

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN
TRANSPORT IN TIMES OF CHANGE**

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TRANSPORT AND SUSTAINABILITY
VOLUME 18

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN TRANSPORT IN TIMES OF CHANGE

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PREFACE

During 2020 and 2021, the editors of this book had several discussions on public participation in the field of transport and the limited research in the field. These discussions led to new research projects, but also to this book. We saw the production of an edited volume on the topic as an attractive opportunity, as it allowed us to gather scholars within the field for interesting discussions on the topic that highlighted both the diversity and the complexity of the issue.

By means of a global call for contributions, we gathered in November 2021 selected authors in an inspiring digital two-day workshop, where all draft chapters were scrutinised and discussed. This was followed by review processes and adding of additional chapters, and we think the result is a book full of interesting and relevant cases and perspectives, one that fills a gap in the literature on public participation in transport.

We would like to express our gratitude to all chapter authors for their engagement in the book. There has been a lot to learn from the collaboration. Lisa and Tom further would like to thank the Faculty of Logistics at the Molde University College for providing the working conditions that made the work possible. Claus would like to thank The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI), The Swedish Knowledge Centre for Public Transport (K2) as well as the research programme, Mistra SAMS for funding his work with the book. We are also very grateful to Mira K.C. from Molde University College who helped on much of the practical work at the end of the submission process.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our families for their support and understanding throughout the process.

October 2022

Lisa Hansson, Claus Hedegaard Sørensen, and Tom Rye

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN TRANSPORT IN TIMES OF CHANGE?

Lisa Hansson, Claus Hedegaard Sørensen and Tom Rye

ABSTRACT

A general global wave of public participation is occurring. Students and researchers as well as civil servants, policy-makers, and NGO representatives are encouraged to study, propose, and engage in public participation. New innovative forms of participation are suggested, and experiments in participation are ongoing locally and nationally. Within the transport sector, most studies of participation focus on road infrastructure and other land use changes. However, for other areas within transport, studies are limited and fragmented. Based on this, we see a need for a volume on public participation in transport, aimed at practitioners, students, and researchers, in what are unarguably times of change. The overall aim of the volume is to provide examples of different forms of public participation in transport, which can work as a setting for further analyses and discussions of public participation in transport. Drawing on different cases, eight empirical chapters are presented covering three main themes: grass-roots participation initiatives, participation in unconventional areas, and public participation that throws up unexpected results. In this introductory chapter, we set the scene for later discussions and analyses of public participation in transport. This chapter also provides an overview of the structure and content of the volume.

Keywords: Public participation; participatory planning; exclusion; change; transport; infrastructure.

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1. WHY A BOOK ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN TRANSPORT?

Globally, the world is facing a wave of public participation (OECD, 2020). New innovative forms of participation are suggested, and experiments in interactive forms of participation are going on locally and nationally (Bateman, 2021; Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010). The Internet, mobile phones, and computers are highlighted as tools to facilitate participation (Lin & Geertman, 2019). There are also experiments with what can be described as representative, deliberative forms of civic participation (OECD, 2020). The topic of public participation is also widely debated among political science and planning scholars. Studies have addressed the lack of public participation; and how to increase deliberation in planning processes, as well as the negative aspects of participation (Kasemir, 2013; Lehtonen & De Carlo, 2019; Sager, 2013).

However, there seems to be less debate within the field of transport, and transport cases are seldom seen in the general literature on participation (Grossardt & Bailey, 2018). Cases addressed are most often related to infrastructure projects requiring changes in land use plans (see, e.g., Williamson, 2021). Smart mobility-driven planning often stresses the need for public participation, in order to gain legitimacy and acceptance for new technology (Lozano et al., 2021). However, in practice, public participation in relation to political decisions on the transition to 'smart' mobility, legislation on vehicles, or new fuels and taxes is limited.

While there is a wave of changes in terms of new technology in the transport sector, society is also facing several consecutive and overlapping challenges that may change society in various ways. The most long-term and persistent threats are climate change, reduction of biodiversity, and other signs of unsustainable production and consumption. There are also examples of large social movement groups that raise their voices against existing structures in society that cause and exacerbate national and global inequalities. The last few years the corona crisis, supply change crisis, and energy crisis are examples that may add to local or national crises linked to these other challenges previously mentioned.

Public participation is seen as an important means of dealing with both smaller changes in society as well as larger challenges, threats, or crises. There is an increasing focus on the more deliberative forms of public participation: leaving time for acquiring and sharing knowledge, listening, reasoning, and establishing some degree of consensus (Healey, 1992; Sørensen & Isaksson, 2021; Sprain, 2017). Thus, a backdrop to the general move towards greater public participation is that considerable faith is placed on it as a way of handling complex and interconnected problems, such as climate change and social exclusion (Kasemir, 2003; Sprain, 2017; Stanley et al., 2018).

Within the field of transport, it could be anticipated that public participation could provide an increased understanding of the public's needs; that local knowledge and perspectives that may not be available to experts would be included; and that, by taking in views from the public, the quality of policy documents and decisions might increase. Those who participate may also gain

an increased sense of ownership and understanding of differences that may exist between different points of view and different groups in society. Moreover, participatory approaches to planning could help build trusting relationships between governments and the local community. Effective public engagement could also assure the public that local authorities are serious about addressing their concerns, which in the long run could lead to easier implementation. Through participation, the potential for conflicts, risks, delays, and breakdowns of a project could be better predicted and, in the end, provide better outcomes for the plans. However, poorly performed public participation processes might lead to unexpected effects. For example, stigma and exclusion of groups, and mistrust in institutions. It might also increase the distance between the public and public authorities or politicians. The processes might result in project delays, implementation problems, and undesirable outcomes (Andersen & Skrede, 2021; Fernandez-Heredia & Fernandez-Sanchez, 2020; Hanssen & Millstein, 2021; Lehtonen & De Carlo, 2019).

Based on this, we see a need for a volume of public participation in transport in times of change, aimed at practitioners, students, and researchers. The overall aim of the volume is to provide examples of different forms of public participation in transport, which can work as a setting for further analyses and discussions of public participation in transport. The aim is divided into two. First, we aim to understand forms of public participation in transport. Thus, the questions we aim to answer are: How are processes designed? Who initiates them? Who is involved? What are the results? Second, we aim to discuss the transformative potential of public participation in transport: Does increased public participation in transport provide a way forward for the handling of complex problems? What are the possible disadvantages? When is it appropriate and when is it not? Provided that more public participation is needed, how can it be improved and where and when should it increase in scope?

Through these aims, we hope the volume can provide renewed and increased discussion on the practice of (or avoidance of) public participation within the sector, and that this will be of interest to students, academics, politicians, civil servants, NGO representatives and the public.

In this introductory chapter, we will set the scene and explain the background and idea of the volume, before briefly introducing the three parts of the volume and related chapters.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN TRANSPORT POLICY AND PLANNING

Public participation is a concept that holds various meanings depending on what is emphasised, but in principle, it constitutes a relationship between people (the civic) and public authorities. Public participation includes a process perspective, namely, how the public can get involved and influence planning and decision-making processes or politics in general. Public participation also includes an

outcome perspective, addressing the effects that participation may have on the outcome of a plan, a project, or a community (Parker, 2011).

Public participation processes can be more or less institutionalised. Examples of highly institutionalised forms of participation are voting in elections, referendums, and engaging in political parties. These are participatory forms that often cover a broad spectrum of political issues, but can also be linked to single issues, for example, a referendum on congestion charges (Hensher & Li, 2013). Participation can also be expressed through organised interest groups or other civil organisations working in formalised channels with local or regional governments, for example, in joint projects or workshops (OECD, 2020). Public participation also includes more loosely institutionalised participatory structures, for example, social movement actions or local communities protesting against a government plan or project, for example, a new road (Hague et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2022).

Participatory processes are often justified based on a belief that, in democratic societies, everyone has the right to be informed and should have the opportunity to express their views on matters that affect them. To encourage participation, it is therefore important to create channels that stimulates peoples interest in public decisions and actively engage in such processes. Inspired by Habermas, Healey's (1992) approach of communicative planning has had a large impact on the understanding of public participation. The communicative approach argues for the involvement of the public in participatory planning processes that are based on communication and argumentation (Healey, 2006; Sager, 2013). The approach has been criticised for not addressing power aspects between involved parties and that those with the most resources will have the most impact on the process (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002). Despite this critique, there is a rather consistent view that constructive dialogues should be included in planning processes.

In recent years, the role of public participation in improving the transport system has been recognised. For example, public participation is brought forward as a key element in mobility planning practices, such as the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP), proposed by the European Union (Mozos-Blanco et al., 2018). However, as stated earlier in the chapter, we believe there is a missing discussion on various aspects of public participation in transport among academic scholars. As a starting point for this volume, we were therefore interested in what type of public participation the transport literature addresses. A systematic search in ScienceDirect on keywords related to public participation combined with transport words gave us an indication of the status of studies of participation within the transport area.¹

Most studies address public participation in relation to road projects and urban regeneration projects (e.g. Shah & Roy, 2017; Zhou et al., 2022). In this literature, the lack of participation, or exclusion of groups, is often addressed. In relation to this, social movement groups, organised interest groups, and local community protests are addressed. In these types of case studies, tensions, conflicts, power relations, and various cultural differences are analysed, as is their role in the processes (e.g. Ruming, 2014; Xian & Gu, 2020). The use of more

institutionalised channels of participation, for example, workshops with the public, is highlighted in many cases of infrastructural planning (e.g. [Silverman et al., 2008](#)). In this setting, we also see studies in the transport sector inspired by communicative planning. For example, [Isaksson et al. \(2009\)](#) discuss the move from consultation to deliberation in EIA processes.

There are some studies addressing public engagement in mobility planning, however, critiques have brought forward that the public involved is limited to those who have an interest in the issues dealt with ([Le Pira et al., 2016](#)). In line with active mobility modes, few studies have addressed the importance of public participation in the planning of bicycle mobility and walking (e.g. [Field et al., 2018](#); [Knapskog et al., 2019](#)). It further was difficult to identify examples of participatory processes directly linked to public transport planning. The role of public involvement has been addressed in relation to Bus Rapid Transport projects (BRT) (e.g. [Sagaris, 2016](#)), but overall, there is a scarcity of studies within the public transport field.

The overview shows a picture of public participation from the transport literature in which there is a clear majority of studies on road infrastructure and other land use changes. The reason for this might be that many countries have some type of legislative requirement for public consultation in land use processes linked to infrastructure. For other transport modes and initiatives, studies are more limited and fragmented.

Studies from infrastructure planning show that effective public participation is difficult to achieve. There is a need for more knowledge on how different groups are represented, as well as included or excluded from transport projects. Excluded groups can, for example, be those living in poverty, ethnic minorities and, in some contexts, women. Some may struggle to meet basic needs and may not have the time or energy to participate in public participation processes. They can also be deterred from participating by a feeling that they lack education or knowledge, particularly when it comes to complex transport projects. Groups might also be actively ignored and marginalised by project participants ([Fernandez-Heredia & Fernandez-Sanchez, 2020](#); [Mahapa & Mashiri, 2001](#)).

There is also a pressing need to understand public participation in transport and mobility planning in fields beyond infrastructure projects. As of now the word ‘customer’ or ‘user’ often occurs in discussions of public transport and Mobility as a Service solutions. Surveys are widely used to capture the public opinion of transport services (see, e.g., application in [Chen et al., 2020](#)). In collaborative processes, for example, living lab settings, the concept ‘stakeholder’ occurs frequently ([La Piera et al., 2016](#)). Hence, stakeholder, user- and customer-opinions are included in analyses of the impacts of transport services and new initiatives. But the perspective of participation, in terms of engaging the public in dialogues about the value of public policies before measures are implemented, is often missing (see further discussion in [Hodgson & Turner, 2003](#)). One can critically question what happens in the long run if public participation gets reduced to a customer survey? For some reason, the debate on public participation has merely touched upon these areas of transport that go beyond land use planning and road projects.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Published work on public participation in the transport sector varies in terms of methods, objectives, and themes addressed. This volume is an attempt to gather scholars within the field and provide a base for concentrated, constructive analyses, and discussions of public participation in transport. The volume consists of eight empirical chapters that address different aspects of public participation. In addition to this, there is one introductory chapter and one concluding chapter. Since we hope the volume will foster new discussions on public participation in transport, we have asked the authors for each chapter to add three questions for discussion. These questions can be used in classes for students as well as in discussions with, and among, policy-makers and practitioners.

The eight empirical chapters are structured around three thematic sections: (1) grass-roots participation initiatives; (2) public participation in unconventional areas; and (3) unexpected results from public participation. The three themes highlight central aspects of public participation in transport that we believe need more attention. Grass-roots participation initiatives depart from projects at local level, and emphasise the need for more studies addressing aspects of social justice in this setting. Participation in unconventional areas focuses attention on the fact that there are many areas within the transport sector that still lacks a discussion on public participation. Unexpected results from public participation addresses the need for more critical studies on the outcomes that public participation might have. The chapters under each theme complement each other, however, each chapter can also be read as a stand-alone contribution.

Part one, *Grassroots Participation Initiatives*, puts the focus on participatory processes at the community level. It emphasises the importance of a bottom-up perspective on participation and addresses different social justice and inclusion perspectives. This is illustrated in three chapters using cases from the USA, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. *Mobilising for Transit-oriented Communities in Los Angeles*, by Lily Song (Chapter 2) presents a study from Los Angeles County, in which the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT-LA), a regional coalition of over 40 community-based organisations, has worked with direct-action policy campaigns and participatory planning initiatives to advance just, equitable, sustainable transit systems, and communities. *Understanding the Multiple Roles of Participation in Urban Mobility: An Investigation of Spaces for Participation in Rio de Janeiro*, by Aline Fernandes Barata, Tim Jones, and Sue Brownill (Chapter 3) explores the complex interplay of participation and mobility in a global south context. Using Rio de Janeiro (Favela Santa Marta) as the case study site, the chapter examines the invited spaces for participation enabled by the city's mobility plan and analyses whether marginalised populations engage with and/or create further spaces for participation. *The Potential for Public Participation in Planning Healthy Urban Mobility: The Case of Oxford, United Kingdom*, by Ben Spencer, Tim Jones, Juliet Carpenter, and Sue Brownill (Chapter 4) explores the potential for involving the public in planning healthy urban mobility using a case study of two neighbourhoods in Oxford, UK. The chapter draws on lessons from a large-scale project, which was underpinned by the need to address health inequalities within urban areas by implementing new approaches to planning and health.