and a housing corporation (antihero). When the housing corporation did not do what they were supposed to do (plot line), he put external pressure on them by "put[ting] them in the pillory" at the City District Council meeting (climax). Thus, using a confrontational approach that might "disturb the relationship but that will be all right later", Mohammed and Bart are striving to **be recognised** and to integrate their **regimes of competence** to foster more *cooperative styles of relating*.

However, public professionals and residents have limited opportunities for lifting their *relationships* out of the practice of **approaching each**

other toward a different **regime of competence**. In the Netherlands, governmental actors are highly interwoven with actors in its political, economical, and societal environment (Van der Meer and Dijkstra, 2000) and the outcomes of community participation always greatly depend on the discretion and *relationships* of public professionals and residents (Van Hulst et al, 2009; Michels and De Graaf, 2010). Public professionals and residents in Amsterdam are therefore inclined to see **approaching each other** as the only way to strive for more *cooperative styles of relating*. Samir (the social worker we met in Chapter Five) explains this dynamic with a narrative about giving wrong information to residents and involving them in cleaning events:

> 'So I go to the residents, um, and then I suddenly hear that the housing corporation has decided to postpone the demolition process [for two years] … I know absolutely nothing about this decision and then … the residents tell you "Oh, we've got this letter, actually the relocation working group isn't necessary anymore." And that while we've worked hard for years to form a working group to arrange the moving process better… **This kind of, all, um, miscommunication… you lose the confidence of the residents. They don't know who to trust…** At three resident meetings I've presented maps … of the spatial planning of [the area]. And after the third time we found out it was completely wrong. But we got those every time from the City District and every time they've sent wrong information. And if we go to the City District they say that they've got them from the housing corporation. And if you go to the housing corporation they say "That project manager didn't tell us", and then the contractor says something else… **[So the residents] don't trust the official bodies anymore… They have more trust in their imams, or I don't know who, than in us.** And we have to breach that. So [when] we do cleaning events … , you don't have to bring 2,000 letters door to door, but **you have to have 20 [key figures] and** then say "Yeah, guys, we're going to organise a cleaning event, could you bring five of your people?" …, **just call a day in advance** to, um, to the mosque or an association, a play ground association…, **that's how it works**. But … then you're dependent on those kinds of people. If those people … go to live somewhere else then you lose that group as well.

That's why **we instead have to, the role of those key figures, … take over. But that's only possible if you win the confidence of people**.' (Samir – social worker)

Samir explains how his attempts at **making connections** are limited by the fragility of **approaching each other**. Because of all sorts of "miscommunication" between the public agencies, residents "don't trust the official bodies anymore … [and] have more trust in" local key figures. As a result, the *relationships* between public professionals and residents are highly "dependent on those kinds of people". Samir would like to be more effective in **making connections** between public professionals and residents by taking over "the role of those key figures", but "that's only possible if you win the confidence of people" which, again, is constantly frustrated by "miscommunication". Samir makes a normative leap here by stating that finding a way out of this cycle is "*only possible*" by cultivating trusting *relationships*. As such, he is taking **approaching each other** for granted as the best way of **making connections** rather than adapting this **regime of competence** to break through the habitual pattern to allow more *cooperative styles of relating to* emerge.

In sum, public professionals and residents in Amsterdam find themselves entangled in a habitual pattern of **approaching each other** to maintain open, respectful and trusting *relationships*. They consider their converging and clashing about functional and emotional needs the only way to solve local problems, but they also lament that the great amount of time, effort and energy they invest in it often proves to be insufficient for overcoming power inequalities or generating wide ranging results. Frustrations, tensions and conflicts put their *relationships* under pressure, with the result that public professionals and residents desire a more effective and durable **regime of competence**. However, **approaching each other** continues to be the habitual pattern of communication, as public professionals and residents keep on building and maintaining *relationships* by being accommodating, responsive and trusting each other. Thus, although they demonstrate awareness of the value and intricacies of **making connections**, public professionals and residents should enhance their capacity to communicate about how their **regime of competence** is strongly dependent on the *relationships* between specific people and thus inhibits more effective and durable *cooperative styles of relations* to emerge.

Bologna: keeping distance

*'In preparing a meeting we decided together the main scheme …
selecting the photos and the documents to expose…, the best way
of presenting, … writing the guidelines… So … every step was,
um, coordinated …'* (Marina – facilitator)

In the case of Bologna's Structural Municipal Plan (PSC – *Piano
Strutturale Comunale*), public professionals and residents do not get stuck
in a communicative pattern of contestation about ideal *relationships* or
of being accommodating, responsive and trusting. Rather, they **make
connections** between broad ideas and desires and concrete solutions
without developing their *relationships* beyond formal rules and roles.
They have a tendency to limit their **regime of competence** to the
official remit of their encounters by **keeping distance** – collaborating
within the officially granted discretionary space and making decisions
by adhering to formal structures, plans and procedures. Public
professionals and residents have designated roles and do not try to
develop these further or expect others to do so. Although they all
appreciate their newfound ability to **make connections**, several of
them identify a need for more *cooperative styles of relating*. However, for
now their capacity to communicate about *relationships* remains limited
to **keeping distance** based on a **regime of competence** of formal
rules and roles.

  Public professionals and residents certainly engage in personal
contact, but their *relationships* do not extend beyond the meeting room.
They do not make personal *relationships* the basis for determining the
nature of problems or the most appropriate solutions. Rather, public
professionals and residents think that structured deliberation, supported
by facilitators and participative methods, provides an ideal **regime
of competence**. The participative workshops, which provided a set
of formal structures, plans and procedures that empowered them in
formulating concrete regeneration proposals, were not intended to
cultivate personal *relationships*. As Marina (who works for *Associazione
Orlando* and was involved in the preparation and facilitation of
Laboratorio Bolognina-Est) indicates, "every step was, um, coordinated".
The meetings were carefully prepared in order to coordinate the
interaction between public professionals and residents on a functional
level. Although they tend to see **keeping distance** as a first step toward
cooperative styles of relating, a counter narrative indicates that overcoming
this habitual pattern requires the capacity to communicate about the

power inequalities, antagonism and underlying values and emotions involved with **making connections**.

Public professionals and residents in Bologna devoted themselves to designing and following formal rules according to which problems in the neighbourhood were to be discussed. All meetings were extensively prepared beforehand by the facilitators, who designed what they considered to be optimal procedures, together with local government officers, who determined the *substantive issues* to be covered. During the meetings, they jointly guided residents through the discussions and decision making by maintaining this separation between procedural and substantive roles. The civil servants provided information about the political, legal and technical constraints and options, and had to check the decisions against all legal requirements, while the facilitators mediated the discussions and had to build trust. As the stories of Chiara (the professional facilitator we met in Chapter Four) and Giovanni (a long-time resident) show, this **regime of competence** enabled residents in **making connections** between the different viewpoints among them and the regeneration plans of the Municipality:

> '[F]or example, … **the meeting about the green areas and the sustainability, mobility**. Um, it was in a [room] of the Church ... and **there were about 50 persons. And I was the only facilitator** and there were about, um, eight students [to assist me]. Well, **first of all we have all the people in the circle** ... And in front they have many panels with the images of the project and with the plan of the PSC. And **the technician [of the Municipality] explained in general what the plan says about Bolognina and the green areas**. And then we have a [map], a big cartography, but, um, [simplified], … I mean that, um, … we chose the ... main streets, the main, um, reference points ... also the ... public facilities ... and … all the green areas of Bolognina. And, well, we have some [flipcharts] with, um, the first, one focused [on] one question about ... [how] they [will use] the green areas. **And in the plenary session we explain the kind of work we will do with the people** and we asked them to concentrate [on] how actually they live [in] Bolognina … the different ways to [use] the parts of the green areas … and what are the problems that they know and they have actually. **And we divided the plenary session into little groups**. In each group there were about five, six persons, and … there was also a student and he tried to

help the people to read the [map] and to note on the [map] what the people say … **And they have about one hour of time to make this work** and then we altogether **in … the plenary session we report on the [flipcharts] all the things the citizens said.** And … we tried to… understand what the reason for conflicts was. And … **then we work again in little groups about what, um, people think and want to change** with the transformation of the new area.' (Chiara – facilitator)

'[T]he work in small groups favoured … dialogue … **[O]ne issue that came out of the small groups that did not come out in such a strong, clear way during the … plenary assembly, was the issue of safety**, I mean fear, also I am afraid. Um, [people] who were afraid, primarily linked to the nightly hours evidently, didn't come forward during the … plenary assembly, but it came out in the small groups … Then, um, also in the small groups fear and the sentiments that make you afraid were talked about, related to the fact that maybe there are no, I mean, the fear that you can determine if you make several decisions, within the group still. **Then this thing was faced and in some parts I could say overcome.** I mean, it was substantially said that if, um, the new area was to become a place for, um, initiatives, um, to become a place in which persons walk around also the sentiment of fear had to be discussed. I mean, … otherwise it would only be a place, [but] to become a place … that can overcome the fear, … there have to be constantly good persons in this area.' (Giovanni – resident)

Both narratives are based on the causal belief that **making connections** is only possible if public professionals and residents are **keeping** distance from each other while discussing solutions to local problems. Chiara gives the example of meetings about green spaces in which civil servants ('technicians') used maps to explain "what the [urban] plan says about Bolognina and the green areas", while the facilitators made clear "the kind of work we will do with the people", "divided the plenary session in little groups" to discuss the issues at hand, and "report[ed] on the panel all the things the citizens said". Residents abided by the substantive and procedural arrangements "to make this work" and articulated what they "think and want to change". Similarly, Giovanni

says that residents "who were afraid … didn't come forward during the … plenary assembly, but it came out in the small groups". While plenary meetings provided a forum for more general discussion in which people who had no problem with talking in public participated , the small groups created a more intimate environment in which less outgoing people could express their fears about leaving their house after dark. According to Chiara and Giovanni, then, local problems can only be solved if the content and remit of the regeneration plans are properly understood and their discussion follows procedures which make residents feel comfortable with talking about them.

Therefore, as Marina already stated, a **regime of competence** was enacted in which "every step was … coordinated" in order to make the meetings as structured and effective as possible in arriving at consensual outcomes. The division of roles among public professionals created a certain professional distance from the residents, because the professionals acted as visibly distinct entities with their own competences and responsibilities (either procedural or substantive). Public professionals and residents thus managed to maintain a deliberative space for effective decision making by **keeping distance**. The importance of grounding their *relationships* on a **regime of competence** of formal rules and roles becomes visible in the narratives of Flavia – a facilitator in *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est* who works for *Associazione Orlando* – and Alberto – the urban planner who talked about the importance of legal rules in Chapter Six:

> '**[I]f during the** *Laboratorio* **the rules change, like in our case, for the facilitators, you also have a problem of personal credibility** … In this case fortunately it was the fault of a third party, therefore it was understood in the end. Um, … because the citizens have built all their expectations on something that turns out to be impossible. Um, so, **a facilitator has to be able to work in a situation of certainty**, also of conflict, but of certainty, **within parameters** … [T]he workshops have **to construct trust** in the end between the public administration and citizens. When things like this happen they lose their credibility. So, for the facilitator the personal credibility matters a lot. In this case, for the Municipality it has been greatly important to have the facilitators from this association, because it's an association that notoriously has, in short, has a very strong autonomy, also from the Municipality, which nevertheless funds us. And **some of us have a strong personal**

authority so that, how to say, ... we have confirmed that it was true that an error had occurred, not dirty play, right .... With other things, in other cases the things have ended badly. Um, so, ... with regards to Bolognina–Est, **the relationship with the public administration has been a relationship of a certain clarity**, in the sense that we have, ... there have been conflicts, some ambiguities … However, in short, it has been a relationship that we can say **we have been accepted** as the ones who, um, reporting the indications of the citizens, carrying out a function of strong pressure. So, **this has greatly lowered the direct conflict between the administration and the citizens**.' (Flavia – facilitator)

'**[W]e participate in the workshops as ... the technicians, the employees, the functionaries, um, that later follow the legal instructions and the evaluations that you are obliged to do** in the project. I mean, the *Laboratorio* ... is attempting to orient the citizens towards the best decisions, um, a type of work that's a lot more creative. **Our work is more obligatory**, because we, when the project is evaluated in the *Laboratorio* and if the deposit is decided by the Municipality **for the verifications, we take the laws** and say, um, "The project is in accordance with the SIR rules, the project is in accordance with the legal rules for hydraulics, the project is in accordance with the environmental rules, the project is in accordance with the rules for building density, for the limits in distance, for the minimum number of parking spaces, um, ... for the minimum quantity of greenery" … **The work we do is**, how to say, **already codified**, already, um, where there are already norms, ... that have to be respected by the designers who have, um, created the project, … and **we don't do anything but verifying these ideas**. It's a, **we can't invent anything**.' (Alberto – public professional)

Both narratives serve to legitimate **keeping distance** as a habitual pattern by asserting that formal arrangements enabled public professionals and residents to avert instability, spontaneity or flexibility in their *relationships*. For Flavia, "to construct trust" and prevent conflict "a facilitator has to be able to work in a situation of certainty

... within parameters''. The *relationship* between the residents and the Municipality underwent a serious test when it turned out that several proposals the residents had been working on were not possible (plotline). Because of their ''strong personal authority'' and ''relationship of a certain clarity'', the facilitators (heroes) were able to convince the residents that a sincere error had been made instead of ''dirty play''. As a result, the residents accepted this setback and mutual trust was not harmed (climax). Likewise, Alberto says that he could only participate by sticking to the formal remit of his job, to ''follow the legal instructions and the evaluations that you are obliged to do''. Making a normative leap by stating that ''we don't do anything but verifying these ideas'' and ''we can't invent anything'', Alberto shuns any possibilities for building and maintaining *relationships* beyond his formal remit. As such, public professionals and residents in Bologna are upholding a habitual pattern of **keeping distance** and do not strive for more *cooperative styles of relating*.

Public professionals and residents value the fact that the participative workshops facilitated **making connections** and breaking a longstanding pattern of adversarial communication. In Italy, *relationships* between public professionals and citizens are traditionally characterised by high levels of distrust and dissatisfaction (Koff and Koff, 1999, p 158; Lewanksi, 2000) because the government tended to deem its own interests, legal correctness and authorisation processes more important than responsiveness, public accountability or social consequences (Furlong, 1994, pp 79-86, 105). The Bolognina neighbourhood used to be characterised by strong personal *relationships* sustained by local branches of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party, but this radically changed with the decay of these institutions, the growth in the number of immigrants and young residents, and the persistent conflict with the Municipality about regeneration of the derelict areas. To turn this 'story of decline' (see Chapter Four) around, public professionals and residents perceive the participative workshops as a first step toward more *cooperative styles of relating* in the future. The stories of Giuliana and Ivano (two long-time residents of Bolognina) about the current *relationships* support this storyline of gradually **associating** public professionals and residents (again) to the area, its problems and each other.

> 'Well, in the meantime I have got to know a lot of people, [chuckles] I really got to know ... For example, **I have met some new citizens who**, um, of an area with new housing, ... that **we didn't know at all**. And moreover

it is like, it is a zone of new housing, I thought that there weren't any problems over there. Instead, **we have discovered that we have common problems**. There we have got to know some new people, um, with whom we have exchanged emails and with whom we have really only followed the *Laboratorio* up to now. Um, and **I have, instead, deepened the contact with other people who I knew very superficially** … Also with regards to socialising, [chuckles] moreover, we have recently really exchanged ideas about how you can [chuckles] construct places where you can socialise on the route of the linear park. Um, so, … it has been a working experience on the whole, where we have had the opportunity to get to know other people and also to mark several differences, right, with other people, other, um, and other associations … However, **this is not socialising, it has more been a confrontation**. How to manage the park instead, there it already begins, **we begin to get ourselves together in a common project**, in the end, to do, really to do. To socialise among us and to offer occasions for socialising, but at the same time to start by ourselves, how we can live together in this park, about what do we still have to think?' (Giuliana – resident)

'Young people for instance, young people proposed an area for, um, skateboarding area. [chuckles] I remember some old people: "What is this?" [imitates gasping in amazement]. "That's skateboarding." "What?" "Boards with wheels…" "And what do they want here?" "Well, they have some little proposal, I think it's important if they can [chuckles] have this opportunity." "Ao." [makes disapproving hand gesture] And it was very interesting to see these **little conflicts**, right, in the discussion, [chuckles] [a bit of] incomprehension. But it was very interesting to organise this negotiation, hey, and I think it was very, very interesting for the organisation of Bolognina-Est. … it was **learning for all people** who participated in the *Laboratorio*. … **[it] was a little step, um, forward**.' (Ivano – resident)

Both narratives are framed as a 'story of helplessness and control' (see Chapter Four): whereas the *relationships* between public professionals and residents had seriously declined, now they have established a

preliminary but promising basis for more profound and widespread **association** in the future. Giuliana says that she "met some new citizens who ... we didn't know at all", "discovered that we have common problems", "deepened the contact with other people who I knew very superficially", and started "a common project" for the management of the new linear park. In her view, this is the first step in going from "confrontation" to "socialising". Ivano talks about how elderly participants really struggled to comprehend and appreciate the ideas of the group of youngsters who suggested the creation of a skate park. Despite "[a bit of] incomprehension" and "[a bit of] conflict", they arrived at collective proposals and learned about each other. Therefore, it was "a little step forward" in a much longer process of maintaining engagement, enhancing mutual understanding, supporting regeneration and developing more *cooperative styles of relating*.

In contrast, several residents challenge the idea that **keeping distance** should be seen as a first step towards **associating**. The participative workshops might have been instrumental in **making connections** on a functional level, but have neither touched upon *relationships* on a profound level, nor do they offer the potential for doing so in the future. This 'story of change is only an illusion' (see Chapter Four) is supported, for instance, by the narrative of Gino (the long-time resident we met in Chapter Five) which places the participative workshops in the much wider social history and dynamics of the neighbourhood. He says that the traditional inhabitants and the new generation of residents (immigrants and youngsters) have not been **making connections** at all. Elderly residents do not feel comfortable leaving their houses at night because of the lack of meeting places and the groups of youngsters and immigrants loitering about. Although they may not be causing any problems, their attitudes, manner and language make elderly residents feel uncomfortable and anxious. **Making connections** between the old and new generation of residents could benefit their *relationships* as well as the regeneration process. However, little is known about the life patterns and views of these new groups, who, despite efforts by the organisers, barely participated in the workshops. The prospect of this changing is slim, because the idea of public professionals getting more deeply engaged in local social dynamics does not fit with their habitual pattern of **keeping distance**.

In conclusion, public professionals and residents in Bologna resort to **keeping distance** in building and maintaining their *relationships*. They communicate by sticking to formal roles and rules in order to arrive at concrete decisions and build mutual understanding and trust. Public professionals and residents value this **regime of competence** as

decisions are grounded in the predetermined substance and procedures of the participative workshops. Although their ability to **make connections** remains circumscribed as a result, public professionals and residents consider that a first step has been taken toward developing *cooperative styles of relating* in the future. However, the participative workshops only cover a small part of all local residents and public professionals, as well as a limited number of topics and a short period in time. If they want to expand their ability to **make connections** between people, problems and policies, they need to develop their capacity to communicate about their *relationships* and adapt their **regime of competence** beyond **keeping distance**.

Summary and implications: communicative capacity and making connections

This chapter revealed how habitual communicative patterns are intimately tied up with the *relationships* between public professionals and citizens and their capacity for communicating about them. Building and maintaining *relationships* comes down to constantly **making connections** between people, problems and policies on a functional and emotional level, the scope of which far exceeds the actual prospects of doing so. While they are **struggling** with *substantive issues* and engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation*, public professionals and citizens enact **regimes of competence** to empower each other to take part in conversations, make decisions and act on problems. At the same time, this constantly puts their *relationships* under pressure because mistakes, unexpected problems and misunderstandings lead to tensions and frustrations. The habitual pattern according to which they handle these pressures and possibilities limits their ability to talk about actual ways of addressing local problems. Therefore, public professionals and citizens need to enhance their communicative capacity for adapting the situated performances of their **regimes of competence** to more *cooperative styles of relating*.

   Making connections grounds 'the practice of community', or the process of 'group association', in the **regime of competence** that transpires from the ways in which public professionals and citizens build and maintain their *relationships*. They are constantly **making connections** with a great many people, problems and policies on both a functional and emotional level while being limited in their practical opportunities for actually doing so. Whereas for some, **making connections** is their official job (for example, facilitators), all public professionals and citizens are involved in bringing people into contact

with each other, expressing beliefs about how they should interact with one another, and hinting at who should and who should not be at the table. **Making connections** in these ways can certainly enable them to empower each other to take part in conversations, make decisions and undertake actions. However, as public professionals and citizens tend to build and maintain their *relationships* according to a habitual pattern, they limit their ability to address local problems in the face of the mistakes, unexpected issues and misunderstandings that inevitably put pressure on their *relationships*.

In other words, they require communicative capacity to integrate their **regimes of competence** with *the law of the situation*. If, for example, public professionals and citizens find themselves stuck in attempts to **convert each other** to 'genuine' empowerment, as in Glasgow, they could explore the implicit and restricted meanings of their conflicting **regimes of competence** and work out practical strategies for enacting *cooperative styles of relating*. They could do so by **approaching each other**, as in Amsterdam, to develop more responsive, accommodating and trusting *relationships* while jointly addressing concrete local problems. If they feel that such *relationships* would not be sufficient to enable them to generate sustainable results, they could, as in Bologna, develop a **regime of competence** of formal rules and roles that facilitates making joint decisions while **keeping distance** in terms of *relationships*. More specifically, public professionals and citizens can adapt their habitual communicative pattern by adapting the situated performances of their **regime of competence** in three ways.

First, the capacity of public professionals and citizens to communicate about their *relationships* is affected by the demeanour of their contact. Mutual attitudes and posture can range from rather formal and detached to very informal and close. Although most of the time they engage in at least a minimum of social etiquette by, for example, having a chat before or after meetings, we should be attentive to the many situated performances through which public professionals and citizens express what are proper ways of getting along, which intentions they believe others have, and who is a competent participant in the conversation (and who is not). Citizens in particular can be wary of the intentions of public professionals due to a long history of not being taken seriously. In turn, public professionals tend to be sceptical of citizens who turn their past frustrations into anger and accusations. *Relationships* can easily become unproductive if public professionals and citizens do not manage to enact the 'communicative etiquette' (Wagenaar, 2007a, p 39) of taking the time to listen to each other, keeping promises and

appointments, and making a sincere effort to do something about the problem at hand.

Especially in the Amsterdam case, we saw how easily *relationships* can be distorted when public professionals and citizens get the feeling that they are not **being recognised** properly. Residents like Mohammed and Bart, as well as public professionals like Samir, have to go to great lengths to overcome drawbacks when they notice that they are not being listened to, taken seriously, or trusted in the course of their efforts to address problems, amend plans or improve services. In Glasgow and Bologna, public professionals and citizens are concerned with recognition beyond formal arrangements and superficial *relationships.* While in Glasgow this means that they have to convince each other that they are legitimate participants, in Bologna this is mainly a matter of looking for opportunities for **association** with each other in the future. Thus, in each case public professionals and citizens are building and maintaining their *relationships* by trying to get one another to acknowledge the importance and effects of their demeanour, words and actions.

Second, the fragility of their *relationships* affects the ability of public professionals and citizensto communicate productively. Taking part in participatory practice often comes at great personal cost. Public professionals and citizens invest time and energy in getting things done together. However, these efforts, and the *relationships* emerging from them, are inevitably frustrated by unforeseen antagonism, resource constraints, misunderstandings, diverging organisational decision-making cycles and information systems, or tacit cultural differences (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973/1984; Huxham et al, 2000; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). As I argued in Chapter Five, good institutional design can help to prevent a lot of this **work in progress**, but it is impossible to control all that is happening and prevent unforeseen issues from emerging. Having to deal with disappointment is an inevitable and demanding aspect of **making connections** and can quickly wear down *relationships*. Therefore, public professionals and citizens have to keep on talking about the efforts, tensions and frustrations surrounding their *relationships*.

In Glasgow, public professionals and citizens are constantly trying to convince one another of the sincerity of their commitment in light of serious challenges. Annette takes the marginal collaborative budget of the GCPP as a sign of the weakness of *relationships* between public agencies, while Zahraa makes a lot of effort to build *relationships* with residents and win their trust by having informal chats, responding to body language, and explaining her background. Public professionals

and citizens in Amsterdam point out all the effort that goes on behind the scenes to get organisations to collaborate, to persuade residents with serious personal issues to seek professional help and to become trusted figures in the community. In Bologna they managed to insulate their *relationships* from such pressures during the participative workshops, but now these have finished they face a long period in which the resilience of their *relationships* is put to the test.

Finally, the communicative capacity of public professionals and citizens is subject to the practices through which certain key individuals build and maintain *relationships*. Sometimes a participatory project is championed by a civil servant who is officially in charge or a facilitator who gains the trust of all the participants. But more often than not there are various other public professionals and citizens who take the lead on certain issues and play a key role in keeping others committed to their *relationships*. It is important to be aware of who these 'facilitative leaders' (Bussu and Bartels, 2014) are, how they connect people, problems and policies, and how this affects their communicative capacity. Facilitative leaders can promote communicative capacity by getting people to talk to each other and keep the conversation going. This comes down to far more than just convening a meeting; facilitative leadership implies the ability to engender a sense of mutual understanding, trust and interdependence, as well as to create the actual operational leeway for achieving concrete results (Innes and Booher, 2003a; Neaera Abers, 2003; Ansell and Gash, 2007; Forester, 2009).

In Bologna, the facilitators (urban planners, architects, external professionals, and voluntary workers) played a crucial role in enabling citizens and public professionals to make concrete decisions rather than ending up in conflict because of unexpected setbacks and misunderstandings between divergent viewpoints. By preparing the format of the meetings, managing the discussions, and reporting the results, they facilitated the emergence of new and productive *relationships*. As facilitators are absent in Amsterdam, public professionals and citizens of various backgrounds are bringing people into contact with each other, negotiating behind the scenes for certain things to happen, and trying to enhance mutual understanding and trust. The variety in the practices of neighbourhood managers, social workers, and proactive residents enables tailored responses to particular problems, but does not always facilitate structured and effective encounters. In Glasgow, the role of facilitative leader is mainly reserved for formally appointed officials like Zahraa and Gail, but they find it difficult to facilitate stable and productive *relationships* amidst everyone's efforts at **converting each other**.

In conclusion, this chapter shows that public professionals and citizens cannot devote attention to actually solving local problems if their *relationships* are constantly distorted. They need the capacity to communicate about how they build and maintain their *relationships*, so that they can **make connections** to empower them to do something about the problems they face together. This means they need to overcome their habitual pattern of communication by adapting their **regime of competence** to more *cooperative styles of relating*. As such, we have completed our tour of public encounters in participatory practice. When public professionals and citizens meet, they are engaging with the **work in progress** of their *situation*, **struggling** with *substantive issues*, and **making connections** to build and maintain their *relationships*. While all of this implores them to *unify differences* through *cooperative styles of relating* in the *total situation*, public professionals and citizens tend to limit their communication to habitual patterns as they enact their **ongoing business**, **actionable understandings** and **regimes of competence** in a fixed and unchanging way. The final two chapters summarise and review the communicative capacity needed to adapt the nature, tone and conditions of their conversations to the *law of the situation*.

Conclusion: communicative capacity in participatory theory and practice

[D]emocracy is just this, productive interrelatings. (Mary Follett 1919, p 585)

Having immersed ourselves in the daily participatory practice in which public professionals and citizens encounter one another, we can now step back and recapitulate our illuminated understanding of (the theory of) communicative capacity. This chapter explains how we can understand public encounters in participatory practice in terms of the communicative in-between and the capacity emerging from it. In light of the findings of the preceding four chapters, I argue that participatory democracy often fails to achieve its desirable purposes because public professionals and citizens tend to uphold habitual patterns of communication. They usually do not recognise how they enact these patterns, and those who do seem unable to change much about the habitual 'ongoing business', 'actionable understandings', and 'regime of competence' of their encounters. Therefore, I present the theory of communicative capacity as a means to better understand and improve public encounters in participatory democracy. The chapter ends with a call for more attention to how communicative capacity is exercised, what inhibits it, and how we can aid public professionals and citizens in having more productive conversations.

Public encounters in participatory theory and practice

In essence, this book aims to improve understanding of a notable contemporary phenomenon troubled by significant problems, questions and uncertainties: public encounters in participatory democracy. During the twentieth century, Western societies have developed around the notion that the authority to take and enact binding public decisions was reserved for the system of representative democracy and bureaucratic government. Advocates of participatory democracy challenged this system with a more plural notion of democracy, in which non-elected individuals and agencies affected by public decisions should have actual influence on those decisions and their

implementation. Accordingly, Western governments started to reform their institutions and practices to facilitate more equal, inclusive and deliberative decision making, service delivery and problem solving. A key implication of this development was that public encounters, face-to-face contact between (non-elected) public professionals and citizens, became more widespread, frequent and intensive. However, a quantitative increase in contact making does not necessarily imply a qualitative increase in shared sense making. Indeed, conversations between public professionals and citizens tend to be demanding, to say the least, and are often far from productive. The conceptual language and practical tools with which we shape and appraise these participatory encounters is inadequate in several important ways.

Initially, public encounters were not even included in democratic theory. After initial experiments with direct democracy via voting mechanisms, more structural experiences with inauthentic public participation triggered calls for reforms grounded in a system of deliberative democracy. Advocates envisaged a strong democracy in which citizens would be freed from the tyrannies of the system and enabled to make autonomous, consensual decisions based on free and equal deliberative processes. Contact with public professionals was best avoided as it would only allow for the encroachment of power inequalities and technical rationality. This citizen-centred model was then extended into a more encompassing, authentic system of participatory democracy in which attention to the role of public encounters has been growing. Participatory theory started to include communication between public professionals and citizens as an integral element, while governments around the globe increasingly facilitated more frequent and intensive encounters by adopting participatory policies on an unprecedented scale. We now recognise that the actual dynamics and outcomes of participatory policies depend to a significant extent on what public professionals and citizens do when they meet.

However, public encounters have mainly been approached from a framework of democratic theory and norms, with little attention to what goes on in-between public professionals and citizens. Public encounters require new skills, mindsets and relations that have to meet standards of collaboration, equality, trust and inclusion. To be sure, these participatory ideals and associated practices are desirable on a normative level and have proved highly effective in addressing many intricate problems which traditional democratic ideals and government structures were simply unable to resolve. At the same time, participatory encounters continue to be fraught with structural dilemmas and persistent problems, leaving what public professionals and

citizens should actually do, as well as the effects of their efforts, highly contingent and unpredictable. The key change I am suggesting, then, is not to forego participatory ideals altogether, but just to accept that they are not meaningful in and of themselves and do not guarantee authentic participation in practice. Rather than seeking to create participatory democracy by rational deduction from substantive principles or policies, we should ground our understandings and aspirations in the new meanings and patterns of interaction that emerge from encounters in the rough, rapidly evolving context of everyday practice.

I have endeavoured to demonstrate how remarkably helpful the almost a century-old work of Mary Follett is for doing so. While Follett's relational process philosophy of 'integrating', 'circular response', 'interweaving', 'the (total) situation', 'the law of the situation', 'group association', 'power–with', 'unifying differences', and 'constructive conflict' inevitably provide us with a framework for assessing the authenticity of public encounters, these notions point us toward what is actually taking place and emerging in *processes* in–between, rather than relying on a preset *substantive* framework. It directs our attention to the relational bond that connects public professionals and citizens, and the interweaving that occurs when they encounter one another. The actual meaning and shape of participatory ideals like collaboration, inclusion or equality derives from the relational process of 'group association' in the 'situation' at hand. The effectiveness and legitimacy of encounters depends on whether public professionals and citizens manage to 'integrate' all the wills, practices and factors comprising the 'total situation'. That is, do they manage to let go of whatever preset notions they bring to the encounter and allow something new to emerge that they all consider better than what they started out with? This outcome should not be an imposed decision or a compromise, but a qualitative change in the in–between into a new unified emergent will. In this way, we can conceive and assess what happens in–between public professionals and citizens as a relational process.

Taking a Follettian approach to participatory democracy thus implies that we approach public encounters as a distinct phenomenon with real world consequences. Although many excellent studies have already examined the communication between public professionals and citizens, they are based on an individualist ontology and substantive democratic norms. Based on (often implicit) teleological reasoning, public professionals and citizens are depicted as separate beings or fixed social positions working hard to overcome barriers of misunderstanding, power abuse, or pluralism in order to achieve solutions to shared problems. In this approach, the encounter is a

medium for exchanging information, influencing decisions and getting things done, while communication needs to be free from distortions to the articulation and exchange of free, rational and equal arguments. In contrast, I propose we acknowledge the ontological status of the encounter – that is, seeing the world in terms of the innate interweaving that constantly takes place in-between people and the situations they are in – and explore how its relational processes structure the actual opportunities and abilities of public professionals and citizens to say and do things. This means we do not look at or strive for *idealised* communication but *real* communication: the situated, embodied, social practices through which public professionals and citizens perform their in-between into being in daily practice.

Hence, I set out to answer the following question: *How do public encounters give shape to participatory democracy in practice?* The methodological approach I took was an interpretive, comparative and grounded analysis of the narratives of public professionals and citizens about their experiences in participatory practice. Their open-ended, subjective, value laden, and action-oriented stories enabled me to capture participatory democracy as embodied in the information, emotions, values, beliefs, visions and norms through which public professionals and citizens interweave. Rather than working from a predefined theoretical framework, I allowed understandings, categories and theories to emerge from the practices with which public professionals and citizens navigate rapidly evolving, indeterminate and emotionally and morally charged situations. By (1) analysing the storylines, characters, metaphors, normative loops and causal beliefs they use to make sense of these practices; (2) comparing different narratives within and across three internationally diverse cases of community participation; and (3) engaging in an iterative process of reviewing literature and theorising, I developed a theoretical understanding of participatory democracy grounded in the situated practices through which public professionals and citizens enact it as they encounter each other.

The theory of communicative capacity, as explained in Chapter Two, has been informed by Mary Follett's integrative philosophy and practice theory and was illuminated by immersion in the participatory encounters of public professionals and citizens in Glasgow, Amsterdam and Bologna. The next section reviews the theory in light of the material discussed in the preceding four chapters to further clarify what communicative capacity is. While the final section of this chapter sets out theoretical implications for participatory democracy, the following

chapter spells out a number of recommendations for encouraging and supporting communicative capacity in practice.

Theory and practice of communicative capacity

Public professionals and citizens do not automatically recognise their relational condition and integrate; they need particular attitudes, abilities and conditions for that to happen. Moreover, there is no single (ideal) way of integrating; the particular shape and meaning of relational practices depend on what is appropriate according to the law of the situation. Finally, integration requires more than a single, stable one-dimensional communicative practice; it comes down to the situated performances of multifaceted relational practices in an interactive process of circular response. It is by emphasising and illuminating how public professionals and citizens communicatively enact their in-between that the theory of communicative capacity extends our understanding of public encounters in participatory theory and practice.

Communicative capacity explains why we often find a discrepancy between the theory of what should happen when public professionals and citizens meet, and what typically happens in participatory practice. In a nutshell, public professionals and citizens tend to communicate according to habitual patterns which seriously limit the ways in which they address the problems they face together. These patterns are communicatively enacted in three ways. First, public professionals and citizens engage with the **work in progress** of the *situation* in which they meet through reinforcing what they grow accustomed to and consider to be the **ongoing business**. Second, they reduce their **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand to static **actionable understandings**. And third, public professionals and citizens build and maintain their *relationships* by **making connections** according to habitual **regimes of competence**. In order to have more productive conversations, the **ongoing business**, **actionable understandings** and **regimes of competence** enacted in their encouters should constantly and dynamically be adapted to the *law of the situation* rather than remaining static habits. Therefore, the communicative capacity to recognise and break through habitual patterns of communication is desirable and will generate more effective results.

Habitual patterns of communication

Social change only occurs when deep patterns of behaviour and interaction are transformed. Even though participatory encounters

are supposed to bring about change, public professionals and citizens tend to communicate according to habitual patterns that limit their ability to generate deep change. Table 8.1 provides an overview of the habitual patterns identified in the cases of Glasgow, Amsterdam and Bologna. When we read the rows from left to right we can see that every case is characterised by a habitual pattern of communication that inhibits public professionals and citizens in adapting their conversations to the *law of the situation*. Although the local context and moment in time will always lead to differences in the nature of these patterns, it is striking to notice that public professionals and citizens communicate according to habitual patterns wherever and whenever they meet. A vertical reading and comparison of the three case columns helps to explain why this happens: public professionals and citizens tend to uphold a single mode of communication which is not ideal for all situations or purposes, but they are not inclined to change this mode of communication because it is part of a self-reinforcing loop with deep-seated, preconceived underlying narratives of how participation is being conducted and how it should be.

Table 8.1 Communicative capacity and patterns in theory and practice

	Glasgow	Amsterdam	Bologna	
Generic pattern	Making it work	Being in touch	Canalising	Communicative capacity
Engaging with **work in progress** of the *situation*	Contesting institutional format	Immersing in the nitty-gritty of problems	Creating a safe and insulated space	Integrating **ongoing business** with the *total situation*
Struggling with *substantive issues*	Defending own expertise against others	Recognising multiple forms of expertise	Defining legitimate expertise	Integrating **actionable understandings** to *unify differences*
Making connections to build and maintain *relationships*	Challenging beliefs and ideals	Pragmatic converging and clashing	Sticking to formal rules and roles	Integrating **regimes of competence** for *cooperative relating*
Sustaining *habitual communicative pattern*	Debating **Community-Planning**	Dialoguing **Community**	Deliberating **Planning**	Adapting conversations to the *law of the situation*

For example, if public professionals and citizens communicate according to a pattern of **making it work** (as in Glasgow), their encounters are mostly a matter of overt and tacit disputes between opposed views on the issue of whether 'it is working'. Failing to delve into the tension between the underlying narratives of **Community** and **Planning**, they will tend to engage with their *situation* by upholding antagonism and stalemate between those in favour of **starting from scratch** with a new, comprehensive institutional design and those against the imposition of an external and artificial framework on local practices. They will not be inclined to enquire into the diverse meanings of their vocabulary, their cognitive boundaries for recognising the nature and value of each other's expertise, or the demeanour of their words and actions. Rather, they will **take a stance** to defend their own views about what is relevant expertise and attempt to **convert each other** to what they believe to be "genuine" participation. In this way, public professionals and citizens will spend a lot of time contesting their *situation*, *substantive issues* and *relationships* rather than having constructive conversations about how to actually resolve local problems.

A pattern of **making it work** upholds debate as a habitual mode of communication. Debating can fuel antagonism between (groups of) public professionals and citizens who are each convinced that they 'know' how to do it right, while being unaware of underlying beliefs and tensions. This will be accompanied by efforts to dominate rather than *integrate*, causing conflict to continually re-emerge and little substantive progress to be made. However, debating can also promote productive conversations and integration if it is done from a relational disposition – the will to consider others in all we do and decide. Debating the underlying narratives of **Community** (participation works best through free-floating, creative and reciprocal relationships) and **Planning** (participation works best when everyone sticks to the rules and structures) can help to draw out different views about their nature and value, rather than leaving one to implicitly dominate the other, and open up space to work out a new vision and practical agreements that everyone considers to be better than their preconceived view and narrative. For this to happen, public professionals and citizens will need to learn to disintegrate their *a priori* positions and methods through more dialogical encounters aimed at uncovering and revaluating their underlying and more nuanced desires (Follett, 2003a [1942]).

However, dialogue can equally become a habitual pattern of communication. Public professionals and citizens can get entangled in a habitual pattern of **being in touch** (as in Amsterdam) in which

they tend to be engaged in extensive personal contact to jointly tackle specific local problems. Grounding their encounters in a **Community** narrative, they will bring many different ways of working and thinking to the scene and be in contact with each other in flexible, spontaneous and empathic ways. This means they will be engaging with their *situation* by **getting to grips** with what is going on, who is doing what, and what is supposed to happen. Although they will try to discuss *substantive issues* by getting **under the skin** of multiple perspectives and experiences, they can often fail to coordinate the multitude of factors and actors effectively in order to generate structural and widespread results. They will tend to refrain from looking under the surface of their ostensibly good personal contacts to explore the efforts, tensions and frustrations generated by **seemingly small problems**, how these render their *relationships* fragile, or how experiences are differently grounded in the life world and system world. Instead, they will keep on building and maintaining their *relationships* by **approaching each other** through a pragmatic process of converging and clashing. As such, public professionals and citizens will devote their time to developing mutual understanding, trust and adaptation without deepening or broadening the outcomes beyond the encounters at hand.

A pattern of **being in touch** thus sustains dialogue as a habitual mode of communication. To be sure, dialogue is the preferred way of communicating to achieve true *integration* rather than domination or compromise. By creating a setting in which they feel safe to speak their minds and listen openly to each other, public professionals and citizens can nurture honest, empathic, and respectful relationships and a common ground of mutual understanding and trust. This can lead them to develop a new, emergent shared will organically which they will follow because it is what they all want instead of it being imposed by someone else or a compromise between what they individually want. But without proper practice and facilitation, dialoguing can turn into a lot of sharing and listening without working toward any practical actions or substantive problem solving. Public professionals and citizens should therefore also learn to engage in deliberative encounters that lead to concrete results.

Yet, deliberation also runs the risk of becoming a habitual pattern of communication. If public professionals and citizens are engaged in a habitual pattern of **canalising** (as in Bologna), they will tend to communicate through guided, ordered and reasoned exchanges of arguments within fixed boundaries to make concrete decisions. Grounding their encounters in a **Planning** narrative, they might have very productive and structured conversations about the issues

falling within the remit of their encounters, while not extending their conversations beyond fixed boundaries on scope, timelines and topics. This implies they will tend to engage with their *situation* by creating the right conditions for participatory institutions that will lead to **groundbreaking** results, while discussions of *substantive issues* will be focused on specifying the **nuts and bolts** of solutions for the local problems. By **keeping distance,** they will not develop their *relationships* much beyond formal rules and roles. As a result, they will mostly avoid questioning the introduction of their participatory institutions, the definition of what constitutes legitimate expertise, and the ways in which key individuals build and maintain *relationships*. Hence, public professionals and citizens will spend their time communicating within the specified boundaries rather than wandering off into the territory of hidden problems, deep-seated emotions and personal relationships.

A pattern of **canalising**, then, sustains deliberation as a habitual mode of communication. To be sure, deliberating can enable public professionals and citizens to overcome initially adversarial mind frames through rational and structured communication about the merits of different standpoints and possibilities for consensus. It can open their minds to expressing and reassessing the motivations for their own viewpoints and to working toward joint decisions acceptable to everyone. However, deliberating can also imply a tendency not to communicate beyond preset boundaries and direct outcomes, with the risk of losing sight of excluded voices, critical views and the broader context. Such an instrumental focus often fails to resolve underlying problems and desires, so that these tend to re-emerge in the short term. In other words, deliberation should not be geared toward compromise but to genuine consensus through *integration*.

In sum, all of these modes of communication have their advantages, but none of them should become a habitual pattern. Instead, public professionals and citizens should recognise the presence and limitations of their habitual patterns and break through them by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of their conversations to the *law of the situation*. Exercising such communicative capacity means, for example, overcoming a pattern of **making it work** by noticing how *substantive issues* are discussed in terms of "you're giving us information, we assess that information, and this is what we've gone back" (Mike – police officer) versus "stand outside a school at three o'clock and seek the opinions of mommies and daddies picking up their kids" (Mary – resident; see Chapter Six). Or it can mean changing a pattern of **being in touch** by questioning the inclination to always build and maintain *relationships* by keeping "good contact on the relational

level" (Hetty – housing manager; see Chapter Seven). Alternatively, it can mean breaking through a pattern of **canalising** by exploring alternative ways of engaging with the *situation* rather than through "guaranteed timescales on the implementation of the process" (Giulio – neighbourhood official; see Chapter Five). The next two sections further develop our understanding of how communicative capacity can be exercised and why this is so important.

Communicative capacity

The preceding section has recapitulated how public professionals and citizens uphold habitual patterns of communication and has also provided some indications and examples of how they can recognise and break through these patterns. Although we have observed mainly how public professionals and citizens fail to manage to adapt the course of their conversations to the *law of the situation*, we can theorise what communicative capacity should look like in an ideal typical form. Moreover, the cases provide several instances in which communicative capacity has been successfully exercised.

Those who have skipped ahead to this point of the conclusion as a shortcut to understanding communicative capacity are likely to be disappointed. As previously noted, communicative capacity cannot be captured in a substantive definition because it is a multifaceted, situated practice that exists and evolves in-between public professionals and citizens. That is, as soon as we become part of a (community of) practice, we can immediately recognise and appreciate communicative capacity when we see it performed. Accordingly, by immersing ourselves in the situated practices of the cases we can better grapple with when and how to adapt the course of the conversation to the *law of the situation*.

Clear and precise principles or rules of good communication would do little to illuminate the actual embodied and embedded practices with which public professionals and citizens (can) communicate productively. Just as a manual for cycling does little to help a child to acquire the ability to steer, keep his or her balance and join the flow of traffic, we cannot learn how to talk together by following simple rules or checklists. It emerges from practice. In fact, the practice approach taken in this book makes it remarkably clear what communicative capacity actually is. On a theoretical level, it supports the view that communicative capacity is a shared practice between public professionals and citizens involved in concrete situations. By coming together to resolve the problems they face, public professionals and

citizens gradually develop emergent understandings of what is going on, who is doing what, which issues are to be addressed, who should be approached for what, and what words, actions and tone can move a situation forward. None of them individually *has* this communicative capacity, and neither can it be written down or dismissed as something elusive; it is evoked, performed, and sustained in their encounters, as they experience and learn what it means to communicate intelligibly together about the situation at hand and work effectively within it.

Communicative capacity is mainly absent in the Glasgow case. The conversations between public professionals and residents are more often unproductive than in the other two cases. The habitual communicative pattern of **making it work** indicates that public professionals and citizens spend a lot of time and energy contesting whether 'it is working' rather than finding practical agreements to actually make it work. A division among them was triggered by the way the GCPP was introduced: **starting from scratch** with an ill-defined hierarchically imposed policy which did not facilitate public professionals and citizens in gradually adapting the new institutional design to the **work in progress** of their *situation*. In the communicative pattern of contestation and strife that grew out of this, not only the institutional design but also the *substantive issues* and their *relationships* are subject to opposing standpoints. Public professionals and citizens are inclined to defend their own expertise by **taking a stance** and propagate their interpretation of genuine *relationships* by **converting each other**.

Within the context of such encounters, we can appreciate the ability to recognise that "the theory of how you'd plan these things in the ideal world is completely different to the practice" (Gail – Community Planning officer, Chapter Four) and to signal that their encounters are stuck because "everybody is feeling the same sense of frustration" (Liam – regeneration manager, Chapter Five). Beyond recognising the (consequences of their) habitual pattern, public professionals and citizens should work on having "that discussion … [about] what do people actually understand by" the words they use (Barry – culture manager, Chapter Five). Despite several instances of successful collaboration, they need to broaden and deepen their *relationships* as "we all still behave quite functionally" (Annette – housing manager, Chapter Seven). Having so clearly articulated the tension between **Community** and **Planning**, public professionals and citizens in Glasgow should try to go beyond debating these positions to integrate their views, beliefs and practices into new emergent visions, agreements, and activities.

Public professionals and citizens in Amsterdam have fewer problems in talking to each other. In fact, more than in the other two cases, they are very much used to having conversations about how they can solve local problems together. Their habitual pattern of communication, **being in touch**, refers to their inclination to spend a lot of time trying to understand, trust and adapt to each other to find solutions for specific local problems. But despite the value public professionals and citizens attach to having good relationships, these *relationships* often prove to be fragile, cannot always prevent misunderstanding, tensions and conflicts, and usually do not lead to widespread results. As a consequence, public professionals and citizens are constantly **getting to grips** with their *situation*, getting **under the skin** of specific *substantive issues*, and building and maintaining their *relationships* by **approaching each other**.

Immersed in this context, we can appreciate the ability to signal that they "don't know who to hold to account for" a problem (Peter – resident, Chapter Four), "it's not always that easy ... when it's about putting oneself in someone else's position" (Mourad – social worker, Chapter Six), and "if someone trusts someone in the neighbourhood that it's then very difficult to transfer that contact to someone else" (Diana – resident, Chapter Seven). Besides recognising the limitations of their **Community** pattern, public professionals and citizens should try to maintain the positive aspects of **being in touch** while also having more oversight of what is happening and who is doing what, a clearer sense of where all their talk is taking them, and more stable rules, structures and plans to support widespread results. That means on the one hand they need to keep on dialoguing when they feel "a lot of resistance against ... [something and] go into defence immediately" (Yvonne – police officer, Chapter Six), sense the need for "that extra bit of persuasiveness ... because people retreat into their own area" (Dennis – neighbourhood manager, Chapter Seven), and accept the limits on their conversations as "just the way it is" and focus on "how can you make sure that ... decisions are in fact coordinated" (Tineke – area manager, Chapter Four). On the other hand, they need to recognise more widely that often "it's all unclear ... [and] the individual person is very important" (Samir – social worker, Chapter Five), accepting that changing their pattern of **being in touch** will inevitably disturb certain *relationships*, exclude particular cherished solutions, and introduce new tensions and conflicts.

In Bologna, public professionals and citizens have a specific type of communicative capacity. In contrast to the other two cases, they have productive, structured conversations about proposals for neighbourhood

regeneration plans. The habitual communicative pattern of **canalising** alludes to their guided, ordered, rational exchange of information and arguments about all the **nuts and bolts** of how areas should be transformed. Despite the great number of public professionals and citizens who consider that this mode of communication, and the participatory institutions that enabled it, is a **groundbreaking** change in the **work in progress** of their *situation*, their **Planning** approach imposes clear limits on the scope, time and topics of public encounters. Patterns of **struggling** and **making connections** are restricted to the formal remit, rules and roles that have been determined in advance. This excludes a counter narrative of **Community** with strong concerns and frustrations about the lack of autonomy in addressing local problems on their own terms, both during and after the participative workshops.

Being situated in this context, we can appreciate the ability to signal that "frustration will grow … [if] people have been asked for [input] and they don't see the results" (Nadia – social work agency manager, Chapter Four); to ask "what are we talking about?" (Dusnella – voluntary association manager, Chapter Five); and to recognise that encounters have not been a matter of "not socialising, it has more been a confrontation" (Giuliana – resident, Chapter Seven). Next to recognising the limitations of their **Planning** pattern, public professionals and citizens should try to retain the positive aspects of **canalising** while stimulating more autonomous, spontaneous, and flexible communication. That means, on the one hand, continuing to deliberate to avoid conflict and stalemate by "delimit [ing] the field in which you can discuss, um, because otherwise the discussions … can [go astray]" (Davide – urban planning manager, Chapter Four); determining "what kind of information we needed to show … [and which] question we used to open a meeting" and "collect[ing] in an ordered fashion that what the people say" (Chiara – facilitator, Chapter Four); and facilitating to ensure that issues are identified that "came out of the small groups that did not come out in such a strong, clear way during the … plenary assembly" (Giovanni – resident, Chapter Seven). On the other hand, they need to recognise more widely that "decid[ing] the details between brackets" is not always sufficient for "let[ting] their feelings run free" (Piero – resident, Chapter Four).

In conclusion, these illustrations are all instances of communicative capacity, mostly of recognising the habitual pattern and signalling the need to break it. I have not come across situations in which public professionals and citizens actually manage to completely overcome their habitual pattern. As explained in Chapter One, the stories at the start of this book illustrate how communicative capacity is developed

from the unplanned and sincere interweaving of all the participants in the conversation, with none of them being able to communicate productively without what the others say and do. For instance, a conflict was resolved by dialoguing when Riet stood up and shared her feelings, the boys told their story and asked her to greet them again, and the alderman ensured they exchanged apologies. None of them planned to say and do these things beforehand nor could they have. As doing so is already difficult in the context of a single meeting, constantly and consistently doing so in all encounters, whilst engaging with the **work in progress** of the *situation*, **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand, and **making connections** to build and maintain *relationships*, requires prolonged and joint efforts at bringing about change. The next section provides deeper insight into what public professionals and citizens can do toward this goal.

Generic patterns of participatory practice

We have seen that it is possible yet not easy to change habitual patterns of communication. This might hold true in general, but for public professionals and citizens in particular it has to do with how they communicatively enact three generic patterns of participatory practice: engaging with the **work in progress** of their *situation*, **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand, and **making connections** to build and maintain their *relationships*. Despite the contextual differences in the ways in which they enact these patterns in their encounters, they have the same kind of conversations over and over again by statically performing their **ongoing business**, **actionable understandings** and **regimes of competence**. In the course of getting things done, public professionals and citizens tend to grow accustomed to, for example, the way in which they refer to their participatory institutions, in what kind of experiences their expertise is grounded, or the personal costs involved in taking part in conversations This makes it difficult for them to recognise and change the nature, tone and conditions of their conversations while encountering each other. However, public professionals and citizens can transform their communicative patterns by dynamically integrating their **ongoing business**, **actionable understandings** and **regime of competence** with the *law of the situation*.

A horizontal reading of Table 8.1 draws attention to the different practices through which public professionals and citizens enact the generic patterns of communication. This not only suggests that these three generic patterns are inherent to public encounters regardless of

the context, but also highlights that they need not be as habitual as they often are. For instance, the way in which they discuss *substantive issues* depends on the inclination of public professionals and citizens to defend their own expertise against others, recognise the value of multiple forms of expertise, or circumscribe what counts as relevant expertise. Whenever they notice that one particular practice is dominating their encounters to the neglect of the *law of the situation*, public professionals and citizens should flag this up and together work on practising a different mode of communication into being. In the next chapter I provide more detailed recommendations for how they can do so and what policies could support them in this challenging task. Each of the three generic patterns are discussed here, again illustrating the theory with the practices of the three cases.

First, the *situation* in which public professionals and citizens meet is a complex, ambiguous and changeable **work in progress** in which the meaning and value of participatory institutions is sometimes unclear or contested, public professionals move in and out of positions, and citizens experience problems which often turn out to be more difficult to resolve than first anticipated. They are constantly talking about what is going on, who is doing what, and what should be done as new policies, events and issues need to be made sense of and acted upon. **Work in progress** renders it simultaneously important and difficult to constantly reassess the *total situation*; what public professionals and citizens tend to do is habitually engaging with what they have grown accustomed to as the **ongoing business** of their *situation*. The **ongoing business** refers to the developing, yet mostly taken-for-granted background against which they interpret what is going on, what deserves their attention, and what are and are not possible courses of action. By enacting it statically, public professionals and citizens limit their *situation* to what always has demanded their attention. If instead they dynamically adapt the **ongoing business** by constantly integrating it with the *total situation*, it can provide a shared and evolving repertoire that enables them to talk together about the **work in progress**. Therefore, the highly interactive, adaptive and unpredictable **work in progress** of the *situation* compels public professionals and citizens to communicate in flexible, adaptive and holistic ways.

The *situation* in Glasgow is characterised by contestation of the proper institutional design because public professionals and citizens have been **starting from scratch** with their collective understanding of the concrete meanings and practical conduct of their new participatory institutions. A striking example of this habitual pattern is their shared vocabulary: while they are constantly referring to "the community",

"partnership", or "groups", they never explore what they actually mean by these words and how tacit differences in interpretations inhibit their ability to move the conversation forward. In Amsterdam, public professionals and citizens are constantly **getting to grips** with all the activities, details and interactions of the multitude of people, problems and policies. By delving into the intricate nature and dynamics of **seemingly small problems**, they often feel confused or uncertain about where all of this is taking them. In Bologna, public encounters are focused on establishing a fixed institutional design and sticking to the formal rules and procedures in order to be **groundbreaking**. While the majority of public professionals and citizens support this habitual pattern by telling a 'story of helplessness and control', several of them challenge it with a 'story of change is only an illusion' that expresses their dissatisfaction, frustrations and concerns.

Second, discussing the *substantive issues* at hand is a constant **struggling** with the nature, meaning and value of many different bits and pieces of knowledge, experiences and emotions. When they talk about local problems, public professionals and citizens confront one another with all kinds of information about problems, rules, policies, people, (recent) history, changes and solutions, as well as experiences with and emotions about certain ways of working, suffering from problems, being excluded, and achieving success and failure. **Struggling** with what all of this means and how to value it renders *unifying differences* both a crucial and challenging aspect of their encounters; public professionals and citizens tend to cope with it by habitually enacting static **actionable understandings** of what they need to know in order to act, how to come by this knowledge, and who or what can provide it, to the exclusion of other viewpoints, meanings, emotions and values. Constantly adapting their **actionable understanding** makes it possible to effectively navigate all the available knowledge, experiences and emotions. If public professionals and citizens want their **struggling** to turn into a genuine process of *unifying differences*, they need to communicate by recognising, empathising and appreciating what is being expressed.

Discussing *substantive issues* in Glasgow comes down to public professionals and citizens **taking a stance** to defend their own **actionable understanding** and dismiss the value of others' knowledge and experience, thereby making the **struggling** often highly intense. For example, several residents tend to "go in blind down and … fight" (Kelly; Chapter Six) out of frustration at having been left out of the equation in making plans. In Amsterdam, public encounters are focused on getting **under the skin** of people and problems by engaging in

extensive **struggling** with the details and underlying stories of specific situations. But as illustrated by the different stories about experiences in the life world and system world with refurbishing a playground, the empathy of many public professionals and citizens continues to be characterised by tacit cognitive boundaries. In Bologna, public professionals and citizens concentrate on specifying the **nuts and bolts** of regeneration plans, which does not benefit their **struggling** with any other knowledge and experiences that cannot directly contribute to this. Discussions of *substantive issues* are dominated by ideas, needs and problems that can be translated into physical designs and interventions rather than social activities and neighbourhood management.

Third, public professionals and citizens build and maintain *relationships* by continuously **making connections** between people, problems and policies, while the actual possibilities for doing so far outnumber the functional and emotional needs stirred up by their encounters. Engaging with the **work in progress** of their *situation* and **struggling** with the *substantive issues* at hand would require them to talk about how to empower each other to take part in conversations, make shared decisions and act on problems together. Mistakes, unexpected problems and misunderstandings inevitably lead to tensions and frustrations that constantly put the effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of their *relationships* under pressure. **Making connections** brings the centrality and challenges of *cooperative styles of relating* to the fore; public professionals and citizens are inclined to relate through a habitual **regime of competence**. This refers to the social configuration, or shared sense of who are acknowledged as legitimate participants, what qualifies as competent and meaningful (inter)action, and what are practical ways of being part of the situation and wider context at hand. Depending on whether they enact their regime of competence in static or dynamic ways, it can either empower or exclude particular persons and practices. **Making connections** can generate *cooperative styles of relating* if public professionals and citizens communicate about the habitual aspirations, standards, values and identities involved in building and maintaining their *relationships*.

Building and maintaining *relationships* in Glasgow is a matter of public professionals and citizens **converting each other** to what they consider "genuine" empowerment without exploring what their personal interpretations of this ideal actually imply for the effectiveness and sustainability of their *relationships* or practical opportunities for **making connections**. Their *relationships* are so stuck that when a new public professional enters the scene, she has to invest a lot of time in legitimising her presence to residents rather than working on

solutions for local problems. In Amsterdam, public professionals and citizens **approach each other** to sustain responsive, accommodating and trusting *relationships* that facilitate them in pragmatically **making connections**. While they often manage to get things done this way, the stories in which two residents present themselves as heroes fighting unresponsive public professionals reveal the fragility of their *relationships*. In Bologna, public professionals and citizens **keep their distance** even though they feel empowered by the new *relationships* they have experienced. As they believe that the key to their *relationships* are formal roles and stable rules and procedures, the few stories about social bonding remain highly speculative.

In a word, public professionals and citizens can exercise communicative capacity by integrating their understandings, activities and relations while they communicatively enact their *situation*, *substantive issues* and *relationships*. This will prevent them from getting stuck in static patterns and enhance their ability for productive communication. The final chapter provides more detailed recommendations for how this might be encouraged and realised.

Implications for participatory theory

Before turning to recommendations for facilitating communicative capacity in policy and practice, it is first necessary to consider the implications of the theory of communicative capacity for how we approach participatory democracy. On a general level, the theory of communicative capacity implores us to take a Follettian approach that combines a relational process ontology, an epistemology of practice, an interactive methodology, and collaborative practice. For participatory democracy to achieve its very desirable ideals of collaboration, equality, and inclusion, we should let go of the common predetermined teleological deliberative framework in favour of understanding public encounters on their own terms – that is, what happens in-between public professionals and citizens in the everyday practice in which they meet. That means recognising the ontological status of the in-between (or the encounter) and coming to an understanding of its situated performances in the push and pull of daily practice. Although I do not want to repeat the first section of this chapter, it is worth emphasising some specific directions for reconfiguring the relation between participatory democratic theory and practice.

First of all, combining Follett's relational concepts (integrating, interweaving, group association, the (total) situation, unifying differences, power with, circular response, and the law of the situation)

with practice concepts (ongoing business, actionable understanding, and regime of competence) provides us with a framework that allows us to interpret what happens in-between public professionals and citizens on its own terms. Despite their different origins and ambitions, Follettian philosophy and practice theory are remarkably complementary. Whereas practice theory proposes a relational ontology in which 'the world exists in our interaction with it ... [in] an eternally unfolding present where all is process' (Cook and Wagenaar, 2012, p 23), Follettian philosophy embodies an epistemology of practice in which 'ideas are tested and molded through experience to create a coherent but ever-changing body of collaborative knowledge' (Stout and Love, 2015, p 79). The theory of communicative capacity is a first attempt at linking these two literatures into a functioning philosophical framework, which merits further exploration and application (see for example, Stout et al, 2015).

Besides its philosophical grounding, future research on participatory democracy could use and develop the theory of communicative capacity in other cases and contexts, widening and deepening our understanding of the multifaceted situated performances through which public professionals and citizens communicate in participatory practice. I do not pretend that the theory of communicative capacity presented here comprises all possible communicative patterns and practices. Nevertheless, by using the generic elements of the theory in the analysis of public encounters in different participatory contexts we can still identify and interpret modes and patterns of communication in reference to the narratives of **Community** and **Planning**, the debate–deliberation–dialogue model, and the **work in progress** of the *situation*, **struggling** with *substantive issues*, and **making connections** to build and maintain *relationships*. In this way, we can further theorise the nature and effect of various modes of communication, identify different communicative patterns, and explore a range of ways for overcoming habitual patterns and improving participatory practice.

Doing so would also further feed into the already increasing attention to the role and importance of communication in participatory democracy. After Habermas' (1984a, 1984b, 1996) communicative ethics and ideal speech situation spurred a great amount of interest in communicative action and deliberation (Cohen, 1996; Warren, 1996; Bohman, 1998; Elster, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; Weeks, 2000; Carson, 2006; Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2009; Campbell, 2010; Carcasson et al, 2010; Elstub, 2010; Nabatchi, 2010), recent work has emphasised and explored the value and practice of dialogue (Isaacs, 1999; Tannen, 1999; Yankelovich, 1999;

Spano, 2001; Schein, 2003; Anderson et al, 2004; Heath et al, 2006; Kelshaw, 2007; Rosenberg, 2007; Black, 2008; Kim and Kim, 2008; Escobar, 2010, 2011). Moreover, studies of conflict resolution and mediation demonstrate the importance of the adversarial way in which stakeholders communicate about intractable problems, as well as a range of communicative practices for effectively resolving their disputes (Podziba, 1998; Susskind et al, 1999; Podziba, 2003; Forester, 2006; Laws and Forester, 2007; Forester, 2009). Rather than advocating any particular mode of communication per se, the theory of communicative capacity suggests that the way forward lies in exploring which situated performances suit the *law of the situation*.

All of this is not to say that participatory democratic theory is, or should be, all about communication. Although the main aim of this book is to show that communicative capacity is a vital and much neglected aspect, the "productive interrelatings" that democracy comes down to, as Follett indicates in the opening quote of this chapter, require a broader range of collaborative and participatory capacities. We need to further explore this universe of relational practice by considering such important conceptual and methodological questions as: How can we theorise relational practice? How can we evaluate it? How can we research it? How can we stimulate it? (see Bartels, 2012; Stout et al, 2015). In any case, the theory of communicative capacity helps us (understand how) to practise authentic participatory democracy into being. The next chapter reflects on what this means for policy makers and practitioners involved in its daily practice.

Recommendations: communicative capacity in practice and policy

> *[A] strong democratic community … creates new avenues for collective judgement and action that transcend the boundaries of conventional communication channels.* (Shawn Spano, 2001, p 39)

This chapter further develops the conclusion of the previous chapter and translates it into recommendations for practice and policy. It starts by once more making the argument that citizens and public professionals can improve the productivity of their participatory encounters when they learn to recognise and break through the habitual communicative patterns they sustain in-between them by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of conversations to the *law of the situation*. Exercising communicative capacity can enhance their ability to solve the problems they face together and save time, energy and cost in the process. Based on the analysis of the three cases, I provide a number of pointers for more productive communication about the *situation* they are in, the *substantive issues* at hand, and the *relationships* they build and maintain. I then turn to three recommendations for policy makers to actively support public professionals and citizens who encounter each other in everyday practice, enabling facilitative leadership, learning and change to emerge while jointly acting upon the problems at hand. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the challenges involved with learning and change and emphasising the importance and centrality of communicative capacity in the process.

Communicative capacity in practice

So much is going on and is at stake in participatory practice. Why is it so important that public professionals and citizens spend their precious time and energy on the ways in which they communicate? How does this help them to better address the problems they face together? Is there not already enough talking going on without adding talk about the way in which they talk? These are all legitimate concerns which are often voiced when I talk about communicative capacity with

practitioners. They are usually very busy with their day-to-day affairs, trying to get things done amidst many meetings, emails, phone calls, activities, planning, workshops, evaluations, and so on. I can therefore appreciate that reflecting on communicative processes, patterns and practices can seem like a waste of time, or, at best, just one of those things we should really do but for which there is simply no time. But it is exactly for this reason that communicative capacity is valuable. Much of what practitioners seem to do is talk. As time is short and ambitions are high, it is all the more pertinent not to waste time and energy on constantly misunderstanding one another, having the same conversations over and over again, and dealing with problems which keep on recurring. Communicative capacity can save time, energy and cost as it engenders more productive conversations about how to address local problems.

Public professionals and citizens tend to sustain habitual patterns of communication when they encounter each other in participatory practice. Although coming together is supposed to enhance their ability to resolve the problems they face, public professionals and citizens often struggle to have productive conversations. That is not to say they never get things done or are always embroiled in conflict. But what it does mean is that the solutions to local problems they come up with are limited because they have grown accustomed to certain habitual ways of addressing one another, having particular kinds of conversations repeatedly, and referring to their *situation*, *substantive issues* and *relationships* as if they were static. For example, public professionals and citizens can have such opposed views about what constitutes "genuine participation" that they spend little time actually talking about what can be done about local problems. Therefore, practitioners should recognise that 'the quality of communication is crucial in these emerging democratic spaces. It is not just about getting things done but also about getting to know each other better, treating each other cordially and with respect, being open for questions and suggestions' (Wagenaar, 2007a, p 38). Communication is simply a fundamental and vital aspect of participatory encounters.

Communicating well with each other will not just make participation a more pleasant (or less frustrating) experience, it will also enable us to better solve problems. You know how to find and address each other when something comes up, you are able to rapidly exchange information and generate creative ideas and responses to sudden problems, and even when a conflict emerges, you will trust that the actions of others are motivated by the best intentions and are in your joint interest. In contrast, consider a situation in which crucial

information only reaches you by coincidence at the last minute, you have endless discussions about minute details or repeated arguments, and you do not feel you are taken seriously or you are accused of excluding or marginalising others yourself. It is not difficult to decide what the most desirable situation is. But getting there is not always that easy. Public professionals and citizens meet in the face of a complex and rapidly evolving *situation*, face a great many bits and pieces of knowledge, experiences and emotions triggered by the *substantive issues* at hand, and have to build and maintain *relationships* among all the various people, problems and policies involved.

Therefore, public professionals and citizens need the communicative capacity to recognise habitual patterns of communication and break through them by adapting the nature, tone and conditions of the conversation to the *law of the situation*. Rather than communicating according to a habitual pattern, they should learn to open their minds to listen to what others are actually saying and to express themselves in ways that serve the *situation* rather than their own viewpoints and interests. This requires that they have the ability to signal what kind of conversation they are having, whether it is getting them anywhere, and what communicative practices might move the conversation forward. Exercising such communicative capacity is not a matter of some interventions by a few individuals, or having a talented communicator in the group. It is a shared practice *in-between* public professionals and citizens. Communicative capacity is promoted or hampered by all the situated practices they engage in *as they encounter each other*. This 'interweaving' takes places so quickly and naturally that it seems almost impossible to do anything about it. However, public professionals and citizens can cultivate their capacity to communicate about their *situation*, the *substantive issues* and *relationships*.

Communicating about the situation

Public professionals and citizens need to recognise that the situation in which they meet is a complex, ambiguous and changeable **work in progress**. As the *total situation* is constantly recreated in often unforeseeable, uncontrollable and incomprehensible ways, they tend to limit the ways they engage with their *situation* to a habitual understanding of its **ongoing business** – the developing, yet mostly taken-for-granted background against which they interpret what is going on, what deserves their attention, and what are and are not possible courses of action. But rather than just accepting that 'This is the way things are over here', they should engage in flexible, adaptive and

holistic communication about who is saying and doing what, when and how, as well as what can and should be changed. Public professionals and citizens can do so by enquiring into exploring three practices with which they communicatively enact their **ongoing business**: a) how they talk about their participatory institutions, b) how they use their vocabulary, and c) how they address **seemingly small problems**. This can be supported by questions like:

a) *In what way were our participatory institutions introduced and how do they function as reference points?* Was it a drastic break or an incremental change? Did it provoke sudden conflict, enable new forms of collaboration or reinforce existing patterns? Do participatory institutions provide a legitimate starting point for everyone and a useful format for our encounters?
b) *What is the content, nature and meaning of our vocabulary?* Are we using the same words or do we lack a common language? What meanings do these words have for different people? Is everyone familiar with these different meanings? How can we come to an agreement about practical working definitions?
c) *What complexity and ambiguity exists under the surface of seemingly small problems*? What are the differences and conflicts between multiple problem analyses? What details do we need to know? Who is involved, how are they interdependent and how can we get them to work together? What gives rise to frustration?

By exercising communicative capacity accordingly, public professionals and citizens can more effectively handle the complex and rapidly evolving ways in which the **work in progress** of their *situation* is obfuscating their understanding of what is going on and what should be done. This should enable them to effectively *integrate* their **ongoing business** with the *total situation* as they engage with the *situation*.

Communicating about substantive issues

Public professionals and citizens need to recognise that discussing *substantive issues* comes down to ongoing **struggling** with the nature, meaning, and value of others' knowledge, feelings, and experiences. As *unifying differences* implies they are confronted with a great amount of information about problems, policies, and people, as well as emotions about certain practices, suffering from problems, and experiencing success and failure, they tend to limit discussions of *substantive issues* to habitual **actionable understandings** – what they need to know in

order to act, how to come by this knowledge, and who or what can provide it. While doing so might enable them to act upon the issues at hand in one way or another, they should be more critically engaged in recognising, empathising and appreciating what is being expressed. Public professionals and citizens can do this by exploring three practices with which they communicatively enact their **actionable understandings**: a) how they uphold cognitive boundaries, b) how they ground their experiences, and c) how they define relevant expertise. This can be enabled through questions such as:

a) *What are the practical limitations on our ability to cross cognitive boundaries?* Is the scope of our ambitions and activities too broad or narrow? Are we too much concerned with details or general statements? Who is sticking to their own viewpoints and why? What is preventing us from truly understanding what others are saying?

b) *How are our experiences grounded in the system world and in the life world?* How are we positioned? How much are we drawn into the logic and dynamics of our own experiences? Are we addressing local problems more in terms of the system world or the life world? How much empathy and understanding is there between people situated in the system world or the life world?

c) *How does the definition of relevant expertise generate seemingly idiosyncratic ways of mutual neglect, misinterpretation or misunderstanding?* What do we consider legitimate expertise? Do we employ a strict and narrow or a vague and comprehensive definition? Is it explicit or underlying? Is it generally accepted or subject to contestation? Are certain beliefs, values and feelings excluded from the conversation?

By exercising communicative capacity accordingly, public professionals and citizens can learn to appreciate the **struggling** involved in making sense of *substantive issues*, broadening and deepening their grasp of what others mean, and understanding what actually motivates others as well as themselves. This should enable them to *integrate* their **actionable understandings** and truly *unify differences* as they discuss the *substantive issues* at hand.

Communicating about relationships

Public professionals and citizens need to recognise that building and maintaining their *relationships* is a matter of constantly **making connections** between people, policies and problems on a functional and emotional level. As there are far more connections to be made than

is actually possible, and as their *relationships* are constantly put under pressure by mistakes, unforeseen problems and misunderstandings, they tend to build and maintain their *relationships* according to a habitual **regime of competence** – the social configuration or shared sense of who should be acknowledged as legitimate participants, what qualifies as competent and meaningful (inter)action, and what are practical ways of being part of the situation and wider context at hand. Although a sense of what is a competent and meaningful action, as well as an informal understanding of one another's standing, status or reputation, is inherent in social interactions, public professionals and citizens should be sensitive to how their *relationships* facilitate or block them in participating in discussions, taking decisions and acting on problems. They can enact such sensitivity by exploring three practices through which they communicatively enact their **regime of competence**: a) how they express the demeanour of their contact, b) how they accommodate the fragility of their *relationships*, and c) how they facilitate the practices of key individuals. This can be facilitated through questions such as:

a) *How does the demeanour of our words and actions affect mutual recognition?*
   Are our mutual attitudes and posture formal and detached or informal and close? Do we get along beyond a minimum of social etiquette? How do we express our perceptions of others' intentions? Who do we believe is or is not a competent participant?
b) *How do efforts, tensions and frustrations render our relationships fragile?*
   What are the personal costs involved in getting things done together? Which practical constraints frustrate our efforts? How do we deal with disappointment? Do our *relationships* quickly wear down or are they sustainable?
c) *In which ways do key individuals build and maintain relationships?*
   Who is/are championing our efforts? Who are taking the lead on what? How do they keep others committed? How do they create operational leeway?

By exercising communicative capacity accordingly, public professionals and citizens can learn to acknowledge how they communicate about the habitual aspirations, standards, values and identities through which they **make connections** with one another. This should enable them to *integrate* their **regimes of competence** and enact *cooperative styles of relating* as they build and maintain their *relationships*.

Cultivating communicative capacity

Communicative capacity is not an unwavering characteristic or textbook skill that you have and employ in all circumstances. It is a shared practice existing in-between public professionals and citizens that varies along with the *law of the situation*. Depending on the needs of the conversation, the performances of communicative capacity listed here can enhance judgement about how to talk more productively. Public professionals and citizens can cultivate their communicative capacity by individual reflection and regularly reflecting together on their communicative patterns and practices. For example, in meetings they could take time to ask 'how are our conversations going, do we have the feeling they are getting us anywhere, are there possible alternative ways of addressing each other and the problems at hand?', or have quarterly or annual meetings focused on evaluating communicative practices, patterns and capacity. But they can also cultivate communicative capacity by endeavouring to be conscious of their individual split-second decisions about how to address someone else or participate in a conversation. The next sections explore in more detail how policy makers can support these individuals and groups in learning to develop and cultivate communicative capacity.

Policy for communicative capacity

It might seem that policy makers (politicians, top and middle level managers, and policy advisers) have little to do with communicative capacity. Indeed, what can they do if the shape, dynamics and outcomes of participatory democracy in the end depend largely on what public professionals and citizens do when they meet? Well, what policy makers do is actually crucial to whether or not public professionals and citizens manage to get something out of their conversations. Public encounters will be futile if policy makers fail to recognise that 'the social and political practices that make participatory democracy possible are created and maintained through processes of human communication' (Spano, 2001, p 27). Policy makers have to appreciate that the communicative in-between has real world consequences and that exercising communicative capacity can save time, frustration and resources. But it is not enough only to recognise the importance of communicative practice to achieving their ambitions; policy makers need to actively facilitate public professionals and citizens in cultivating communicative capacity. Policy makers can do so through the policies

they make, their degree of engagement with participatory practice, their leadership practices, and their commitment to learning and change.

Make policies which enable public encounters

Policy makers should craft policies which recognise that public encounters are key to fulfilling participatory ambitions. While this might have been a natural (yet implicit) assumption underlying the participatory policies which sprung up in the third generation (see Chapter Two), currently the dominant idea seems to be that citizens should resolve the problems they care about on their own (Bartels, 2014; Bartels et al, 2014). For example, in 2010, the British coalition government ushered in the 'Big Society' in which the government would 'roll back the state' while empowering 'communities' to run local services and resolve local problems. Implicit to this remarkable mix of neo-liberal and participatory values is the assumption that citizens will decide to volunteer when public spending decreases and that encounters with public professionals are of little value for a thriving participatory democracy (Bartels et al, 2014). Similarly, in the Netherlands the ambition is now to further transform the welfare state into a 'Participation Society' in which the government reduces the scope of its activities in favour of citizens taking on more active and responsible roles. Public professionals are only to 'facilitate' citizens in their voluntary activities, based on the implicit assumption that there is little value added by their collaboration.

Of course, it can only be encouraged that policy makers seek to reconfigure state-society relations in order to stimulate the development of a strong democracy. All too often, participation is used as a technology of governing or implemented in symbolic or superficial ways. Civic activists are regularly hampered by public professionals who see participation as no more than a legal obligation, smother innovative solutions and civic enthusiasm with complex and lengthy procedures, or lack the social, emotional and professional skills to listen to what citizens are saying, treat them with respect, and keep their promises (Wagenaar, 2007a; Stout, 2010b; Wagenaar and Specht, 2010). The idea that government knows best and will provide that which is needed is as much an outdated, high-handed culture as it is financially unsustainable. Nevertheless, that does not mean policy makers should return to the neo-liberal maxim of the 1970s that the government is by definition part of the problem. Public professionals and citizens can generate innovative and sustainable solutions to intractable problems by coming together (see, for example, Fischer, 1993; Fung and Wright,

2003; Innes and Booher, 2010), but they simply do not always manage to do so. It is therefore not necessarily fewer but different (and more productive) encounters that are needed.

Actively engage in participatory practice

Participatory ambitions will not automatically be realised by making policies that demand that public professionals and citizens come together. Policies that merely provide them with 'space' to accomplish such participatory ideals as empowerment, inclusion and trust are simply not enough. Rather than relying on abstract concepts and detached understandings, policy makers should actively engage in participatory practice by listening to, and working closely with those who actually and concretely communicate with one another to resolve local problems. While it is up to public professionals and citizens to have productive conversations, policy makers need to have a thorough understanding of the daily conditions under which those actors are doing the actual work that participatory policies come down to (Lipsky, 1980; Brodkin, 2012). Only from a grounded, street level grasp of what is going on, what is working and what is not, and how public professionals and citizens are coping with the constraints and affordances of their local context, will policy makers come to understand how participatory practice might be improved and participatory ambitions realised.

To be sure, detached policy making is a general problem in public management. Policy makers tend to avoid the rough ground of everyday practice. They see it as their job to have overview, control and clarity, provide guidance and support from a distance, and only to intervene when things get out of hand. In doing so, they craft and rely on organisational maps (policy statements, job descriptions, organisational charts, decision-making procedures) rather than experience of the actual conditions of the roads practitioners travel. Such detached policy making does not only prevent them from understanding how things work in practice, but can also hamper the daily social practices through which practitioners work, learn and innovate (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Brown and Duguid, 2000). In the context of participatory democracy, policy makers provide documents with abstract ambitions for 'engagement', 'empowerment', and 'inclusion', decision-making trees (or ladders loosely inspired by Arnstein (1969), which conveniently ignore her critical and empowering message) for deciding the best participation 'tool', or complex organisational charts with a jumble of coloured boxes and lines for visualising a

collaborative network. Such detached policy making treats participation and encounters in instrumental and regulatory terms, inhibiting public professionals and citizens in exercising the capacity to communicate according to the *law of the situation*. Instead, policy makers should actively facilitate public professionals and citizens in letting their own communicative practice emerge from their encounters.

Exercise facilitative leadership

Policy makers need to facilitate rather than force public professionals and citizens to change their communicative practices. They need to move away from traditional forms of top down management, and, instead, exercise facilitative leadership (see Williams, 2002; Crosby and Bryson, 2005; Ansell and Gash, 2007; Bussu and Bartels, 2014). Policy makers should not act as hierarchical leaders who steer public professionals and citizens towards achieving participatory ambitions, but should enable everyone involved in the 'situation' to participate to their full potential and achieve results that follow the 'law of the situation' (Follett, 2004; Stout and Love, 2015, chapter 9). Facilitative leaders can do so by creating common ground and shared frameworks, constant brokerage behind the scenes to create operational leeway, and institutionally embedding resources and remit (De Souza-Briggs, 2008; Forester, 2009; McGuire and Agranoff, 2011). As such, policy makers can enable public professionals and citizens to break through habitual patterns, communicate productively about the issues at hand, and implement solutions that emerge from their encounters.

Moreover, facilitative leadership does not only require policy makers to adopt a new role, but also, more fundamentally, to allow and enable others to take the lead on issues they care about and in which they are competent (Bussu and Bartels, 2014). True willingness to do what someone else says can only legitimately follow from what the law of the situation commands (Follett, 2004; Stout and Love, 2015, chapter 9). Participatory activities usually thrive on the efforts of several key individuals who are, for example, trusted figures in the neighbourhood, have initiated innovative solutions to local problems, or have the right connections with crucial political or organisational actors (Stout, 2010b; Wagenaar and Specht, 2010; Van Hulst et al, 2011). Policy makers should therefore learn to recognise public professionals and citizens who stand out and enable them to facilitate local encounters and make a difference. Alternatively, if the situation requires it, policy makers can collaborate with researchers and facilitators who can provide training, reflection and mediation to public professionals and citizens

when they are stuck in a habitual pattern of communication and lack the communicative capacity to resolve the issues they face together.

The next section concludes the chapter and book by providing some final recommendations and reflections on how policy makers can facilitate processes of learning and change.

Learning and change

Cultivating communicative capacity is about more than finding solutions to the immediate issues at hand; it enables public professionals and citizens to build sustainable relationships, continue to have productive conversations, and structurally transform their situation. The more they become aware of their habitual patterns of communication and are able to adapt their conversations to the law of the situation, the more sustainable, productive and structural their encounters will be, and hence, the more effective they will be in resolving local problems. Communicative capacity thus involves both single loop and double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1976; Freeman, 2006). *Single loop learning* refers to the ability to perform a task better within the given parameters by using new types of institution or knowledge. Public professionals and citizens can find, for example, more effective ways to talk about the regeneration of derelict areas, domestic violence, or health issues. *Double loop learning* is the ability to change the conditions under which tasks are performed. This means that public professionals and citizens learn how to keep on recognising and averting the communicative patterns underlying seemingly innocent disagreements, conflicts and problems. Only in this way can they prevent having the same kind of unproductive conversations over and over again.

Transformative learning and sustainable change are as much aspired to as they are difficult to achieve. They require the structural commitment of all practitioners and policy makers involved to processes of joint inquiry and learning. They need to learn to slow down their mental processes and start questioning their communicative practices, in order to gradually develop awareness of the presence and consequences of their habitual patterns. Although this might sound appealing and unquestionably necessary, it is not easy to commit practitioners and policy makers to joint inquiry and learning as these processes do not provide quick and readymade solutions and are challenging in terms of divergent viewpoints, confrontational emotions and unexpected outcomes. Practitioners and policy makers therefore need to develop a willingness to be patient and trustful, listen to each other, and let

go of deeply held belief systems (Stivers, 1994; Schein, 2003; Shields, 2003). Facilitators, consultants and researchers can aid them in doing so.

A variety of formats can be used to engender and support joint inquiry and learning, depending on the needs of the situation: for example, reframing a policy controversy by using citizens' juries, consensus conferences, or role playing; exploring the impasse around a **seemingly small problem** by engaging in joint fact finding; or creating common ground for future collaboration by developing a shared metanarrative (Fischer, 1993; Hendriks, 2005; Ryfe, 2006; Hampton, 2009; Innes and Booher, 2010). This book shows that storytelling is a helpful approach to reveal (the impact of) underlying beliefs, experiences and feelings as well as the associated habitual patterns of communication. Storytelling can bring public professionals and citizens together to tell their stories to each other, understand the origins and effects of their differences, and identify opportunities for learning and change. By sharing and reflecting on their narratives, they can start to see how seemingly innocuous details are part of a meaningful and often harmful pattern. It can help them to expose and transform the series of inferences they make from their personal experiences and the statements of others which result in a habitual communicative pattern (Argyris et al, 1985; Forester, 1993b; Schein, 2003).

Whatever format is chosen for joint inquiry and learning, the primary focus should be on foregrounding communication: that is, focusing attention away from the immediate issue at hand and raising awareness of the effects of the mode of communication on the joint ability to resolve the issues people are facing together (Spano, 2001). Public professionals and citizens need to break vicious communicative patterns which result in them having the same kind of conversations over and over again while continuing to face the same recurring problems (Forester, 2009). This book suggests that they can turn the conduct of their encounters around based on the capacity to recognise habitual patterns, adapt the mode of communication to the *law of the situation*, and (re)kindle productive conversations by dynamically enacting communicative practices in-between them. Communicative capacity, in other words, enables public professionals and citizens to improve participatory democracy through their encounters. Indeed, as Shawn Spano (2001, p 27) indicates in the opening statement of this chapter: 'a strong democratic community ... creates new avenues for collective judgement and action that transcend the boundaries of conventional communication channels'. Let's make this happen.

Notes

[1] All names have been changed for confidentiality reasons.

[2] As will be explained in the section 'Communicative Capacity: theory and practice' in Chapter Two, concepts expressing shared communicative practices are in bold while those indicating the ideal typical quality of public encounters are italicised.

[3] Enacted in meaningful and competent ways.

[4] Following Stout and Love (2014), I refer to Mary Follett rather than the more common Mary Parker Follett.

[5] An overview of these policies extends to seven pages (see Imrie and Raco, 2003).

[6] In fact, a review of the literature shows that up to now, the concept of public encounters has rarely been used (Bartels, 2013).

[7] 'I' then becomes 'I-plus-you-plus-I', 'you' becomes 'you-plus-I-plus-you-plus-I', 'I' becomes 'I-plus-you-plus-I-plus-you-plus-I', and so on.

[8] Whatever static images we might have of ourselves, entities or causes are mere snapshots of ongoing, evolving relational processes.

[9] The deliberative framework conceptualises public encounters as transactions between the separate beings and fixed social positions of 'public professional' and 'citizen' (Stout and Staton, 2011) leading to mutually beneficial outcomes. Encounters are reduced to an instrumental medium for achieving participatory ideals in practice.

[10] A case in point of the iterative nature of the grounded theory analysis is the earlier, less developed version of the theory of communicative capacity I published (Bartels, 2014).

[11] In fact, Wagenaar (2011) argues that *heuristics*, rather than *methods*, is the correct term for the kind of rules and strategies of inquiry that guide interpretive research, as the inductive process harbours so many unexpected turns and dilemmas that there is no real method in managing the research.

[12] In the cases reported here, the terms in use were citizen participation (*partecipazione dei cittadini* – Bologna), community engagement (Glasgow), and resident participation (*bewonersparticipatie* – Amsterdam).

[13] Frames are cognitive definitions of problematical situations which organise thoughts to facilitate, or legitimate, action by linking *events or actions* (what has been done or will be done) to *values* (what should be done) and *causal beliefs* (what has brought about this situation or will bring about a desired situation) (Rein and Schön, 1993)

[14] Final interview in Glasgow was cancelled at the last moment and I was therefore unable to arrange an alternative before the end of the fieldwork period.

[15] In England, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) were introduced following immmplementation of Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs). Following devolution in 1999, the Scottish Executive continued with SIPs but later replaced them with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) through the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

[16] Other policy documents that have to be taken into account are *Modernising the Planning System*, *Regeneration Outcome Agreement 2006-2008*, *Fairer Scotland Fund*, *Framework for Community Reference Groups*, and *National Standards for Community Engagement*.

[17] The six strategic partners comprise Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service, Strathclyde Police, and Glasgow Chamber of Commerce.

[18] These structures are discussed further in Chapter Five.

[19] Five community residents who participate in the LCPP are drawn from the CRG on which they represent voluntary organisations, Community Councils, the Public Partnership Forum, the Local Housing Forum and 'the Black and Ethnic Minority Community'[sic].

[20] Partner agencies comprise Community Health and Care Partnership, Glasgow South East Regeneration Agency, Glasgow Community and Safety Services, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Local Housing Forum, Culture and Sport Glasgow, Glasgow Housing Association, Strathclyde Police, Jobcentre Plus, Glasgow Land and Environmental Services.

[21] Community Forums are neighbourhood level statutory bodies which were legally instituted in 1973.

[22] The Gorbals area covers the Laurieston, Hutchesontown, and Oatlands neighbourhoods.

[23] Minority ethnic groups include Pakistani, Indian, Somali, Chinese, Jewish, Czech, Slovakian, Polish and Roma, as well as other backgrounds. Each of these 'ethnic groups' or 'communities' has its own subdivisions and cultural dynamics and experiences a lot of influx and outflow.

[24] In fact, of 155 participants in the event, only 15 were residents.

[25] Municipalities are funded through local taxes (18%) and central government grants that are either open (38%) or ring-fenced (44%). The latter are decreasing in importance and relaxing their criteria (Denters and Klok, 2005).

[26] Housing corporations own 36% of the total Dutch housing stock and 50.2% of the total stock in Amsterdam. For a discussion of the history and nature of housing corporations see Gerrichhauzen (1985).

[27] At the time of the research, Bos & Lommer still formed a single city district. From 1 May 2010, the Municipality was reorganised from 15 into 7 city districts. Bos & Lommer became part of the West city district.

[28] Indeed, by the middle of August 2011 the City District's annual budget for bicycle stands was already completely used up (Het Parool, 2011).

[29] The reform process started in 1970 when Parliament approved the creation of regions. But these reforms did little to decentralise any real formal powers to regional and local government until the 1990s,.

[30] Bolognina is known as the most 'red' area in the most 'red' city in Italy, a position that was reinforced in particular by the discernible presence of the Resistance in the area during WWII. It was in Bolognina in 1990 that the leader of the Communist Party announced the dissolution of the party after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a historical event commonly known as *'la svolta della Bolognina'*.

[31] The majority of *stranieri* (foreigners) in Bologna come from China and Romania, but significant numbers also originate from Morocco, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Albania, Ukraine, Moldova, Pakistan and Eritrea.

[32] Remember the furious woman in Angelo's story at the beginning of Chapter One who threatened to kill the architect.

[33] Adapted from Stone's 'story of stymied progress': 'Things were terrible and got better, but now there is a new obstacle to progress, and we must act to remove it.' (Stone, 2002, p 138).

[34] Louise (Community Planning officer), Shawn (Community Planning officer), Mark (Community Planning officer), Gail (Community Planning officer), Mike (police officer), Bill (employment manager), Annette (housing manager), Barry (culture manager), and Zahraa (Community Planning officer).

[35] Kelly (resident), Liam (regeneration manager), Mary (resident), Sara (resident), Sadiqua (resident), Stewart (resident), George (resident) and Cynthia (health manager).

[36] A *reference* group is a soundboard of residents, who provide feedback, ideas, and initiatives to the professionals. In doing so the residents do not necessarily need to *represent* a particular group or segment of the population. They're participating as a resident who is affected by the issues at hand (a norm of participatory democracy) and not as an elected representative (a norm of representative democracy).

[37] Some have even gone as far as dubbing this 'the British syndrome of retrospective justification for ill-considered empirical developments. That is not to say that developments may or may not have been desirable but to stress that theory consists of a form of words to sustain disparate practice.' (Jordan, 1994, p 260).

[38] In the sense of a single document with codified rules that define and limit powers.

[39] The Localism Act 2011 granted local authorities the power of general competence ('to do anything that an individual might generally do'), yet without the constitutional reform of the *ultra vires* principle, they are ultimately dependent on the mandate of central government.

[40] A search of the Engage Database, which lists all known resident and voluntary groups in the city, on 18 January 2009 for the geographical area of 'Pollokshields and Southside Central' identified 121 groups. www.infobaseglasgow.org/asp/ (S(ycvtmy45hbqnl1552bupjw55))/browse.aspx?Srch=Geo

[41] Qualifying domestic violence as a seemingly small problem is in no way meant to trivialise the immense horrors and momentous impact it inflicts on people's lives. Instead, it is to emphasise, as Diana explains, the overwhelming difficulties involved in finding out what is going on in other people's homes and doing something about it.

[42] The narratives of Tineke (area manager), Dennis (neighbourhood manager), Hetty (housing manager), Samir (social worker), Peter (resident), Yvonne (police officer), Thea (resident), Mohammed (resident), Bart (resident), Diana (resident), Carla (City District official), Mourad (social worker), Mark (housing manager), Houssain (police officer), Sevgi (resident), Riet (resident), Gwen (resident), Margreet (area manager),

Linda (housing manager), and Malika (neighbourhood manager) all provide support for both the dominant narrative and this counter narrative.

[43] Supported by Fabrizio (municipal facilitator), Elisa (resident), Davide (urban planning manager), Marina (agency (Orlando) facilitator), Giulio (neighbourhood official), Nadia (social work agency manager), Corrado (neighbourhood official), Alma (resident), Angelo (facilitator), Ivano (resident), Chiara (facilitator), Flavia (agency (Orlando) facilitator), Vito (urban planner), Giuliana (resident), and Alberto (urban planner).

[44] Supported by Piero (resident), Gino (resident), Giovanni (resident), Dusnella (voluntary association manager), and Kin Sang (resident).

[45] He explained later in the interview that the situation for *Laboratorio Bolognina-Est*, with three landowners and a more diverse population, was far more complex.

[46] See www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi? and http://cordis.europa.eu/easw/home.html for more information on these popular participative methods.

[47] A critical mass has accumulated for a particular interpretation to represent the 'true' meaning of the idea or phenomenon.

[48] Moreover, Giulio's story illustrates the sheer complexity of what we might dub **seemingly small solutions**.

[49] As listed in the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organizations database (Keating, 2010, p 92).

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Participatory democracy has become an unshakable norm and its practice is widespread. Nowadays, public professionals and citizens regularly encounter each other in participatory practice to address shared problems. But while the frequency, pace and diversity of their public encounters has increased, communicating in participatory practice remains a challenging, fragile and demanding undertaking that often runs astray.

This unique book explores how citizens and public professionals communicate, why this is so difficult and what could lead to more productive conversations. Using timely, original empirical research to make a thorough comparative analysis of cases in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Italy it shows policy makers, practitioners, students and academics the value of communicative capacity.

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