Public Participation in Planning: Political Prescriptions and Practitioners' Roles

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To my father, Douglas Burdess

Abstract

The post-war development of environmental planning has been accompanied by an on-going debate regarding the role of public participation. However, such discussion has often been limited both by the lack of any well-defined theoretical framework, and by the limited amount of empirical data in certain areas. This thesis contributes to the planning participation debate, both on a theoretical and empirical level, firstly by establishing a comprehensive political framework within which ideas concerning planning participation can be placed; and secondly, by determining how two potentially influential groups, local professional planners and local elected representatives, regard the concept of participation and their own role with reference to its practice.

The research shows that, on a theoretical level, the planning literature on participation can broadly be classified as predominantly taking either an elitist, pluralist or participationist approach, with the majority of comment relating to those forms which are most widely practised, that is pluralism and elitism. At the empirical level, although there are discernible differences in the level of support given by different subgroups of respondents, the dominant view of both local government planners and councillors is closely related to the elitist perspective, with public participation being regarded basically as a technique to stimulate the two-way flow of information between local government personnel and the general public.

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