

AESOP 2015 Definite space – fuzzy responsibility

## Public Participation in Norwegian Physical Planning – revisited Helge Fiskaa

### **Abstract**

Ten years ago, I published about article Public Participation in Norwegian Physical Planning (Fiskaa, 2005), which this paper follows up. Since then changes have occurred in Norwegian planning act and practice. The new Planning and Building Act from 2009 emphasized the ambitions and requirements for public participation. At the same time, Norway has an explicit right for private developers to promote zoning plans, unlike at least the other Nordic countries that still have a public planning monopoly.

Thus, one may assume private developers in Norway to influence the content of plans decisively although the municipal council has the authority to approve them. Previous research project indicate that developers communications about plans are mostly towards the municipal planning department and other public authorities, with less regard for public participation.

This paper examines the present status of public participation in Norway, enlightened by a case study of 140 zoning plans decided upon by the city council in Trondheim in the years 2012-2014. The study shows that public participation in the meaning citizen participation beyond the act's minimum requirements is rather seldom. Moreover, when neighbours, other inhabitants and civil organizations oppose to plan proposals or forward alternative proposals, their meanings are for the most not taken into account. This fact is most obvious concerning private promoted plans, and must be a challenge for planning authorities that have the superior responsibility for open and democratic planning processes.

Key words: Planning system, public participation, private plans.

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## 1. Introduction

The article in 2005 gave three recommendations to the preparation work on the Norwegian planning and building act concerning public participation. Firstly, a planning program should be introduced for all planning matters, as even small plans may turn out to be controversial. Secondly, public participation should be organised at the very beginning of the process. Thirdly, the planning authority should be responsible for establishing the planning program and leading the planning process, which would give the planning authority an undisputable place behind the steering wheel and thus increase the chances for real public participation and plans more in accordance with public interests. An underlying question for this article is if these recommendations are taken into account or not.

In Norway, public participation is on one hand regarded as an inevitable part of the planning process and on the other hand, market forces seem to challenge participation, which gives reasons to investigate participation related to political and planning ideology. Why and how has participation in Norwegian physical planning developed over time and what are present status and challenges? Which kind of actors participate and to what degree? What are the outcomes of public participation in planning?

The request for public participation in Norwegian planning has roots in citizen's protests and actions around 1970 against the then authorised form of planning, which was, in the opinion of many, authoritarian and top-down, a "game" between planners and (some) politicians, following an instrumental rational approach (Amdam and Veggeland, 1998). The municipality had monopolistic responsibility for planning and was supposed to co-operate with public agencies, organisations etc. who had interests in the planning task. Interest for participation from other than municipal and other public bodies and those with business or owner interests was not very conspicuous, and limited to public scrutiny of plan proposals with opportunity also for citizens to put forward their remarks.

The protests, which were often in the form of demonstrations and actions, was a reaction against undesirable consequences of the policy of economic growth, industrialisation, and centralization (Furre, 1991). The criticism was concrete in the sense that it dealt with loss of jobs in rural areas (Skjeggedal, 1988), and negative environmental consequences as unfortunate effects of urban growth, such as building on agriculture land and natural areas, and urban renewal and road projects, which inhabitants meant would deteriorate old neighbourhoods, etc. The protest promoted alternative values such as sprawled settlement structure (Fiskaa, 2009), local communities, historical continuance and environmental protection. The criticism was also theoretically directed against methods in modernistic planning and the "value neutral" expert role in physical planning (Ellefsen, 1993).

Gradually planning became more locally oriented, incremental and focused on local environmental issues. From the late 1970s, the authorities accepted citizen participation as part of the planning process. Planning theories about bottom-up and garbage can planning arose (Amdam and Veggeland, 1998). From the 1980s' neo-liberal ideas' belief in market forces and the idea of new public management, have strongly influenced Norwegian politics, as in most western countries (Mydske *et.al.*, 2007) The regulative and controlling public sector came under pressure when liberalization, privatization and deregulating became major political goals (Falleth & Hansen, 2011). The fundamental purpose of public planning as such came under discussion. Today private developers provide most local plans, at least in the cities; in contrast to countries like Sweden, Denmark and Germany where public planning monopoly is still in effect. By this planning changed character with less emphasis on public long-term preparation and control, and was more incremental and project oriented. In most cases, developers have the main responsibility for plan implementation, often in the form of development agreement with the municipality, and have thus a leading role in urban development (Røsnes 2008). Thus, they may have a considerable influence on master planning as well. Planning literature described a change from public governing to

governance, which in practise exists in the form of public-private cooperation giving market actors a stronger position then traditionally (Fimreite & Medalen, 2005; Nyseth, 2008), and with little attention to citizens participation.

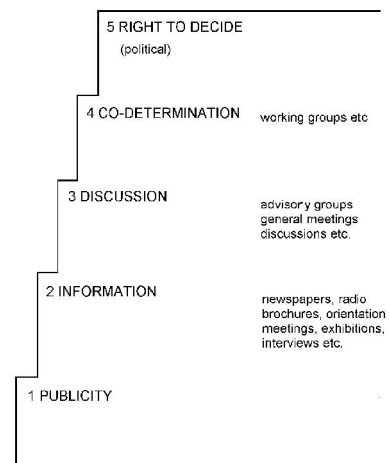
After this presentation of the political and historical background, the paper accounts for conception of public participation in Norwegian context. The main section of the paper presents a case study of public participation in zoning plan processes in the city of Trondheim. At the end, the paper discusses the present situation and current trends, with some reflections on future participation in planning, including a recommendation to authorities to strengthen the requirements to openness and democratic planning processes.

## 2. The conception of public participation in Norwegian planning

Three main arguments legitimate public participation in Norway: Participation will (1) enhance knowledge about the situation and give a better basis for creating favourable solutions, (2) it will give affected people opportunity to control that all factors are taken into consideration and thereby give legal security for them, and (3) participation is as a democratic right (Medalen, 1999). Implicit, participation has a purpose of advancing fairness and justice (Innes E. & Booher, 2004). Public participation is a means to fulfil the basic purpose of public planning and interventions, namely to correct the free market forces in order to provide common goods, hinder overexploitation of limited resources, control external consequences, and to contribute to fair distribution of goods (Sager 1991).

The Norwegian term *medvirke* for participation means to take part, contribute, co-operate, and indicates thus an active form of participation. Related to Sheryl Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969), which has been adapted to Norwegian planning as shown in figure 1, participation should mean real co-operation and influence. Everyone should know they could influence the shape of their community (Bedford, Clark & Harrison, 2002). Public participation can include all parties or actors having any interest in or for the planning case, although one primarily thinks of citizens' participation.

Figure 1. Different degrees of public participation range from one-way communication (1 and 2), via two-way communication (3), up to active participation and co-operation (4), and right to decide (5), which is the responsibility of political boards (Adapted from NIBR/TØI, 1980).



The parties might be directly and indirectly affected persons and organisations as owners, property developers, public agencies, neighbours, other inhabitants, interest groups etc. The purpose of participation is to obtain better plans, in that meaning that most people accept them. A well-performed participation process can contribute to moving a problem from disagreement and unknown solution in the direction of agreement on goals and solutions (Sager 1991). Brabham (2009) claims that Norwegians are more

apt to be involved in public planning due to a general expectation of transparency in government and due to Norwegians' generally high rates of activity in political parties.

### *2.1 The Act's requirements*

Most physical planning takes place in the municipalities, although the counties shall provide regional plans, which will normally not be specific on localisation and land use, and the state may prepare and approve state plans for securing national interests or projects. The municipalities shall prepare and approve a master land-use plan for the entire area, and eventually land-use plans for parts of the municipal area. There are two types of detailed plans. Area zoning plans, which are meant for defining land use in some detail, will normally cover a rather large area. The municipality is normally responsible for preparation of this plan type. Detailed zoning plans are meant for further clarification of the design within the actual area, and is normally used for concrete projects. Private bodies, developers, organisations and other authorities are entitled to put forward plan proposals, often called submitted plans.

Some allege that the prevailing Planning and Building Act's has strengthened the requirements to public participation. However, the present principal wording "... shall facilitate public participation. ...." seems weaker than the former act's statement "... make an active effort .... at an early stage ...to inform the public ... ", and "... an opportunity to participate actively ...". There are concrete minimum requirements to participation for the different plan types, which the new act has just slightly changed.

According to these requirements, inhabitants and other may promote their views and arguments at two stages of the planning process: Firstly, at the commencement of a planning work, affected public bodies and other interested parties shall be notified, and the proposer shall publish a notification. The act does not describe real participation at this stage, but common practise is to invite both public agencies and citizens to questions and comments. For a zoning plan that may have substantial effects on the environment and society, a planning programme, including arrangements for public participation, shall be drawn up. The programme proposal shall be circulated for comments and presented for public scrutiny.

Secondly, the planning authority shall, if they wish to proceed the process, present the plan proposal for public scrutiny and, at the same time circulate it to central government, regional and municipal authorities and other public agencies, organisations and institutions affected, for comment. Landowners, lessees, other rights holders in the planning area and directly affected neighbours shall be informed of the planning work. This hearing gives citizens and organisations a right to forward their remarks and proposals, most often in written form, which the municipality shall consider and eventually incorporate in the plan. Some state and county agencies and neighbouring municipalities are entitled to object on plans within their sphere of responsibility. The last step is the municipal council's eventual adoption of the plan; however, an objection to the plan may cause a final decision by the ministry.

### *2.2 Actors, arenas and planning process*

Generally, one can divide actors in planning in four or five groups: planning authorities, politicians, developers, and citizens (Nordahl, 2006). In addition, other public agencies have an important role in most planning matters. Planning authorities has the assignment to produce plans and advice others promoting plans. In the present situation when other than the planning authority prepare and promote most detailed plans the public planners are most often reduced to executive officers who steer the plan through the formal political decision-making process (Falleth & Hansen, 2011).

Politicians are rarely involved in the planning process *per se*. Their task is formally most often limited to participating in the decision-making process in the actual political committees and boards. This is in



free market forces do not take care of, the motives are to provide for what is desirable and to hinder unfortunate side effects of individual and private actions (Vigar *et al.*, 2000; Røsnes, 2005). In addition to the right for developers, which have substituted the traditional public responsibility for preparing project implementation, may threaten public interests. Crucial questions are about the transparency in the process and negotiations taking place parallel to the planning work. Parallel and closed negotiations, and may be lobbying as well, may lead to early informal decisions on plans and thus short-circuit the planning process (Garnåsjordet, 2000). Thus, negotiations upon plans and agreements for plan implementation may lead to pre-binding and exclusion of lay citizens and third parties from information and influence in an early and decisive stage of a planning process until the final hearing of the proposal (Røsnes, 2005; Falleth and Hansen, 2011). The procedure for development agreements is the same as for a zoning plan, giving opportunity to real participation at the stage of public scrutiny. It is paradoxical to give third parties the right at a late stage when the possibility to real influence is modest (Wøhni, 2007), which citizens find unsatisfactory (Schmidt *et. al.*, 2011).

Falleth & Hansen (2011; 2014) have found that the performance of governance has given private developers a stronger position in planning and development at the sacrifice of public control and third parties influence. The planning administration and local politicians appear to value participation as an important part of the democratic decision-making process. Developers are far less likely to view public participation as an important part of the planning process. They rely to a greater degree on an economic rationale with planning seen more as a necessary administrative control before construction can get under way. Their survey reveals further that most municipalities have set up procedures for interaction with developers. The developers have mostly interaction with planning authorities in the form of closed meetings and direct contact. They have also considerable interaction with local politicians, especially direct contact. Community organizations also have more or less contact with politicians and planning authorities, for the most direct contact. Developers and local organizations have to lesser degree interaction, and then most often direct contact. Politicians mean suggestions from and contact with community actors influence the planning result to a higher degree than contact with developers, contrary to the view of planning authorities. Both local organizations and developers mean contact influence the plans to lesser degree.

### 3. The survey

This article is based on a recent study of all 140 zoning plans approved by the City Council in Trondheim in the years 2012 to 2014. They are all proposed and processed according to the prevailing Planning and Building Act of 2008. Six of the plans are area zoning plans and 134 detailed zoning plans. The size of the plans varies considerable, covering from around 700 square metres up to more than 200 hectares. Most of them concern housing or other buildings, but there are variations from roads, recreation areas, to a wind farm etc., and even a shooting range. Of the 140 plans, 84 are private plans provided by developers or landowners. Fifty-six plans are public. The town planning department was responsible for 15 of them, three of them in cooperation with private developers or Public Roads Administration. Other municipal bodies, as for example the municipal property department and the municipal administration for transport (The environmental package) are responsible for 32 plans prepared by private consultants. The Public Roads Administration was responsible for seven, and other public authorities for two plans.

#### 3.1 Method

The survey is a cross-case survey dealing with many examples and rather few questions. The method is supposed to give reliable results. However, equivalent studies in some other municipalities may have given different results. It is a document study of case documents for the plans. The main documents are easily accessible at Trondheim municipality's web page. They include the written presentation of cases and plan maps provided for political treatment during the process. The survey examines the documents

at two steps. The first step is the announcement of commencement of planning work and the following treatment of the proposal in a planning committee, in Trondheim called building committee, who decides if the plan proposal shall be presented for public scrutiny and circulated for to public agencies and organisations for comments or not. The committee may accept the proposal, reject it or make changes in it. The second step is the committee's considerations of received scrutiny comments and eventual objections. Also at this step, the committee can accept the plan, reject it or prescribe alternations. A major revision requires new presentation for public scrutiny and circulating for comments. After the committee's acceptance of the plan, the final step is the City Council's decision upon approbation of the plan. The survey do not analyse this step because a final decision will be accordant to the second step.

The written presentation to the treatment in the committee and city council gives a description of the plan proposal and the consequences of it, and a summary of meetings during the process and, comments received from public agencies, organisations and inhabitants, and the judgment of the comments. However, the presentation does for example not always account for all internal meetings concerning solutions within the planned area, or eventual informal steps. Thus, vital decisions may have been taken behind closed doors, not least in the crucial early stage of the process. Due to lack of time available, no other documents are scrutinized or involved persons interviewed.

In addition to these statutory minimum requirements for public participation, it is of interest to look for supplementary arrangements, for example information and discussion meetings, what kind of arrangements, the purpose, participants etc.

Comments may be irrelevant or not dealing with the real matter of the plan proposal, for example circumstances that the plan does not affect. There may be some misunderstandings behind a response, for example about what the plan really regulate. In several cases, especially public agencies just report that they do not have any comments to the plan.

Comments may be taken fully or partly into account, or be rejected. Comments fully taken into account may concern one or more plan elements that are all accepted as reasons for revision of the plan. If partly taken into account the comment deals with several issues, and some lead to plan modifications and others not, or the arguments are accepted to a certain degree and the plan are revised modestly. If rejected, none arguments and views are accepted. The case study follows this classification.

Respondents are grouped in three categories. One is neighbours and other individuals, groups as for example residents' associations, or companies nearby or inside the planned area, directly affected of the plan. Another group is organisations often representing, as for example environmental protection organisations, and citizens generally who are interested in the planning matter, some specific interests. The third group is public authorities, which most often represent one or more specific public interests.

Responsible for the plans are divided in two groups, public authorities and private developers and land-owners. As the number of plans produced by the municipal planning department is very low, there is a risk for random results, which may be reduced within a greater group.

### *3.3 Step one –at the commencement of a planning work*

Although the act does not prescribe a process for following up the announcement of the commencement of a planning work, it seems common that public agencies react and give their comments. They may comment on elements in the plan and propose solutions, and can notice a possible objection to the plan. Many inhabitants and organisations also ask questions and put forward their views and remarks that has to be considered by the planning authority.

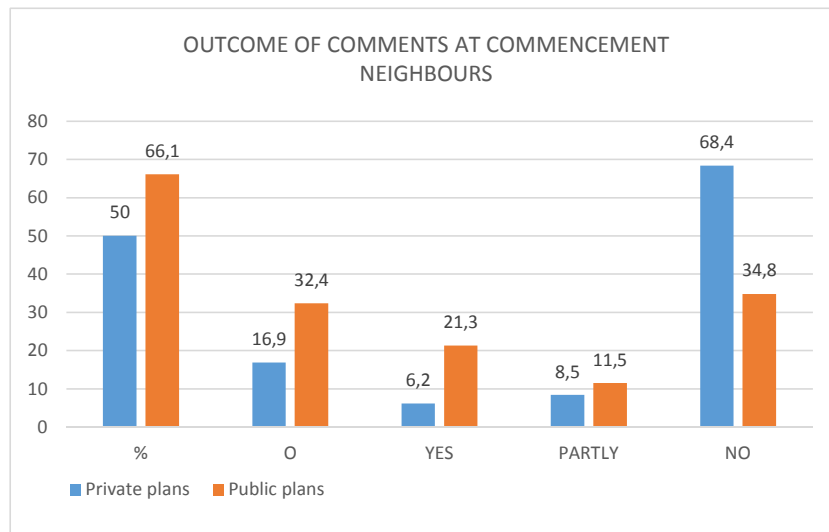


Figure 3. The outcomes of the building committee's considerations of received comments from neighbours after the commencement of the planning work.

Surprisingly many neighbours reacted to the planning work already in the first stage. As much as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of publicly and half of privately promoted plans were commented upon from one or more neighbours (%). Despite limited announcement, people seem to be aware of planning initiatives. This is opposite to former findings where participants in a participation project meant that invitation to participation happened too late in the process (Schmidt et. al., 2011).

When it comes to the result of the planning committee's considerations, they found one third of the comments to public plans and sixth part to private plans not actual or relevant (O) which may indicate more trust to public agencies than to private developers. One third of the comments to public plans were taken fully (YES) or partly (PARTLY) into account and just 15 % of the comments to private plans. The higher rate of positive response to comments to public than to private plans gives the same indication. One third of comments to public plans and two third to private plans were rejected (NO). The high rate of rejections of comments, especially to private plans, indicates that private promoting plans are less sensitive to neighbours' interests and views than public agencies. It seems that major principles for the content of the plans have been determined at a very early stage of the process. In addition, one explanation may be that private plans most often deal with new dwellings in already urbanised areas, which often lead to worry among people for reduced quality of view, outdoor areas, traffic safety etc.

Other citizens and organisations, for the most organisations, commented to nearly one third of the private and more than forty percent of the public plans. Although lower figures than for neighbours, this is in fact a high share, as one would think that people outside the actual area more seldom would be concerned about the planning. The high share of not actual comments for both private and public plans, about a third, indicates also that many involve even if they are not sure that their views are relevant. On the other hand, the figures for fully and partly acceptance for comments, in all around 40 to 45 % and a little higher for public than for private plans, indicate that many promote important arguments and views.

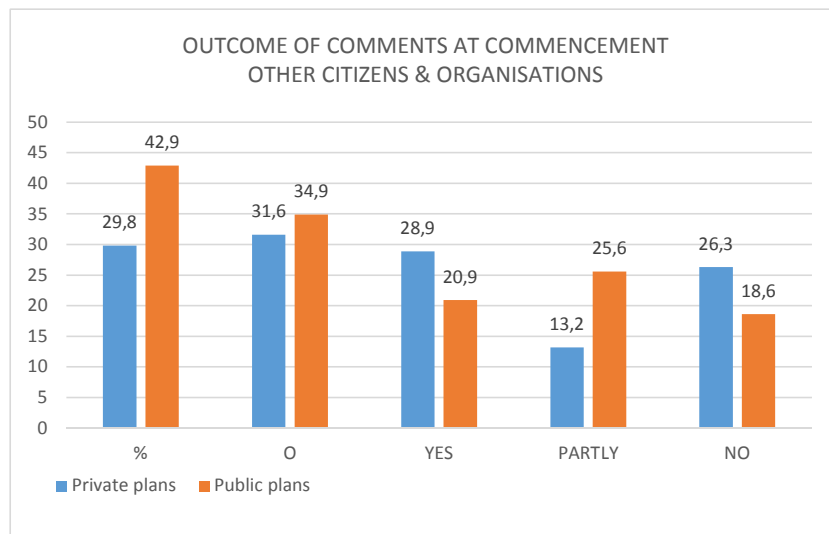


Figure 4. The outcomes of the building committee’s considerations of received comments from other citizens and organisations after the commencement of the planning work.

The higher score for public plans indicates that public agencies are more open for inhabitant’s meanings and proposals than private developers are. One can have the same interpretation of the higher share of rejections to private than to public plans. Although higher figures for acceptance and lower for rejection then is the case for neighbours, the figures for other inhabitants also indicate that basic principles for the plan design are fixed at the very start of the planning work.

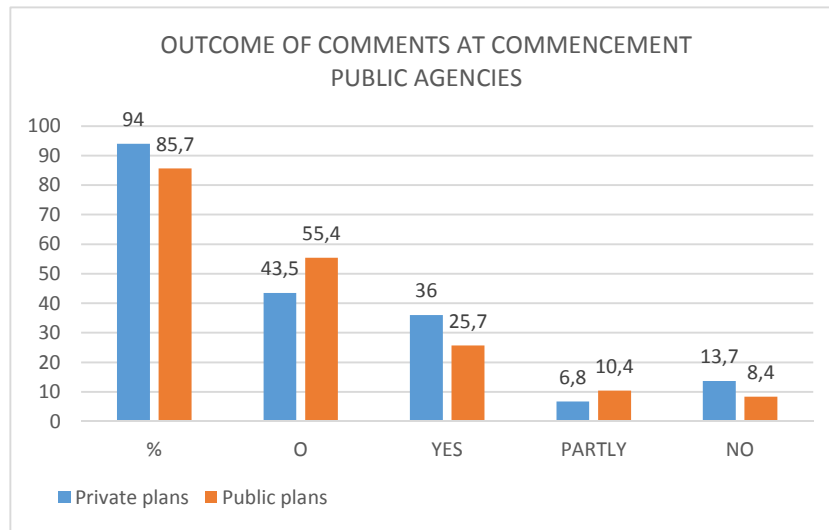


Figure 5. The outcomes of the building committee’s considerations of received comments from public agencies after the commencement of the planning work.

Several public agencies, especially at municipal and regional level, have responded to the commencement of planning work, in almost all cases. The obvious reasons are that all relevant agencies receive a direct information of the commencement and public bodies are according to the act obliged to participate in the planning. The high share of irrelevant or not actual comments, most to the private plans, is due to many responding that they have no comments at this stage.

Of the relevant comments, the most are taken fully or partly into account, a third for public plans and a little more for private plans. Thereby only about one tenth of the comments are rejected. All together, the figures tell that public sector agencies have a considerable influence on the planning. This may base on strong political traditions for many public sector interests' strong power, and in addition, they often represent rather concrete and practical issues that have to be taken into account. The right for public agencies to make objection to plans may be a kind of pressure for making revisions in a plan proposal.

### 3.4 Step two – at the public scrutiny

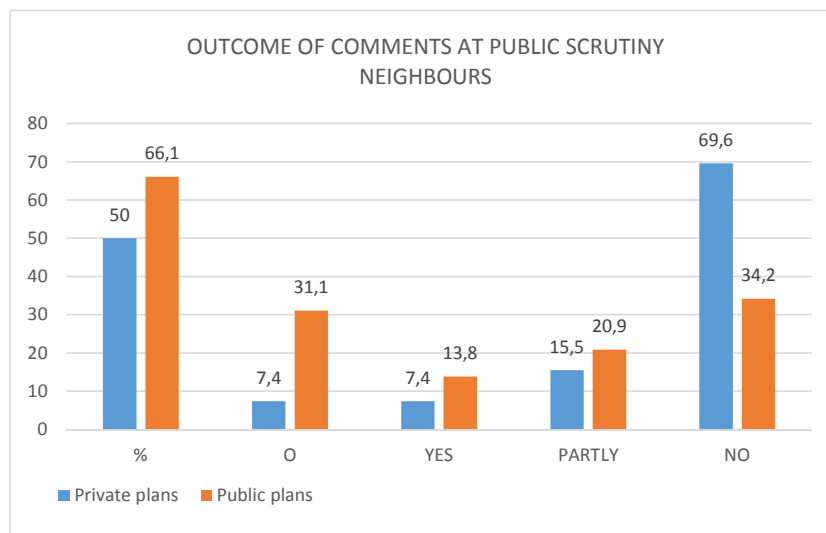


Figure 6. The outcomes of the building committee's considerations of received comments from neighbours after the public scrutiny of the planning work.

Neighbours commented to the same share of plans at the stage of public scrutiny as at commencement of the planning work, namely half of the private and two third of the public plans, but the total number of comments is noticeable lower. One should anticipate more comments and a higher rate as the act's requirement to information at this stage also include other right holders, lessees and directly affected neighbours, and they are explicit invited to react. An explanation may be that at least some remarks are taken into account and made some neighbours satisfied at the first step, though this argument seem to be inconsistent with the high share of rejected remarks at the first step. May be many simply have given up to protest. The rate of not actual or relevant comments is about the same for public, but considerable lower for private plans than at the stage of commencement. Anyhow, these comments are probably expressions for many neighbours' fear for being negative affected. One find about the same figures for fully or partly acceptance for the comments for both public and private plans as at the commencement phase. So also for the share of rejected remarks, nearly 70 % for private plans, which indicates that the solutions are to a high degree already fixed and the will to listen to neighbours is rather limited.

Other citizens and organisations have commented at the same share of private and some higher share of public plans at public scrutiny than at commencement of the planning. The difference may be accidental, although many organisations have received direct information about the scrutiny, but the high shares may indicate that many are dissatisfied with the outcome of their comments at the first stage. The share of not actual or relevant comments is about the same for public, about one third, and some lower, about a fourth, for private plans than at the commencement phase. The rather high shares may indicate a fear for being negative affected, like the neighbours.

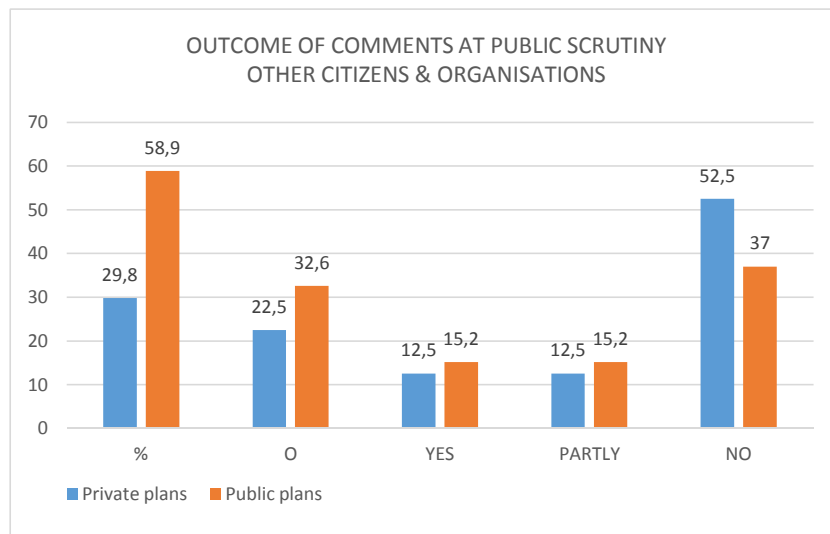


Figure 7. The outcomes of the building committee’s considerations of received comments from other citizens and organisations after the public scrutiny of the planning work.

The rates of positive outcome, one fourth for private and one third for public plans, is considerable lower than at commencement stage, and the percentage of rejected comments, more than a half for private and a third for public plans, are considerable higher than at the first step. These figures too, demonstrate that the main parts of the plan content are determined in forehand of the public scrutiny process. Probably only minor less problematic and alterations are implemented in the plans, either fully when a comment was about a small detail or partly if the comment was meet only to a certain degree. A major revision of the plan would cause a new procedure of circulation for comments and public scrutiny, which would delay the process.

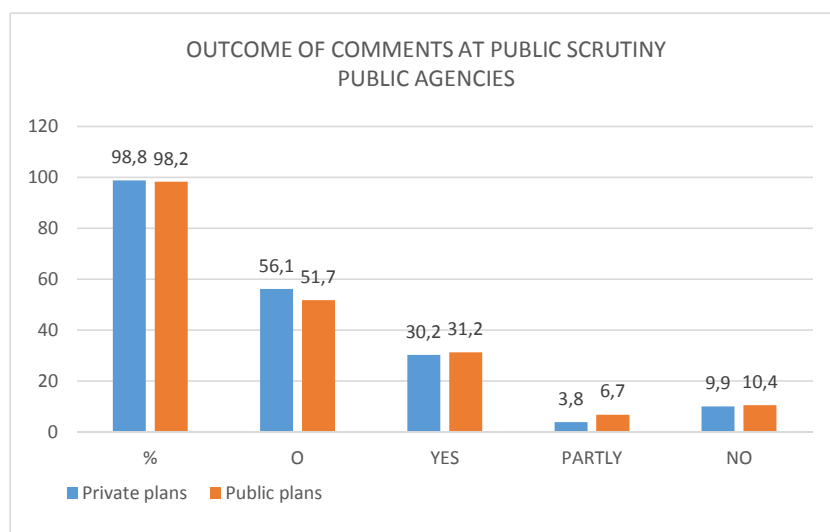


Figure 8. The outcomes of the building committee’s considerations of received comments from public agencies after the public scrutiny of the planning work.

Public authorities have commented to almost all plans, and more than half of the comments are not actual or irrelevant, some more than at the commencement phase for private plans. As at the first step, many public bodies answer that they do not have any comment to the plan. About one fourth of the comments are taken fully or partly into account, a few more for public than for private plans. Just about 10 % of the comments are rejected. In addition to the political traditions of strong public sector interests, public bodies announced objection to all together 66 of the 140 plans provided the comment was not accepted. Almost all these plans were revised; one after formal mediation by the County Governor, and one was approved by the ministry. In a few cases, the revision was so wide-ranging that a repeated scrutiny was necessary.

The city council adopted all plans according to the planning committee's decision, not always unanimously. Planning tasks often lead to discussions and disagreements.

### *3.5 Other arrangements for public participation*

Some other arrangements for public participation are performed, most often in forehand of or during the public scrutiny. The written presentations of the cases for political treatment give only limited and partly inaccurate information about what arrangements are performed and the outcomes. Developers have held several internal consultation meetings with various public agencies in order to clarify technical and other questions, but the accessible documents give very little information. For fairly many plans the proposer have arranged external meetings, some of them limited to information meetings which strictly speaking cannot be recognized as real participation. However, information about the plan may give people a basis for formulating comments at a later stage.

Some of the meetings were limited to specified groups of participants, for example landowners or schoolchildren, and some were open for all interested parties or for neighbours and nearby residents. In some cases, there have been arranged on-site inspection for public agencies, neighbours and others affected. Except for one example of a workshop for some public agencies and a few representatives for neighbours, no more active forms for participation than meetings have been performed. The scarcity of information about those arrangements make it impossible to give any analysis of the outcomes.

Table 1. Number of plans and the share where additional public participation arrangements were performed, grouped after plan responsibility.

Plan responsible	Planning dep. 15 plans	Other municipal 32 plans	Other public 9 plans	Private 84 plans
Number of plans	6 plans	9 plans	3 plans	19 plans
Percentage	40 %	28,1 %	33,3 %	22,6 %
Percentage municipal	31,9 %			
Percentage public	32,1 %			

As table 1 shows, public agencies are most interested in arranging at least some kind of external meetings beyond the act's minimum requirements. The municipal planning performed meetings etc. in 40 %, all municipal agencies near to 30 % and not municipal agencies one third of their planning tasks. All together public sector arranged some additional participation measures for nearly one third of their plans, compared to private developer's less than one fifth.

#### 4. Some conclusion

The ten-year-old article underlined the risk for matters decided upon before announcing the start of planning, and a need for initiating public participation early in the process. The recommendations to the then ongoing work on the new planning and building act was in the first place to introduce a planning program for all planning tasks, including a program for public participation, not limited to plans that are supposed to have major impacts on the environment as even small plans may turn out to be controversial. Secondly, the participation should be organised at the very beginning, and thirdly, the planning authority should be responsible for establishing the planning program and leading the planning process, even when a private developer has taken the initiative. This would not limit the developers' right to initiate a plan, but by giving the planning authority an undisputable place behind the steering wheel and thus increases the chances for real public participation and a result more in accordance with public interests.

The legislator did not follow these advices. On the contrary, the act introduced a new rule that gives developers a legal right to apply for building approval simultaneously with the commencement of the planning work, which strengthens the planning system as project-led. It seems obviously that when performing the project design and planning, and in addition, negotiating on a development agreement simultaneously the main content and design of a plan will be fixed, mentally and economically, at an early stage, may be already at the preliminary conference between developer and the planning authority. The developer will usually make project preparations ahead of this meeting and confront it with the planning authorities' information about paramount plans and requirements, and thus seek for some kind of acceptance for the first sketches. Many politicians have a sense of obligation to advance negotiations on development agreements and preliminary conferences (Hansen and Falleth, 2011), which will influence their opinion to the plan.

The survey demonstrates clearly that private developers have strong power in the planning process. However, public agencies have a considerable influence on the content of plans; only one tenth of their comments were rejected, and internal meetings between developers and public agencies were held to clarify solutions in many cases. Public agencies have traditionally a great influence, and if necessary, they can force developers following requirements by announcing objection to the plan, which was the case for almost half of the plans.

The picture is quite different when it comes to neighbours and other citizens' influence. Although surprisingly many individuals and organisations have delivered their comments in both the initiating and the scrutiny phase, the comments are to a high degree rejected. This outcome is most obvious for private plans, and concerns most neighbours to a higher degree than other citizens and organisations. Possible conflicting interests and views among neighbours may account for some of the rejections, but the rates are still high and indicate strongly limited will among developers to adjust to third parties' opinions and interests.

Falleth and Hansen (2011) have found that the planning authority interact primarily with developers, and at a very early stage of the process, and less more with third part, which is contrary to what most planning literature ascribe. Surprisingly they also found a high frequency of interaction between politicians and the community actors, but at later stage of the process. Other surveys indicate the same (Wøhni, 2007; Schmidt *et al.*, 2011). This survey cannot confirm these findings, but the high rates of rejected comments to especially private plans indicate that it is the fact. When politicians are involved at a later stage than the planning authority, it might be too late for them to prescribe major alterations in the plan.

In the present situation neighbours and citizens have to work very hard to influence planning decisions leading to fundamental revisions of the premises of the project (Innes & Booner, 2004; Schmidt *et al.*, 2011). There is obvious a need for a more transparent and democratic planning that involve citizens more and give them real influence. A solution could be to restore the former public planning monopoly, for example in accordance with the Swedish system where the planning authority shall give a plan answer (planbesked) to developers if an area shall be subject to planning. The planning authority shall have the leading role in planning processes, and thereby a clear responsibility for performing citizen participation. At present, such solution is probably too radical politically in Norway. A more careful way could be to require planning program, as mentioned above, for all zoning plans, like in Finland, provided by the planning authorities. At least one could make the commencement phase clearer as a first step of participation with invitations to deliver comments in line with the principles for public scrutiny.

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