

# Resident Participation in an Era of Societal Self-Organisation: The Public Administrative Response in Tøyen

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## Abstract

Participatory measures are widely acclaimed as a solution enabling public administrations to become more responsive to citizens. Research has nevertheless documented that, despite intentions, residents end up feeling manipulated rather than listened to in these processes. In this study, we performed an in-depth analysis of policy documents used for decision-making related to the area-based initiative in the district of Tøyen in Oslo, Norway. We also interviewed local politicians and representatives of residents and civil servants. Initial contracts clearly stated that residents were supposed to influence decision-making in this area-based initiative. In the analysis we categorised the different participatory measures in accordance with Arnstein's participation ladder to see if residents were allowed to influence decision-making and if so how. The results show that they were not allowed to influence decision-making. This raises questions about the inherent dilemma of accountability in modern-day bureaucracy and the potential for responsiveness to citizens.

## Introduction

In many parts of the world, gentrification processes are leading to streamlining of urban landscapes for the needs of business, tourists and the rich, alienating and pricing out the local population (Lees, Shin & Lopez Morales 2016). As a consequence, many residents on more modest income are moving to the fringes of urban areas. This displacement often removes people from their networks and makes their life situation more burdensome and insecure. Likewise, it robs central urban areas of their diversity and atmosphere, developing them into spaces of commercialisation. Public investments contribute to these processes by increasing the potential ground rent for owners in the area (Huse 2012, Lees, Shin & Lopez Morales 2016). This paper asks the question: how do public authorities, in their planning and administrative systems, allow city residents to make their voices heard in an era of increased pressure on urban areas?

This question is on the EU agenda, in terms of the Horizon innovation program, which has the aim of funding research on co-design, co-creation and co-implementation. These concepts, nevertheless, relate more to implementation

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than to decision-making and therefore fail to take into account the inherent conflictual and political character of these processes.<sup>1</sup>

Central stakeholders in these development processes are public administrations as guardians of the common interest through the electoral channel, the economic interests of business and both the city and city residents who live and work in the area. Bringing these perspectives together is of interest for discussions about democracy and considerations about the quality and responsiveness of government.

There is a need to consider whether participation can be a tool for fairer cities or whether such tools risk becoming just another instrument in the hands of privileged or intolerant groups to safeguard their own “not in my backyard” interests. Action groups can come in different colours and forms. They can fight on behalf of a whole community to safeguard their right to housing and to remain in the place where they have their network, or they can fight for their own interest to the detriment of other groups in the same area. In any case, a legitimate public administration must safeguard a just and transparent process that caters for the interest of all groups in the area. At the same time, it needs to be responsive to residents in the face of capitalist pressures displacing them out of their communities. In many cities, “right to the city” movements have emerged as a consequence of brutal processes of eviction by venture companies (Mayer 2003). Oslo saw displacement in the redevelopment of Grünerløkka in the 1980s (Huse 2012). However more recent area-based programmes in Oslo have been more sensitive to the social consequences of physical upgrading and have included social measures to assist and help people living there.

## **Background**

The municipality of Oslo is organised on two levels: the municipal and the district council. The city is geographically divided into 15 districts. The “Gamle Oslo” district council, of which Tøyen is part, is one of the biggest, comprising 50,000 inhabitants. It is also the district that is expected to increase its population most in the near future,<sup>2</sup> mainly because of the development of former industrial areas and of the harbour. Figure 1 shows Tøyen’s location in the district as a central area that is quite close to the harbour area.

Figure 1: Tøyen's location in the city



Source: Map from the report “Hva nå Tøyen” (Brattbakk 2015)

The district councils in the municipality of Oslo have responsibility for child welfare, nursery schools, welfare, homecare services, nursing homes, licences for serving alcohol, culture and voluntary work, social housing, parks, school health service, physiotherapy and other areas. In addition, the District Councils are to be consulted in matters related to city development, but they only have small departments working on city development, as they are merely consulted in these matters. The “Gamle Oslo” district council had no employees or department with expertise in area-based initiatives (ABIs) when the Tøyen ABI was decided (Årsmelding 2014).

In Oslo, the municipal council decides the budget for the urban districts. It has agreed to fund the Tøyen ABI to the tune of 25 million Norwegian kroner (approximately 2.5 million euro) each year for five years (2014–2018). The state is contributing the same amount but has used funding already allocated to the municipality to this end. The district council is deciding the use of this funding.

One important reason why an ABI was decided was a decision to move a major flagship institution (the Munch museum) from Tøyen and place it more centrally, in order to attract tourists and business, in the newly developed harbour area. Tøyen is an area with low scores on indicators for health and living conditions. Residents considered losing the Munch Museum as down-prioritizing the area. In a political compromise between the socialist and conservative parties, an ABI was therefore decided, to improve living conditions in the area and to compensate for the loss of the museum.

The area has always been poor. Tøyen has historically been a working class area with overcrowded municipal housing. A building boom in the second half of the 19th century produced a lot of low quality housing blocks. Even though there has been a certain upgrading of the area, it remains a poor part of the city (Brattbakk og Hagen et al. 2015, 13–15).

Approximately 13600 people live in the ABI area (Brattbakk & Hagen et al. 2015). This makes Tøyen one of the most densely populated areas of Oslo. In Tøyen, around half of the residents have an ethnic minority background, and the percentage of children under the age of 16 is 68%. In addition, immigrants in the Tøyen area have lived in the country for a shorter period than has the average immigrant. When it comes to educational background, there are two main groups. The first are residents with a Norwegian background who are highly educated; 65% of Norwegians living in Tøyen has attended either university or university college, compared with 61% for the city as a whole. The second is the minority population. Only 24% of the minority population has a higher education, which is lower than in the city as a whole.

Tøyen has a higher unemployment rate than does the city as a whole and fewer immigrants have a job. The same is true as regards child poverty and health. Tøyen's situation is thus more difficult than the district of which it is part and the city as a whole in terms of living conditions (Brattbakk & Hagen et al. 2015, 27–42). The various diverse groups in Tøyen are increasingly polarized and the differences between those groups are increasing. New groups are attracted to the area because Tøyen is situated very close to the city center and thus considered an attractive place for young aspiring professionals to settle down in. Trendy coffee shops and bars have popped up in the district center – an early sign of gentrification.

At the same time, Tøyen has a high percentage of municipal social housing, the highest of all the neighbourhood areas in Oslo. Eleven percent of the housing units in Tøyen are social housing, compared with 3.2% in the city as a whole (Brattbakk & Hagen et al. 2015, 85). Tøyen has also been the subject of media attention because of gang rivalry, criminality and drug dealing.

Most studies on community involvement do not study how the involvement actually plays out, but rather take the involvement as a given. Still authors endorse the view that structures alone cannot engender involvement. Many authors conclude that ABIs could have planned better for involvement in relation to approach, structures, roles, processes, methods and resources (Burton et al. 2004). Our study sets out to understand and disentangle these processes and dilemmas of involvement in more depth.

## **Theory**

Public administrative systems can be characterized in different ways depending on the logic embedded in their governance systems. How the systems allow for participation can be described by the degree of co-decision-making they allow for – some public administrative systems being more responsive than others

(Pierre 2011). Citizens are seldom allowed direct participation in political decision- and policy-making, except sometimes in participatory budgeting. In the case of Tøyen, as in most cases, the district council, makes the final decision; but, as we show below, there are variations in how the deliberative process is organized, and this gives the citizens more or less influence (Cabannes 2004). Systems that allow for participation by stakeholders remain controversial. The systems may be questioned for being unclear about who the stakeholders involved represent. Decision-making processes in participatory systems are also often less transparent and accountable than representational pluralist democratic systems (Swyngedouw 2005). Lack of legitimacy of the democratic system can ensue if the system is unable to sustain the expectation of major societal groups (Lipset 1959).

Different types of public administrative systems can be more or less open to citizens' initiatives. Below are some reflections on the characteristics of different types of public administrative systems.

### **Research on public administrative systems**

At the core of bureaucracies are civil servants. How they interpret and execute rules is essential for the workings of public administrative systems. The essence of the idea of public-service motivation is that civil servants are intrinsically motivated to do a good job and provide good public services. However, what it means to be a good civil servant and what good governance means is not only unclear but also changes in response to trends and the circumstances of the time. A review of public administration literature reveals four distinct governance perspectives, each of which highlights unique values: "Old" Public Administration, "New" Public Management (NPM), Network Governance and Societal Self-Organisation. These perspectives guide civil servants' perception of their role as civil servants (Van der Steen, van Twist & Bressers 2016). "Old" Public Administration, is the classic perspective of government as a traditional bureaucracy (M. Weber 1978; Wilson 1989). In this perspective, the role of government is centered on legality, the rule of law, the political process and the separation between a representative political system and the civil service. Being a good civil servant is a legalistic, procedural, neutral and supportive task. Public interest and objectivity are important values, as are equality and equity (Van der Steen, van Twist & Bressers 2016). Recently, the governance perspective of Societal Self-Organisation has increasingly attracted attention. In this perspective, the production of public value is centered on a self-reliant citizenry. Societal actors produce public value for their own reasons and are guided by their own preferences and priorities. Citizens can create value independently, as well as through self-organised networks and cooperatives. Self-organizing citizens still have to follow the law and comply with norms and standards. The key point of this perspective is that the dynamics that produce public value start within society itself and that government responds to those dynamics; for example, by doing nothing, letting go, blocking, facilitating, attempting to "organize" more self-organisation (Van der Steen, van Twist & Bressers 2016). This fourth perspec-

tive is most open to self-organizing citizens and their initiatives and thus to participation.

### **Participatory systems in public administration**

In the English language, the word “control” refers, in the public administration context, to the steering and management of organisations. It includes both systems and routines aimed at steering employees’ actions in certain directions, but the concept also refers to the managers’ practical use of these systems for the production of results (COSO).<sup>3</sup> In academic literature, “steering” is regarded as taking three forms: hierarchical steering through systems in a bureaucracy, steering through the market mechanism and steering through the logic of civil society. In modern society, the three forms of steering have increasingly merged with one another. The new term for this mix of steering forms is “governance” and “network”, reflecting the fact that public authorities increasingly depend on cooperating with private companies and civil society to obtain results. When residents are invited to participate in decision-making this is called co-decision-making (Røiseland and Vabo 2012), but not all participatory processes can be considered co-decision-making.

Participation by citizens is regarded as crucial for citizenship and democracy (Graaf et al. 2015). The ideal is to include residents in policy decisions and implementation. The Tøyen agreement explicitly states that residents and NGOs are to participate in decision-making processes (Lae et al. 2013).

Citizen-based participation occurs in a host of different ways at the level of the street, neighbourhood and city (De Graaf, Hulst and Michels 2015). Initiatives in urban planning that included non-formal innovations have led to certain legitimacy problems. When strategic urban plans are prepared outside the statutory planning system, they lack the legal guarantee for inclusiveness, fairness and accountability. The problem with the formal participatory systems, on the other hand, is that the planners and/or elected politicians decide the degree of involvement of stakeholders and offer no possibility for citizens to contest it (Mäntysalo et al. 2015 p. 351).

The influence citizens have in each ABI is conditioned by laws, administrative systems and plans in each specific city. The participation ladder of the US community planner Sherry Arnstein, which dates from 1969, is a theoretical representation of different practices of participation. The point of departure in this theory is that participation can contribute to transferring power from those in power to the powerless (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein’s model has eight steps ranging from the least influence to the most influence. The two lowest steps are defined as non-participation (therapy and manipulation) and the two middle steps (placation and consultation) as “tokenism”, which denotes participation without influence, including information and consultation without the power to influence decision-making. The three top steps (citizen control, delegated power and partnership) describe participatory processes in which residents do have influence. Such processes range from partnerships to direct control over decision-making.

## Research questions and methods

To identify which types of public administrative system we deal with in our case study and to show how different participatory measures work within this framework, we have used official district council (DC) documents on the ABI in Tøyen. Document analysis was the main method used in this study. We went through all available documents in the DC's electronic archive from June 2013 through May 2016. Diverse documents related to the ABI were collected, summarized in tables and analyzed. The most important documents included:

- The DC annual plan and report
- Program plans
- Progress reports
- Budget documents, committee proceedings and decisions related to the ABI
- All minutes of and summons to meetings in the DC, in the standing committees, and in advisory committees regarding the ABI
- All DC documents related to the ABI
- Cases related to the follow-up to the ABI
- Newspaper articles

The administrative leader in the district initiates cases, which are processed in one of the three standing committees of the DC. The committees then propose what decision the DC should make. Very often the cases are also processed by the advisory committees, but these cannot suggest cases or decide. Both the standing committees and the DC can suggest changes or additions.

We read all the case documents from the preparatory stage to the final decision both to understand the thinking on resident participation and to see what decisions were made in the end. We thereby gained insight into the different parties' views on participation. Newspaper articles and reports about the ABI were other important sources of background information.

Seven people were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format to allow for a free flowing conversation. To obtain a balanced picture of how the participatory system in the Tøyen ABI worked in practice, we interviewed representatives of the different relevant stakeholders; local politicians, civil servants at different levels in the administration, residents and representatives from action groups. The informants were selected strategically and can be considered expert informants (Dorussen, Lenz, and Blavoukos 2005). The residents, too, were considered expert informants as they actively participated and also took part in former resident initiatives in the area. They have suggested for what purposes the ABI funding should be used and have recommended new ways of organizing the ABI. The informants were interviewed in the period May–October 2015.

The informants were:

- A former member of the DC from the time of the launch of the ABI until 2015.
- Three active members of the DC at the time the ABI was decided. They represented different political parties – both those in power and the opposition. They were all very much involved in the ABI and had sound knowledge of its participatory systems and processes and the outcomes of the ABI.
- Two civil servants working at different levels within the DC who were also involved in and knowledgeable about the systems and processes related to participation.
- Two residents of the Tøyen area.

## Findings

The interview and document data in the following sections are organised in accordance with Arnstein's participation ladder. The participatory methods described represent low levels of participation up to higher levels of participation. Quotes by local politicians and the administrators as well as the organisation of the decision-making process in the DC illustrate the type of public administration the DC most resembles.

### Participatory measures organised by the DC

The term "participation" is used to cover a very wide range of disparate activities. Moreover, some of the activities aimed at involving citizens are hard to distinguish from planning. The official documents in our case study are not very specific on how participation by residents and stakeholders is to be organized. Participation is underscored as an important principle in the initial documents. However, the documents do not elaborate on what participation involves, except that it should take place through dialogue with residents. A reference group and, later, a "Tøyen council" are mentioned as means by which to ensure participation. For this reason, we include here, as participatory activities, initiatives by the public authorities that seek to understand and take into account local citizens' preferences (Frewer & Rowe 2005).

Our interviews as well as the program plans and the case documents processed by the District Council (DC) demonstrate that the DC has taken many different measures aimed at participation. Few of them can be said to be high up on Arnstein's participation ladder. The influence that residents have been allowed has been limited and does not include co-decision-making.

According to one of the informants from the district administration participation was a concern from the outset:

From the very start we were preoccupied with and accommodated for participation, through several measures; idea brainstorming, renting an office in a café one evening, holding public meetings at which we



presented the ABI and attending conferences in other ABIs to share experiences. There were several arenas for participation.

Indeed, both the DC and the project office dedicated to following up activities within the ABI have organised several participatory activities, most of which were, however, public meetings where residents were informed about the ABI. Civil servants in the administration and in the DC admitted that they were unsure of how to organize the ABI and ensure participation by residents. Initially, most of the funding for the ABI was used for activities that looked like business as usual and in which no real participation was evident:

The first program plan was for 2015. It was a big responsibility for a district. We hadn't had time to prepare. As we do not lack tasks to tackle, we launched several initiatives to improve operations. We did what we could and we tried to do our best. And then we were criticized for using ABI funding for strengthening normal operations... The activists claimed that the district administration hijacked the ABI funding that they had secured, that they felt belonged to them.

The following participatory measures have been organised as part of the ABI: suggestion boxes and e-mails, public meetings, "half-hours open to the public," discussion groups and workshops, a report analyzing the use of parks in Tøyen, a children's walk app that maps children's use of the area, a project office, a report analyzing Tøyen as a place in which to live and a reference group/"Tøyen council". These measures are described more in detail immediately below.

#### **Participatory measure No. 1: Suggestion boxes and e-mails**

When the ABI was launched, the district administration provided suggestion boxes at public meetings so that participants who had not voiced their opinion at those gathering could still make suggestions. In addition, it announced, both on its webpage and at public meetings, that residents could send suggestions by e-mail. We put this participatory measure on the lowest step of the participatory ladder. It is easily accessible for all residents, both those who are familiar with e-mail and those who prefer putting a note into a box with their suggestions. This endows the measure with democratic legitimacy. At the same time, the measure allows for little influence or impact as it is unclear what happens with the suggestions.

#### **Participatory measure No. 2: Public meetings and "half hours open to the public"**

The first activity that the district administration launched as part of the ABI was a dialogue conference. From the documents:

Monday September 30th, 2013, the DC and the district administration organised an open meeting for the residents of Tøyen at a local café. Around 120 engaged residents came to share ideas about Tøyen's development. Invitations had been posted on the DC website and e-mails had been sent to NGOs and other organised groups in the district. The meeting was also announced in newspapers and posters were put up in the district. To frame the discussions in a good way, tables were set up for different topics of discussion. To further the dialogue at the tables and take notes during the discussions, each table had a host from the district administration.

Approximately 120 people turned up to the meeting. It was organised to easily accommodate suggestions. The participants were placed at different tables that dealt with different topics. Hosts were attentive and tried to listen to the suggestions made during discussions. People that had not been able to attend could put their suggestions in a suggestion box or e-mail the district. This procedure was inclusive, but required a lot of resources. Another public meeting was organised one year later.<sup>4</sup> Some 100 people showed up at this meeting.

When the report analyzing Tøyen as a place in which to live was published and presented in the autumn of 2015 another public meeting was organized. Some 250 people attended this meeting. First, the report was presented and then there was a Q&A session. The meeting ended with a round table at which local politicians discussed the ABI. In addition, smaller-scale public meetings addressing more specific matters (such as planning the use of a community house and the district square) were organized.

The district has thus organised a significant number of public meetings related to the ABI. However, public meetings have their limitations as participatory measures. They can end up being charades, as one informant from the district administration explained:

You know, these meetings open for suggestions that we started out with – they have to be systematized later on. Otherwise, they come across as charades. You can get a lot of good suggestions; but when you start big, open processes like this, they have to end in real proposals for political decisions.

The following is what residents experienced. When asked where they would place this participatory measure on Arnstein's participation ladder, they answered:

The participatory meetings with residents was on the lowest step of the participation ladder. We made tons of suggestions and none of them were followed up on. We had no influence. Instead, they just checked off that they had organised a participatory meeting. If they

invite people to give input, they have to listen. We will never ever let them do this again. We had a petition going with 600 signatures that we need a sports arena. We represent 750 residents.

Another problem with public meetings is that they do not necessarily represent the entire population of the ABI area. Only those that turn up at the meeting are represented. As one of the informants from the district administration put it:

When the report on Tøyen as a place in which to live was presented at the Vahl school last year, you could see who were present. They were white and middle class, not many of those you read about in the report – the residents of Tøyen.

Moreover, not everyone dares to take the floor. As one of the resident representatives commented:

Many are not comfortable speaking in public, but their opinion is also important. If you want to hear their opinion, you need to be creative.

One of the local politicians held the same view:

Participation is very demanding. You need to tailor your procedure to the different groups. If you are simply holding public meetings, it's the same people who don't show up. You shouldn't pay attention just to those who shout loudest, who use social media proficiently, write articles in newspapers etc.

The resident representatives said that it is necessary to be more creative if the goal is to reach all the inhabitants of the Tøyen area:

The district administration must invite people to discussions, but there needs to be competent representatives who can translate suggestions into action. This is an art form. It's significant who's participating. Children can have corny opinions and young people are not always enthusiastic, but really. You need to decode what they're saying. It's a job for professionals.

Out of the 13,600 inhabitants of the Tøyen area, just 250 showed up to the public meeting with the highest attendance. Moreover, the people who speak out at these meetings are even fewer. Thus such meetings are not necessarily representative of the opinions of Tøyen residents, but they can be used as an information channel and some of the suggestions can prove useful. One of the most

successful measures, a community house in Tøyen, was, in fact, suggested at a public meeting.

Besides public meetings, the DC invites residents to take part in regular “half-hours open to the public,” at which residents can suggest additions or changes to the program plans. But like public meetings, this measure is limited in the extent to which it allows for residents to exercise influence. Relatively few people attend. Participants are not representative of the entire population of the area and it would be questionable to base decisions solely on their suggestions. The representativeness of these meetings is further limited by the fact that few who attend dare speak their mind. The possibility for impact is nevertheless higher than that of suggestion boxes and e-mails because dedicated local politicians are there to listen. Thus we place this participatory measure next to last on the participatory ladder.

### **Participatory measure No.3: discussion groups and workshops**

Before deciding on the first project plan, the district administration consulted residents by means of discussion groups, for example with young mothers from Somalia, to get ideas for the plan. It also organised workshops with selected groups, particularly during the planning of the Tøyen square. These workshops involved activists, the private owners of the square and representatives from the district. We regard these measures as offering the third-lowest possibility for influence. It is true that they increase the democratic legitimacy of the ABI through the effort to reach out to all types of residents, including those less familiar with the bureaucratic system, and that dedicated civil servants are there to listen and learn; therefore, the possibility to exercise an influence on policies exists. However, the extent of the impact remains uncertain.

### **Participatory measure No. 4: The park report**

The district administration commissioned a report on the parks and green spaces in the Tøyen area. The largest such spaces are the green areas in the botanical gardens and around the prison, but there are also smaller ones. According to the park report, Tøyen is conceived as a green area, even though many of the smaller parks and green spaces are hidden away, partly overgrown and full of litter. Several respondents said that they felt unsafe in some of the green spaces (Zenisk et al. 2015). To find out how the parks in the area were used and perceived, three workshops were organized, along with two focus groups and a questionnaire sent out to 477 people. We regard this participatory measure as fourth lowest because it is limited to dealing solely with parks. On the other hand, it had a large impact on local policy on parks: politicians prioritized implementing measures in those parks where residents felt insecure.

### **Participatory measure No. 5: Children’s walk app**

As part of the research project on Tøyen as a place in which to live, children’s use of the area was mapped with the help of a digital tool – a so-called walk app.

Children used this tool to document where they walked, how they used the area and what they would like to be different.<sup>5</sup> Twelve-year olds from two schools were asked to draw the route they take to school on a digital map and indicate on which parts of this route they felt safe and on which ones they felt less secure. This provided a useful picture of the children's own experiences of their everyday environment in Tøyen. We rate this participatory measure the fifth highest for two reasons. First, because it targets children – a group that may struggle to be heard – and thus increases the democratic legitimacy of the measure. Second, because using this tool engages politicians and administrators in a way that makes them understand and commits them to action. Its impact potential is therefore quite high.

#### **Participatory measure No. 6: Project office**

The ABI project office was established early in the process. Initially, it had only two employees, but now there are four.<sup>6</sup> The office is located at the community house and plays an important role because it is easily accessible for residents. As one of the civil servants put it:

The project office is important. It represents the district and the ABI. It is situated in the community house. The office is open. People can walk in and discuss their ideas and thoughts.

Not only is the project office intended to offer easy access to the district administration for residents; the office employees are to go out and about to talk to residents. They have contributed to events such as the “Tøyen party”, Christmas celebrations and longer opening hours at the local library.

One of the initiatives considered to have been a success was suggested to the project office by residents – namely, the community house. This building provides space for a mix of voluntary associations, including meeting facilities, and the project office. One of the local politicians commented as follows about the community house:

It's a success, demonstrating real participation. The residents had a big impact on the final result, in terms of the plans for and the rooms in the house. People expressed what they missed and what they thought was meaningless to include in the house.

The suggestion for the community house was channeled through normal decision-making procedures in the DC. The democratic legitimacy of this measure is therefore high. Moreover, it is strengthened by the fact that it favours suggestions from residents who are not familiar with the bureaucratic system and whose voices might not be heard at other forums. For this reason, we rate it as the fourth-best participatory measure.

**Participatory measure No. 7: The report on Tøyen as a place in which to live**  
Investigative research into the Tøyen area, its inhabitants and their needs, as well as the organisation of the ABI and its results was initiated quite early in the process. This was because decision-makers quickly realized that they lacked the knowledge on which to base work related to the ABI.

Informants found the resulting report to be important in that it led to several changes in the way the District administration dealt with the ABI. Representatives from the district administration noted that:

There have been two important reports that established a knowledge base for the ABI: the research report on Tøyen as a place in which to live and the analysis of the parks in Tøyen. These reports were based on broad processes and provided structured and well-informed suggestions. I think they summarize a kind of essence of what residents in Tøyen want from the ABI.

In undertaking the research that resulted in the two reports, researchers engaged in participatory observation in Tøyen: they let children from local schools digitally trace the routes they took by means of a “children’s walk” app; they mapped the area’s physical and geographical characteristics; they talked to local businesses; and they interviewed 200 informants in the area, including children and youths, residents, the police, representatives of cultural institutions, parks, municipal institutions, religious groups, state institutions, the district administration, as well as school principals, representatives of municipal housing and representatives of substance abusers and psychiatric patients (Brattbakk & Hagen et al. 2015, p. 5). This demonstrates that they have talked to, and taken into account, suggestions from a broad swath of Tøyen’s inhabitants and institutions. In the opinion of our informants, work on these reports should have been undertaken earlier – ideally, before the decision to allocate ABI funding was taken. Many felt that decisions were made over their heads without taking account of what the local population needed. As one informant stated:

Why do we have to use our park to construct a science center. A science center is OK, but not if it is to compete with a much-wanted sports arena. We don’t need any more initiatives where our children stand outside and simply look in.

This participatory measure we rate third best because the research report mapped the interests of all residents and stakeholders in the area. This enhanced the democratic legitimacy of this tool. The report also identified key challenges and made concrete suggestions for solutions on which politicians ultimately based their decisions and priorities.

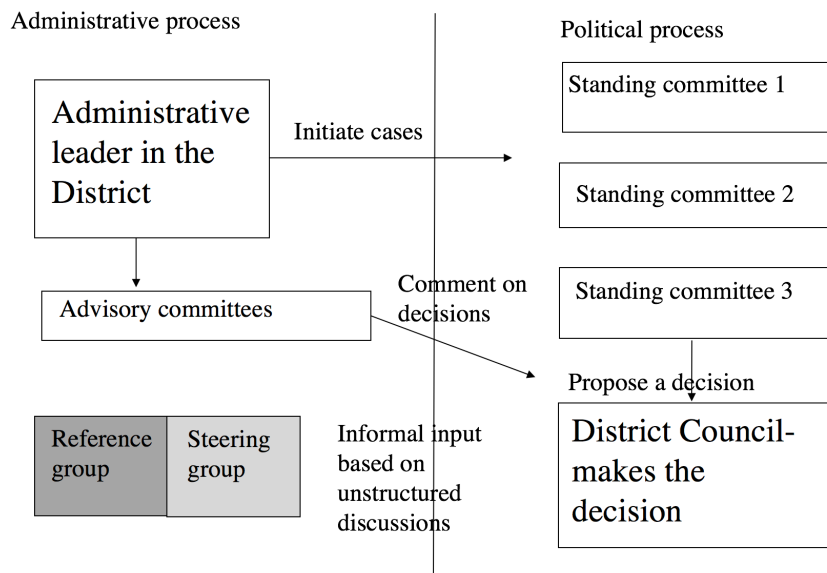
**Measure No .8: The reference group and “Tøyen council”**

In the first year of the ABI, there was a lot of trial and error. In the first case document on the ABI, the head of the district administration suggested participation to be organised through a reference group:

Participation: A reference group will be established. This reference group is to be advisory. It can contribute to the setting of goals and make suggestions to the strategic plan. The reference group is to be involved in the ABI. Suggestions for representatives in the reference group will be decided at the first DC meeting in 2014.

This was the only information initially included in the case document regarding participation. The document also suggested that a board be established with representatives from the administration, local politicians from both the governing parties and the opposition in the DC, in addition to the reference group with representatives of the residents of Tøyen.

*Figure 2: The decision-making process in the district council before the establishment of the “Tøyen council”*



As Figure 2 illustrates, the administration, represented by its leader, presents cases on which political decisions are to be made in the District Council.<sup>7</sup> The cases are processed in the advisory committees (for example, for youths, the handicapped, seniors). At the same time, they are sent to the standing committees, which process the cases approximately one week after the advisory committees. This way, their recommendations are added to the protocols for the

standing committees. The advisory committees can suggest changes, but the politicians decide whether they will take this advice into consideration. When the standing committees have processed the cases, the DC makes a decision based on this proposal.

A board and a reference group were established to ensure participation from residents. Initially, this board, which consisted of politicians selected from the DC, was supposed to propose cases. Then the cases were to be processed by the standing committees. But, in practice, the board ended up serving as another committee in between the administration and the advisory committees themselves. The administration's suggestion was to be discussed by the reference group, then by the board and standing committees and finally by the DC. However, this is not what happened in practice. The reference group received the cases late and had no time to prepare; as a result, there were only informal discussions within the group. This complicated matters significantly and proved time-consuming. Many informants confirmed that the system of having a board and a reference group did not work as intended, according to one of the local politicians:

The documents presented to the board were badly prepared and made it challenging to answer questions satisfactorily. Nor was the administration well prepared.

The same was true of the reference group. Its meetings were neither very efficient nor effective. The case documents were badly prepared and arrived too late. As one politician put it:

A reference group existed, but not many residents attended its meetings. The number of people that turned up varied. It was too loosely organised to have an impact. The case documents arrived just before the voting. Everything was behind schedule. Also, there were no quorums or obligatory votes.

The administration admitted that the reference group was not functioning as planned:

We learned a lot that first year with the reference group. It was not successful ... cases introduced at short notice, only a forum for discussion, no decisions. The meeting minutes from the reference group contained only notes on who said what. It was not substantial enough for the DC to base its decisions on. During the third and fourth meetings only half of the people invited showed up.



The desire to have real participation might also have been lacking in the administration, as suggested by one local politician:

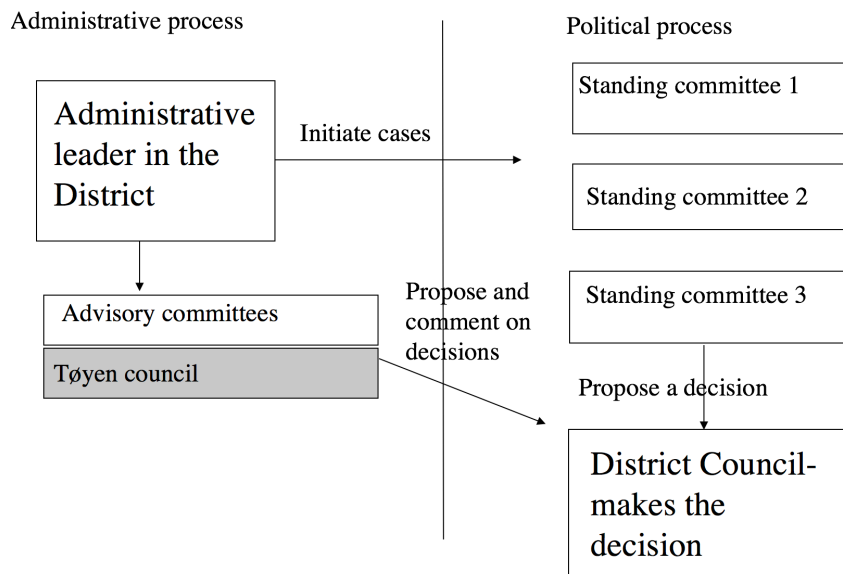
It was demanding to make the administration understand that the reference group had an independent role and was supposed to be our watchdog.

The first year of ABI funding had been channeled towards strengthening normal operations in the district administration. One local politician said:

The administration was more concerned with the levelling of living condition while residents were preoccupied with the environment for their kids and activities for youths so they don't hang out on street corners and engage in criminal activities.

This frustrated residents that had fought to get this funding for improving living conditions in their area. The residents' perception was that the only time their voice had been heard was when they pressured the DC through activism and their own media channels.

Figure 3. The decision-making process in the district council after the establishment of the "Tøyen council"



The reference group and the board were abolished and replaced by a council – the Tøyen council, which had the same status as the advisory committees. This

change was made in part as a response to the report on Tøyen as a place in which to live.

Under this new model, the administration sends the cases to the committees and the Tøyen council at the same time. The meeting calendar is fixed six months in advance. Preparatory documents and invitations to meetings are issued on schedule. Advice from the Tøyen council has the same status as that of the advisory committees, which can both propose measures and comment on decisions. This is still a very new structure that has yet to prove its effectiveness in terms of giving residents real influence.<sup>8</sup>

The representatives in the Tøyen council are mostly the same as those of the now defunct reference group. The project office serves as secretary. The council resembles the other committees in the district, such as the councils for the elderly, for youths and for the disabled. All cases in the ABI are sent to the Tøyen council for comment. Local politicians, the administration and residents all have faith in this new organisation. The Tøyen council is to serve as a link between the ABI, the residents of Tøyen and the district. One of the local residents explained:

They will discuss the ABI proposals. Residents and interest organisations are represented in the council. They will comment before the proposals are decided on politically. I believe in it.

Another representative of local residents states that he has high hopes for the Tøyen council but argues that it should have more power to influence decisions.

Even if civil servants in the Tøyen district claim they want to move towards societal self-organization and responsiveness towards citizens, they are, in effect, prevented from using local products and services to support the local community. This indicates that the problems of participation are multi-level. As an informant from the administration said:

We cannot support local businesses or use architects that work in this area because we are controlled by the municipality's big purchasing contracts and EU regulations. If we could interpret the regulations and have more discretion, it might be possible to strengthen the local community.

The organization of the participation process by a reference group clearly did not give residents any influence owing to its suboptimal and bureaucratic structure and processes. The new Tøyen council, on the other hand, has the potential for exercising influence as it can both propose measures and comment on suggestions on an equal footing with the administration. While this enhances its influence, its democratic legitimacy can still be questioned because it is not clear to what extent the Tøyen council represents all residents in the area. This participa-

tory measure is placed at the top of the participatory ladder because the Tøyen council has authority equal to that of the district administration.

## Discussion

The description of the different participatory methods used by the district administration demonstrates that some of these methods have allowed citizens more influence than others. The initial public meetings did not translate into concrete policymaking decisions and thus came close to informing (which is one component of “tokenism”) in Arnstein’s participation ladder. Many of the other initiatives, such as discussions with mothers from Somalia and workshops involving activists, the private owners of the square and representatives of the district can be seen as consultation (another component of tokenism) on Arnstein’s ladder as they yielded new and useful knowledge that local politicians and the administration could base their decisions on. The project office that led to the establishment of a community house is even higher on the ladder as the idea of the community house originally came from residents. The project office, which is located inside the community house, offers easy access for residents to make their concerns known to the office administering the ABI funding. The project office can therefore be viewed as placation (tokenism) on Arnstein’s participation ladder. The reference group has to be regarded as consultation (tokenism) on the ladder as it did not allow for resident influence. However, the new organizational system providing for a “Tøyen council” is very high on the participation ladder. This body can both propose measures and suggest changes and amendments to the administration’s proposals; however, this participatory measure does not allow for co-decision-making and for this reason is to be regarded as tokenism.

Which interests are represented by the “Tøyen council” is also questionable. If the council does not represent resident interests in a balanced way, this may affect its legitimacy. The reports had a large impact, particularly the one on Tøyen as a place, which led to changes in the decision-making structure. As part of their research, the authors of the report conducted a thorough mapping of all the different groups of residents views on what the funding should be used for. This method could therefore be seen as a kind of advanced consultation (tokenism).

These findings demonstrate that the public administration has to deal with participation in a competent way. It is not enough to organize public meetings so as to obtain input from residents and then decide over their heads. Instead, an in-depth mapping of the different resident groups’ interests may be needed. This demands competence and is time-consuming but may nonetheless be a necessary and legitimate procedure for allowing participation. Not only does it provide a good body of evidence of local residents’ interests; it also does not favour specific groups more resourceful in claiming their rights than others. But this type of participatory measure does not allow for co-decision-making, nor does the new model that includes a “Tøyen council”. To be labelled as co-decision-making, a system for participatory budgeting may need to be put in place. Another possible

participatory measure could be setting aside funding for which residents could apply to finance their own projects. This could move the system up the participatory ladder. This type of measure, however, risks favoring residents with a good knowledge of the formal bureaucratic system. A mix of participatory measures to guarantee the interests of all groups in the area may counteract this risk – for example, taking up suggestions made by the project office in addition to applications for funding projects.

Participatory ideals are intrinsic to the governance perspective of “societal self-organization,” which is more citizen-centric than the other perspectives on public administration. The findings of this paper demonstrate that traditional bureaucracy is still very much alive after decades of NPM reforms and appears far removed from “societal self-organization.” Civil servants are concerned with equal treatment and they are afraid of being held to account for not honouring these important public-sector values. These are legitimate concerns that characterize the old public administration. The organization of the Tøyen ABI nevertheless illustrates how the bureaucratic organization risks ending up destroying any possibility of real citizen participation. There are two reasons for this. Citizens get no power to influence priorities or decision-making in the organization of the ABI and the bureaucratic structure is so complicated that the processes are extremely long. This reduces responsiveness to citizens to almost zero. In Tøyen local activists were a strong force in demanding funding in the first place by holding politicians to account. In the process, the activists saw how ABI project money was swallowed up by normal operations in the district administration and they saw no concrete results from the extra funding in their area.

Inherent in the idea of participation is a dilemma. Electoral democracy is supposed to cater for the interests of all groups. In direct participation, there is a potential for increased democracy through resident participation but the risk also exists that the most resourceful and eloquent get their way over the interests of the less resourceful residents. The administration risks, in addition, being held to account for their use of funds. It is responsible if someone starts asking questions about unfair treatment, fraud and mismanagement, and prioritizing certain groups over others.

Another problem for the local district administration is the way that the hierarchical bureaucracy, the sector divisions and procurement laws function in practice. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of the bureaucratic system.

## Conclusion

The paper illustrates how concerns for the representativeness of all groups in any one area can be in conflict with responsiveness to the interests of the resident activists there. All residents are not likely to participate equally. Therefore, the public administration has to balance the concerns of all residents with the concerns of the activist residents. To deal with this challenge, competence in the

public administration needs to be strengthened. Research-like methods seem suitable for understanding the plethora of interests of citizens in any one area.

The structure and logic of the public administrative system is at odds with responsiveness to citizens. Even though resident participation and influence over decision-making are clearly stated goals in the Tøyen agreement, and in the contract for the ABI: indeed, the organizational setup of the ABI in effect prevents real participation of citizens. The organization for participation is inefficient, ineffective and time-consuming. The purpose of the participatory system thus seems to legitimize the public administration and the politicians' efforts towards participation rather than handing power to residents in line with the higher steps on Arnstein's participation ladder. Social activism seems to be far more effective in yielding power to residents.

It is important that research provides knowledge on the mechanisms that hinder and facilitate participation. The findings in this article explain some of the mechanisms that prevent local politicians and administrators from being responsive to citizens in practice, even when participation is a clearly stated goal in official documents.

The findings in this article have relevance for local districts and governments that want to implement good participatory methods in local administration. It is not sufficient to clearly state intentions of achieving participation or to include such intentions in official documents. Participatory measures must be followed up with competent and concrete measures. If local governments are to succeed in achieving participation, administrators need to realize the usefulness of participatory measures. This will increase their motivation to accommodate for participatory measures in competent ways – something that demands both time and resources. It is hoped that this article can increase the understanding of administrations about the need to encompass the interests of the entire population in any one area when allowing for participatory influence, as activists may not always represent the interests of all groups of residents.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/europe-changing-world-inclusive-innovative-and-reflective-societies>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/Innhold/Politikk%20og%20administrasjon/Statistikk/OsloSpeilet%20nr%201%20juni%202015.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coso.org/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://loft-toyen.no/onewebmedia/TL-ett-%C3%A5r-brosjyre-s-1.JPG>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.barnetrakk.no/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/politikk-og-administrasjon/slik-bygger-vi-oslo/toyensatsingen/omradeloft-toyen/>

<sup>7</sup> Members of the DC also have the possibility to suggest cases, but it is usually the administration that initiates cases.

<sup>8</sup> The overarching structure has also recently changed (December 2016) as the DC decisions now have to be approved by the department of city development in the city council.