

PAPER TITLE: Participatory Planning: State Spatiality and Discursive Spatial Scales

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Abstract

The recent proliferation of institutional geography of state power provides insight into the analysis of socio-political dynamics of multi-scalar participatory decision making. This review examines how discursive strategies of state spatiality may be mobilised to interrogate the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions at another scale. My approach draws together three complementary strands of literature – participation, state spatiality and scale. I first review how participation have been conceptualised, including the nexus between participation and decision making. I also review the literature on state spatiality in conjunction with state spatial projects and state spatial strategies to explain spatial privileging and socio-economic intervention of the state. I then describe the theoretical perspectives on the scalar discourse. The paper concludes by arguing that while spatialisation of socio-political contestations within multi-scalar configurations of state spaces may be scale-sensitive, the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions in another has lacks explicit explanation.

Keywords: Participatory Planning, State Spatiality, Spatial Scale, Discursive Strategies, Multi-scalar

1. Introduction

Planning literature has placed significant emphasis on participation as a means for balancing and rationalising varied interests and preferences. This has also helped in the creation of participatory spaces across a spectrum of institutions and scales. The justification for increasing the role of participation in planning includes, among other things, the improvement of the quality of planning decisions (Kaza, 2006; Cornwall, 2008; Brownill, 2009). However, significant changes have occurred within the planning decision making environment that provide different contexts for the socio-political and spatial contestation across spatial scales. One of such changes includes the proliferation of institutional geography of state power and the decision making processes that fundamentally shape political outcomes (Allen and Cochrane, 2010). For instance, within the last three decades or so, the processes of spatial rescaling had contributed to the creation of more fragmented spaces with the opportunity for different groups to articulate their interests (Meadowcroft, 2002). These processes of spatial rescaling or devolution do not simply imply changes in the coordinates of socio-political struggle but also involve inter-scalar decision making that may be articulated in spatially selective forms and may target different actors across scales of state intervention (Brenner, 2004). At the core of the analysis of the roles between tiers of governance is the perception that the institutional geography

of state power and their decision making processes are greatly transformed by the reconfiguration of the scales that govern their activities (Jessop, 1990; Brenner *et al.*, 2003; Brenner, 2004).

One theoretical approach that shed much light on how the concept of state has a central role in socio-political discourse as well as embedded with political strategy is Bob Jessop's strategic-relational approach to state theory. Strategic-relational theory emphasises the dynamic interaction between state structures and the selective strategies adopted by social forces to advance their divergent interests. In this sense, the diverse societal forces and their interests are institutionally mediated through structurally inscribed strategic selectivity (Park, 2008). By strategic selectivity, I mean, if the state is considered as a social ensemble, then it has specific and differential impact: privileging some interests, spaces, scales, strategies and actors over others (Jessop, 1990; 2002). In other words, the relational character of the state and its attendant concern with strategic selectivity implies differential ability of social forces to seek their interests through selective strategies (Jessop and Sum 2006). Strongly influenced by Jessop's (1990) theoretical arguments, Neil Benner demonstrates how the state theory can be spatialised to provide the foundations for a strategic-relational-spatial conceptualisation of the state as well as spatial selectivity of state institutions. He sees spatial selectivity as the processes of 'spatial privileging and articulation' through which state policies are differentiated across territorial space in order to target particular geographical scales (2004: 89). Even though some state policies may privilege particular geographical spaces and scales, it does not defy the logic that state spaces and the diverse social forces are continuously interacting through the state at various geographical scales (Park, 2008).

Related to the interconnectedness of spatial scales is the call for multi-scalar arrangement for bottom-up decision making, particularly within political geography, political economy and planning. As the brief account on state spatiality from the preceding paragraph has shown that state regulation and political struggle often unfold at a variety of intertwined spatial scales, it may be fruitful to deploy multi-scalar institutional arrangements for participatory decision making. Some might argue, in this respect, that under multi-scalar decision making organisation, some decision tradeoffs have to be made both between actors' preferences and between spatial scales. But because some scales or layers of state power are subordinate to others, it is not every level of political authority that can be said to constitute, in itself a distinctive state apparatus (Shaw, 2000). To be sure, the existence of scalar mismatch (lack of fit between discursive processes and the scope and mechanisms of institutions to address of institutions a given problem) and the potential overlap of strategic interaction across may create uneven and variable outcomes in particular time and space. To some extent, this view is discussed later in the paper. Swyngedouw (1997b) emphasises that the 'metaphorical use and material construction' of geographical scale can easily move from one scale to the other (p.140). However, depending on the scale at which the metaphorical and material processes operate, scale may affect

different people in different ways due to differential discursive strategies. Similarly, accepting that strategic multi-scalar decisions are products of socio-political strategies imply that the achievement of a particular preference over the other will not solely depend on the scale itself but on the agenda of actors who are empowered by the scalar strategy (Born and Purcell, 2006).

Though the multi-scale nature of state spatiality has been acknowledged and useful theoretical frameworks developed to engage with scale and its strategic actors (Brenner, 2004), how multi-scalar decision tradeoffs are made and the kind of specific impacts scale choices might have on decision making have received far less attention (Karstens *et al.*, 2007). Yet it is acknowledged that translating felt needs at a lower scale into decisions at a higher scale often raises fundamental questions, not only about analysing the multiple perspectives within and across scales, but also about the strategies for aligning and harmonising lower and higher scales' decisions. These considerations open up two fundamental theoretical questions. First, how does participatory planning across scales take into account the tendency of the state to privilege particular preferences over others? Second, what are the rationales for translating lower scale decisions into decisions at a higher scale?

In this paper, I reflect on these questions, drawing on the theoretical approach that spatialises the strategic-relational theory of the state (Jessop, 1990, 2002; Brenner, 2004; Park, 2008) to provide insight into the analysis of socio-political dynamics of multi-scalar participatory decision making. Specifically, my account draws together three complementary strands of literature: the concept of participation; state spatiality; and the scalar discourse. I argue that the conceptualisation of discursive strategies of spatial scales may be fruitfully mobilised to interrogate and inform our understanding about the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions at another scale. Specifically, the paper focuses on two key issues: (a) how participatory planning takes into account the tendency of the state to privilege particular interest over the other in participatory decision making framework; and (b) the rationales for translating lower scale decisions into decisions at a higher scale, particularly within inter-scalar decision making structure. To do this, I structured the paper into two interlinked sections. It starts by examining the concept of participation and the impact of participation in planning on decision making. It seems to me that public participation and the possibility of translating its outcome into a decision does not necessarily occur together, and thus deserve analytical scrutiny. The subsequent section presents an overview of the theoretical discourse on state spatiality, with specific focus on strategic selectivity and spatial selectivity as structural features of state organisation. Developing the argument on state spatiality further, I shall examine the theoretical perspectives on spatial scale. The paper concludes by arguing that while spatialisation of socio-political contestations within multi-scalar configurations of state spaces may be scale-sensitive, the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions in another has lacks explicit explanation.

2. Conceptualising Participation

This section attempts to broaden our understanding of participation in planning by addressing two key concerns. The first part addresses some of the conceptual underpinnings of participation. In the second part, I examine the argument on how public participation in planning may be an integral part of the decisions that may emerge. In other words, to what extent does public participation represents an exercise in decision making? Participation and its decision outcomes have to be investigated fully if one is to take any critical stance on the explicit links between the participatory planning process and its resultant decisions. However, it is not my intention here to deal substantially with the theoretical foundation of decision making except to point out that improving public participation in planning may not be a substitute for establishing the nexus between public participation and decision making. My argument is that, analysing participation and its impact on decision making is problematic. The reason is that, while some genuine commitments may be made towards public participation in planning, the ultimate decision-making authority is retained by decision makers. This underscores the fact that participatory processes can conceal undemocratic tendencies and the complexity of incorporating public preferences and interests into decisions. Thus, inclusionary approaches that are required for a decision to emerge from public participation in planning may be fraught with difficulties and ambiguity (Creighton, 2005; Aitken, 2010).

In what follows, I attempt a brief discussion on conceptualising participation. Although the concept of participation has been continuously debated in the development, planning and political science literature, its meaning, function and importance lacks consensus. Also, the term participation is often used by people with different ideological positions, who invariably give varied interpretations of its meaning (Nelson and Wright, 1995). Given the variation in usage and orientation of commentators, it is not surprising that the concept of participation has been conceptualised differently.

Despite varying interpretations and a wealth of differences in conceptualising ‘participation’, Sherry Arnstein’s (2011) definition is insightful and worth discussing. According to Arnstein, participation is ‘the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future’ (p. 3). This conception of the participatory project encompasses the sharing of relevant information, broadening the framework of planning and policy discourses as well as allocating the benefits thereof. Arnstein’s position is that the redistribution of power is not accidental but is a conscious effort to empower the excluded. Whereas political scientists, economists and development administrators may look at participation in terms of public involvement in decision making, sharing in benefits and the roles people assume in implementation respectively (Fecade, 1994 in Kinyashi, 2006), Arnstein’s (2011) definition encompasses all these three dimensions. Emphasising on participation-decision making nexus,

Creighton (2005: 7) also defines participation as ‘the process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making’. The key concern, from Creighton’s conceptualisation of participation is that, it is not just an exercise to provide information, but also that members of the public who choose to participate should have some level of impact or influence on the decision being made. Taking into consideration the definitions and explanations of participation that I have discussed so far, Creighton’s work is more appealing in the context of what this section set out to examine - how public participation in planning may be an integral part of the decision making process.

Based on the foregoing discussion, public participation has been entangled with an ongoing debate between commitments to participatory planning on the one hand, and the opportunity it offers the public to influence decision making processes and/or outcomes on the other (Creighton, 2005). In this view, contemporary scholars of the participation discourse and political scientists are thus confronted with the task of deciphering the rhetoric of participation and active involvement (acting in and through state institutions) of participants from translating public input into decision thereof. Recent literature responds to this task from two strands of arguments. First, the view that participation in planning and decision making are deeply complementary and can be considered both as means and ends, and as processes and outcomes respectively. The second perspective is that, although planning processes may be described as being inclusive, it does not necessarily guarantee that the outcomes of public participation are integral to planning decisions. In the analyses to follow, I examine these strands of argument in turn.

Those scholars who celebrate the causal link between participation in planning and decision argue that participation forms an integral component of decision making processes as it upholds the effectiveness and quality of the planning process and validates planning decisions (DTLR, 2001; Lane, 2003). Relatedly, public participation can assist in producing a ‘better’ policy outcome. Arguably, ‘better’ policy could mean that the outcome of participation is more in tune with society’s values and preferences or tied to using participation to achieve stated goals (Rydin and Pennington, 2000). Puri (2004) argues that the causal link between participation and the effective use of public input in the decision making process can be presented in two dimensions: efficiency-based participation; and agency-based participation. The former understands participation as instrumental means to attaining a defined public interest, but the latter focuses on the role of human agency, defined as actions that bring about change in public policy planning. Given the growing interest in the ideas of ‘people-centred’ approach to decision making, at least at the rhetorical level, the second dimension (agency-based participation) seems to dominate. The underlying presumption about the agency-based dimension of participation is that human agency is preeminent in determining the success or failure of ‘state-society’ planning and decision making processes (Puri, 2004). Also empirical evidence from Agrawal and

Ribot's (1999) study seems to support the agency-based perspective on participation when they assert that the opportunity to participate in planning and decision making is a positive good in itself – it democratises decision making and governance.

In contrast, some commentators argued that meaningful public participation in planning and decision making process requires not only the creation of the opportunity to participate but also involves designing the mechanisms for incorporating the results of public deliberations into decisions (Gregory, 2000; Albrechts, 2002). As Alterman et al. (1984) emphasised in their work on 'the impact of public participation on planning', the general public do not lack the capability to provide useful input into planning decision making but it is only a small proportion of their comments affect the final decision. Another pessimistic account of the impact of participation on decision making posit that making participatory practices more inclusive for the previously marginalised groups and individuals, while using the same structures of power which excluded them previously is simply an act of getting the public to 'rubber stamp' a decision (Kothari, 2001; McCoy *et al.*, 1994; Kaza, 2006). This presupposes that public participation in planning does not always equate with public influence over the resultant decisions (Brownill and Carpenter, 2007; Purcell, 2009). Purcell (2009) further contends that the nexus between participation and decision may not be realised because of the nature of the participatory decision arenas or systems. The point is that, the form of governance and its participatory spaces that are more attuned with consensual methods of decision making may only help to maintain the dominance of the powerful interests and voices over a range of issues. In part, and in some cases, consensual systems may highlight in-built power imbalances and as well eliminate genuine political space of disagreement to unfold in a participatory decision making setting (Ploger, 2004; Swyndegouw, 2009).

In addition, Alterman et al. (1984) work on the impact of participation on planning decision making made an incisive observation. According to these authors, each stakeholder group employs participation as a strategy to achieve its own goals vis-à-vis the participation strategies of other groups. From this perspective, participatory settings can be perceived as the spaces for the deployment of a set of strategies toward the attainment of set goals by the participating groups. Kaza (2006) shows very clearly that one of the purposes of participatory planning is to identify the different positions and strategies of the diverse social groups. However, because it is possible to know the preferences and values of other groups beforehand, two issues are likely to emerge: (a) thus, certain groups actors may misrepresent their positions and/or obscure their intent so as to prevent others from gaining strategic advantage over them, and/or (b) those with prior knowledge about others' preferences may resort to strategic posturing. An analogous argument is that, the possibility of misrepresentation and the adoption of strategic posturing by some actors have the tendency to privilege particular interests and strategies over others in a participatory setting.

In the foregoing section, I have defined and explained the concept of participation. I have also carried forward the discussions by addressing some of the arguments on how participation in planning may be an integral part of the decision making process. In a limited way, I relate this discussion to the agency-based perspective on participation and its causal link with decision making. Even though the above arguments have provided valuable insights into the relation between participation and decision making, the participatory literature rarely examines how participatory decision making can be organised under the processes of state spatiality, and how these processes at diverse institutional sites and geographical scales may be deployed to investigate multi-scalar decision tradeoff. In the following section, I propose to build upon the participatory planning debates by integrating questions of state spatiality and spatial scale in an attempt to understand the discursive effects of multi-scalar decision making of the state.

3. State spatiality: A Framework for Analysing Participatory Decisions

This section presents an overview of the theoretical debates regarding conceptualisation of state spatiality as a form and action of the state. Specifically, I examine how state spatial organisation may offer a framework for analysing multi-scalar decision tradeoffs. I shall also devote some attention to the conceptual discussions on scale. My argument is that state spatial organisation and practices, including state scalar configurations have significant impact on how decisions at a lower spatial scale are translated into decisions at a higher scale. I emphasise that Brenner's (2004) 'State Spatiality' approach to state theory provides the theoretical basis on which the above claim may be further elaborated. It requires further elaboration because the socio-spatial and political forces that operate within and across state spaces are not explicitly specified. And given the fact that these socio-political forces of the state increasingly influence decisions at a variety of intertwined spatial scale, there is the need for a systematic reflection on the dialectical interaction of state spatiality and how it may impact on multi-scalar decision making. In order to make an incisive inquiry into this, it is first necessary to explore the theoretical interpretations of state spatiality.

Brenner's (2004) concept of 'New State Spaces' is partly influenced by Jessop's (1990) theoretical approach on strategic-relational theory of the state. Basically, Jessop's work combines two important concepts – strategy and social relation. First he argues that strategy is often deployed to mediate between structures of the state and human action. He further proposes that the state operates as the site of strategies, the generator of strategies and the product of strategies. Based on this, Jessop defines the state as a system of strategic selectivity. I will return to a detail discussion of the concept of strategic selectivity later. Secondly, he conceives the state as a social relation that derives its specificity from the interaction between state structures and the efforts of diverse social forces to influence or promote their interest in a particular context (MacKinnon and Shaw, 2010). From this perspective Jessop

(1990, 2002) broadly conceives the state as an ensemble of socially embedded and strategically selective institutions which unity cannot be taken for granted. Accordingly, the state has no inherent substantive unity. However, the state can be unified through specific ‘state projects’ for the mobilisation of its various configurations. In order to modify the balance of forces and/or regulate the economy, the state also intervenes in society and the economy through ‘state strategies’ (Brenner, 2004; MacKinnon and Shaw, 2010).

Brenner (2004) spatialises Jessop’s strategic-relational approach to state theory, with particular emphasis on the production of state spatiality. He conceptualises that state spatiality, like all other aspects of the state form, is never permanently fixed, but represents an emergent, strategically selective, and politically contested process (p. 89). He also points out that, political contestation is often mobilised within multi-scalar politico-institutional terrain on which diverse social forces attempt to influence the geographies of state territorial organisation and state regulatory activity. This perspective heavily relies on the assumption that the diverse social forces which are acting through the state are in constant search for the optimum combination of state structure and political strategy. In such a case, the search is also about the best means of using state structures to be able to implement the political strategies of social forces. Interestingly, what come to the fore here are the relationships between state structures and the various strategies social forces adopt, the outcome of which is open to further transformations (Goodwin *et al.*, 2006). Given the above, Brenner (2004) is convinced that, established configurations of state spaces always represent expressions of a dialectical interaction of ongoing regulatory strategies and socio-political struggles. In this sense, both the existing state spaces and the emergent state spaces are contingent in character. It also means that the strategies and regulatory activities adopted may have differential impact across space or lead to what Brenner terms as ‘spatial privileging and articulation’ – a situation where policy intervention leads to asymmetrical privileging of particular scale, space and place over others, partly with the aim of achieving political control (Jones, 1997; Jessop, 2002).

While understanding the role of dialectical interaction between regulatory strategies and socio-political struggles is critical to understanding spatial privileging and articulation, I want to argue that our understanding about spatial privileging would be augmented if we extend the analysis to cover the frameworks of state spatial projects and spatial strategies. By state spatial projects, I mean the initiative to differentiate the internal operations of the state, which are functionally coordinated within an organisationally coherent regulatory geography. Basically, state spatial projects are the embodiment of internal scalar partitioning among diverse tiers of administrative jurisdictions. On the other hand, state spatial strategies refer to how the state interacts with society more broadly to promote economic and social development across a wide range of policy areas. In other words, it is the spatial dimensions of state intervention in socio-economic processes within a given territory, including both spatially

targeted interventions and indirect spatial effects of aspatial actions (Brenner, 2004; Goodwin *et al.*, 2006; Breathnach, 2010; MacKinnon and Shaw, 2010). Together, state spatial projects and state spatial strategies can be mobilised as an integral part to the analysis of spatial selectivity.

Before we can engage with the literature on dialectical interaction and spatial privileging with the framework of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies, one additional concept needs to be clarified – Strategic Selectivity. I choose to follow this line of argument because of the belief that both strategic selectivity and the frameworks of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies result from the dialectic of strategic interactions and socio-political struggles. Also, both have the tendency to privilege particular forces, spaces or scales over the other. Hence, in an attempt to expand our understanding about their effects on spatial privileging, they can be examined together. My argument is not that the notion of dialectical interaction and those of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies converge around a single theoretical foundation. I am suggesting, rather, that if strategic selectivity, state spatial projects and state spatial strategies are the outcome of dialectical relationships and political strategies with spatially selective and privileging effects on space, place and scale, then analysing them together can advance our understanding about spatial privileging.

Even though strategic selectivity has been defined in the introductory section of this paper, it is quite appropriate to reiterate it here. From Jessop's (1990, 2002) conceptualisation, strategic selectivity aims at developing a framework for examining how political strategies may influence institutional structures and strategies of socio-economic intervention of the state. For Jessop, even though the state can be best understood as an outcome of ongoing socio-political contestation, it can produce specific systems of structurally-inscribed strategic selectivity. This situation is capable of producing a form of political class domination in terms of specific configuration of state institutions and its branches. By implication, the state can neither be equally accessible to all social forces nor be controlled or resisted to the same extent by all strategies, or be available for all purposes on equal terms. More generally, we can safely assume that, if structures of the state are not accessible, cannot be controlled, and may not be available for all purposes on equal terms, then strategic selectivity has the tendency to create uneven spatial effects of state policies (Jessop, 1990, 2002; Brenner, 2004). Meanwhile, uneven spatial effects cannot wholly be attributed to structural and institutional constraints. As argued by Jessop (2002) and MacKinnon and Shaw (2010), institutional structures may contain in-built biases but it is the strategies adopted by the actors that increase their prospects of gaining access to the state institutions and resources. And the manifestation of strategies is always found in and through discourses in a socio-politically contested manner. I believe that understanding how the strategic discourses and the reasons why actors privilege particular strategy and/or state space over others are problematic, particularly when this is analysed within multi-scalar configurations (I intend to take this argument up in the last portion of the section).

Equipped with this conceptual reflection of strategic selectivity and its spatial effects, I now turn to examine the conception that the framework of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies are critical for understanding spatial privileging. By taking note of this, one important task immediately emerged – analysing co-evolution of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies and its impact on spatial privileging. Starting off, I draw from Brenner's (2004) conceptualisation of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies to argue my case. On the most basic level, the conceptual distinction between state spatial projects and state spatial strategies is that whereas the former aims at functional unity, operational coordination, and organisational coherence of state institutions, the latter mobilises state institutions concerning particular forms of socio-economic intervention (Jessop, 1990; Brenner, 2004). The frameworks of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies may be conceptually separated, but my purpose here is not to establish their distinctiveness. Rather, I have tried to illustrate how the mutual transformation of the two frameworks can transform spatial effects of regulatory strategies and socio-economic intervention of the state.

As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, the framework of strategic selectivity examines how political strategies may influence institutional structures and strategies of socio-economic intervention of the state. By analogy, both state spatial projects and state spatial strategies are bestowed with strategic selectivity and by extension, spatial selectivity. For example, the struggle to influence the evolving institutional structures of state power (under state spatial projects) and the evolving role of state regulatory strategies (under state spatial strategies) often offer privileges to particular social forces over others. Brenner argues that, successful mobilisation of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies result in relatively coherent state spatial organisation of state institutions as well as modify the political and institutional terrain in which state spatial intervention (state action) occurs. From this perspective, state spatial projects and state spatial strategies can mutually condition and constrain one another partly, because they are endowed with a dialectical relationship between strategic interaction and socio-political contestation of social forces.

Another issue of importance to the co-evolution of state spatial projects and state spatial strategies is political strategy. Here, I shall briefly consider the role of political strategy in the evolution of institutional structures and socio-economic intervention of the state. Jessop's (1990) conception of strategic selectivity, which Brenner (2004) later spatialised, observes that the state often provides specific opportunity to some but not all categories of political strategy. The ongoing political strategies may be used by social forces to shape the evolving institutional structures as well as alter the modes of socio-economic intervention. This suggests that, both state spatial projects and state spatial strategies can mobilise political strategy, though, towards different interest and agenda. In the course of

mobilising political strategy, state spatial projects and state spatial strategies continually transform the political geographies of state regulation. The key message is that while state spatial projects and state spatial strategies may harness political strategies simultaneously, their co-evolution may occur in the mid of uneven spatial effects of state policy through spatial privileging. Against this background, Brenner points out that:

‘As diverse social forces struggle to mobilise state institutions towards their own ends, state space is continuously reconfigured, whether through explicit projects to reorganise the geographies of state territorial organisation and state intervention, or as indirect outcomes of ongoing regulatory experiments and socio-political conflicts’ (2004: 111).

Quite clearly, linking the above discussions under state spatiality to participatory planning in the first section of this paper raises a key question. Thus, if the strategic context of taking a particular course of action by social forces (individuals and/or collective) produces differential privileging effect, then how does the discourse on scale and multi-scalar decision making take account of this? In the present context, I shall not attempt a comprehensive narrative of scale. Instead, the following investigation focuses on a brief account of scale and how it affects participatory planning within multi-scalar configurations. I shall argue that, either on the same level or not, discursive strategies of actors at one spatial scale can be embedded into another through multi-scalar configurations. The issue of scale is worth incorporating into the present discussion for two main reasons. One, it extends the discourse on state spatiality and tease out the ways in which scale shapes socio-political struggle. Second, the scalar discourse will help us to ask deeper questions about socio-spatial relations of governance activity with respect to participatory decision making within multi-scalar configurations of the state. In what follows, I present a brief account on the concept of scale.

Generally, earlier conceptualisation of scale perceive it as the nested hierarchy of bounded spaces of differing size, such as the local, regional, national and global. However, an attempt to treat geographic scale simply as pre-given and fixed hierarchy of bounded spaces at different levels of political organisation and action is fiercely challenged (Delaney and Leitner, 1997: 93) for its failure to capture the myriad of socio-spatial configurations that are continually evolving within and across state space (Brenner, 2001, 2004; Marston *et al.*, 2005). In an attempt to unpack and present a steady conceptual meaning of scale, some political geographers and economic geographers have been spawning an impressive body of literature (Moore, 2008). In spite of the burgeoning literature on scale, it is appropriate for the present purpose to briefly review the theoretical position on the scalar discourse.

According to Swyngedouw (1997a), scale is the ‘embodiment of social relations of empowerment and disempowerment and the arena through and in which they operate’ (p. 169). This suggests that scale is not an independent definable geographical territory, but correspond to real material processes and spatial formations. Just as spatial selectivity which has the potential of creating uneven spatial effects, Swyngedouw’s conceptualisation also acknowledges that scalar processes may not offer equal opportunity for all actors. Swyngedouw (2000: 68) later observes that ‘scale ... has always been the terrain of the political where socio-political tensions were fought over, mediated, and negotiated, resulting in ever-changing forms of territorial or geographical organisation and in territorially shifting forms of governance’. In this sense, the theoretical and political priority should not focus on particular scale, but rather on the discursive processes through which a particular scale may be (re)constituted (Swyngedouw, 1997b). For Leitner et al. (2008), scale is ‘a relational, power-laden and contested construction that actors strategically engage with, in order to legitimise or challenge existing power relations’. In the process of actors’ strategic struggling, new scales are constructed, and the relative importance of different scales is reconfigured (p. 159).

An emerging issue of concern is that, if the (re)constitution of a particular scale is more defined by an ongoing dynamics of socio-political struggle, then, how do specific discursive strategies of actors condition and/or constrain socio-spatial and political relations in a multi-scalar decision making configurations? To illustrate my argument, I will describe how analysts of scale in the field of political geography and planning have attempted to address issues of multi-scalar decision making. This line of thought is greatly influenced by the argument that planning problems manifest themselves at variety of scales and that, in order to address them accurately, discursive action should reckon with these spatial scales (Buizer *et al.*, 2011). A complementary argument from Morinville and Harris (2014) is that, though multi-scalar governance processes may be established, the ability to mobilise the discursive strategies of the diverse social forces across scale is not a given.

To demonstrate how scale can be used to address multi-scalar participatory planning problems, I structure my argument into two parts: (a) the argument in favour of the rationale for multi-scalar decision making; and (b) those against multi-scalar decision making structures. Starting with the first segment is the view that participatory governance and decision making often involves multiple stakeholders whose needs cut across scales. Within this logic, multiple levels of interactive decision making might prevent the problem of ‘one-size-fits-all recommendations (Ostrom, 2009). Viewed through a planning lens, Leino (2012) also posits that participatory planning procedure is multi-disciplinary and as such it requires input from multiple stakeholders and fields of knowledge. In order to confront multi-scalar planning problems, people have to negotiate and tradeoff their competence and interest with other actors across scale. This may be explained in part by the fact that, the scale at which a particular problem is experienced, discussed and analysed may not neatly correspond to the

scale at which implementable decisions are taken (Tower, 2000). Some may argue that multi-scalar interaction that is conditioned by the above scenario is problematic. However, this view is contested by Swyngedouw (1997b). He points out that, though socio-spatial relations of scale may operate over certain distance, neither the larger nor the smaller geographical scale is considered as a preeminent site for interactive decision making.

However, the notions of multi-scalar decision making within spatially organised governance processes across scales are not left uncontested. For instance, in policy and management studies, Cash *et al.* (2006) explain that interactions that may occur within or across scales of decision making are embodiments of dynamic relationship. These dynamics – ignorance, mismatch and plurality – which determine the choice of scale can also be a challenge. By ignorance, I mean lack of understanding about how a solution to a given problem at one scale may engender new problems at another scale. Plurality also refers to the ability to recognise that there is no one scale, representing the whole system that is best to focus solutions on. The fundamental issue is that, at any given time, a particular scale would be best only to a select group. Finally, mismatch is the challenge of matching the discursive processes and the scale at which decisions are made (Buizer *et al.*, 2011). Following this line of argument, it can be suggested that poor articulation of issues of ignorance, plurality and mismatch may constrain effective use of multi-scalar settings for participatory decision making. Hence, until the challenges associated with ignorance, plurality and mismatch are recognised and their opportunities exploited, the existence of multi-scalar structures *per se* will not provide enough basis for analysing planning problems.

Another contrasting view is that public participation at all scales is limited by the problem of inequalities of power (Pickering and Minnery, 2012), including multi-scalar organisation of state spaces. Some writers, including Swyngedouw (1997b) believe that, even though scale is fundamental to temporal transformation of existing socio-spatial power relationship, neither the local nor the global scale offers a viable option for power neutrality. This often raises a fundamental question about the scales at which planning problems need to be analysed and/or solved. Swyngedouw remind us that scale do not emerge only as a site for domination, but also as an arena where compromises are negotiated through a series of socio-spatial struggles. So, in a multi-scalar configuration of the state spaces, the role and interpenetration of a particular geographical scale are determined by nested socio-spatial relationships. Of course, spatial scales are deeply heterogeneous with embedded ongoing transformative socio-spatial power struggles, but the struggles will always lead to three things – changing the importance of certain scales, reassert the importance of other, or new scales may be created entirely. In short, as power coordinates shift, though temporally, new actors join or the existing actors reinforce their power position (Swyngedouw, 2005). In this sense, the power and control of some scales will be strengthened while others are disempowered. Even though a given scale of state

power may encompass and constitutes other scales of political authority, with the latter still playing significant roles within the wider multi-scalar institutional structure (Brenner, 2004), the capacity to make strategic use of any spatial scale typically varies greatly among stakeholders (Swyngedouw 1997b). This suggests that the discursive strategies and/or strategic selection by the actors are fundamental to analysing, incorporating and solving planning problems.

It is important, nonetheless to recognise that despite the ongoing debates on scale's conceptual potential and limitations, decision makers and other socio-political actors continue to engage with scalar concepts within and across varieties of geographical scales. Some even assume that decision makers possess an unlimited processing capacity to be able to translate strategic choices of the public into decisions that are relatively acceptable to all stakeholders (Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga *et al.*, 2007). However, the central importance of multi-scalar decision making becomes distorted when the analysis of scale is not in tandem with these three factors: (a) decision features; (b) situation factors; and (c) individual differences. A balance between these factors will be useful in trading off decisions across spatial scales. For instance, this will help to incorporate regime factors (Jessop, 1990), and the socio-political context of the decision (Mackinnon and Shaw, 2010). In sum, while spatialisation of socio-political contestations within multi-scalar configurations of state spaces may be scale-sensitive, the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions in another has lacks explicit explanation.

In relation to the present section, I examined how state spatial organisation may offer a framework for analysing multi-scalar decision tradeoffs. Using the concept of state spatiality, I discussed how the dialectical interaction between regulatory strategies and socio-political struggles affect the institutional structure and socio-economic intervention of the state. I also distinguished between state spatial projects and state spatial strategies dimensions of state spatiality, and how together they can be produced and (re)produced through spatial privileging and/or uneven spatial effects of state policies. I end the section on the scalar discourse. This cover the conceptual debates on mobilizing scale for multi-scalar decision making. Here, the insight I draw is that multi-scalar configurations of the state may or may not offer a viable option for participatory decision tradeoffs. The strategic choice of actors, both within and across scale is more critical for trading off decisions.

Conclusions

The paper considers how the participation discourses, state spatiality and spatial scales provide the context for participatory planning within multi-scalar decision making arrangement. I argue that the conceptualisation of discursive strategies of state spatiality can be mobilised to interrogate and inform our understanding about the rationale for translating decisions at one scale into decisions at another

scale. I begin the discussion on the concept of participation, and how participation represents an exercise in decision making. I contend that the nexus between participation and decision making is more than the commitment towards public participation in planning. To be able to draw on some of the implications of state spaces on the participation discourse, I carried forward the discussion into how state spatial organisation may offer a framework for analysing multi-scalar decision tradeoffs. My argument is that state spatial organisation, including its scalar configurations have significant impact on how multi-scalar decisions are being traded. Here, I draw heavily on the spatialised version of strategic-relational theory of the state to argue my case. In doing that, I show that state spatial projects and state spatial strategies dimensions of state spatiality can be produced and (re)produced through spatial privileging and/or uneven spatial effects of state policies in a reciprocal manner. I end the discussion on the scalar discourse with specific focus on discursive strategies of actors and how they condition and/or constrain socio-spatial and political relations across spatial scales. Though socio-political and spatial forces continue to use scale discursively, the conceptual explanation on the rationale for translating and/or recomposing decisions at a lower scale into decisions at a higher scale has not been explicit.

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