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SUP4SUD

Conceptual & Policy Framework Session

TS # 1: Territorial Governance & Citizen Participation

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What This Seminar Is Designed to Provide

The session aims at:

- Providing an analytical framework grounded in the ISUD model
- Understanding how governance and participation are shaped by design choices.

1. CONTEXT

What do we mean by governance?

- Not a normative ideal
- Not a synonym of participation

Governance refers to:



the configuration of actors, rules, coordination mechanisms and decision-making arrangements through which public action is organised, implemented and monitored

Governance:

- is observable
- structures **who** is involved, **when** and in **what role** (s)
 - can be formally / informally organised
- operates across the entire policy cycle
- concerns how **public authority** is exercised in complex policy environments

1. CONTEXT

Citizen Participation as a Component of Governance

In SUP4SUD, citizen participation is analysed as one element of governance, not as a standalone practice.

Participation becomes meaningful when:

- institutions absorb and process input,
- participation is linked to decision making,
- and it informs implementation and follow up.

Without governance capacity, participation risks producing frustration rather than sustainability.

1. CONTEXT

The SUP4SUD starting point: Sustainability as a Governance challenge

- Through Europe, cities and regions are expected to integrate sustainability into urban policies
- However, **sustainability does not materialise through policy objectives alone**
- Sustainability becomes effective only when it is embedded in the way decisions are taken, coordinated and implemented



1. CONTEXT

What governance for sustainable urban development

Throughout the last three decades, the EU has built an Urban Acquis and has shaped an urban policy model, which we know as **Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD)** Model:

- Integrated: no single actor can deliver them alone
- Place-based: standardised solutions become ineffective
- Strategic: a common and legitimated vision is required
- Participatory

Broad governance arrangements are **necessary** for politically and territorially **integrated policies**

2. REAL PROBLEM

Why Sustainability Often Fails in Practice

In many policy instruments:

- sustainability goals are clearly stated
- but the governance needed to deliver them is poorly specified.

Common weaknesses include:

- fragmented institutional arrangements,
- coordination concentrated in the design phase only,
- participation disconnected from implementation.

The problem is rarely the absence of sustainability objectives, but the absence of governance architectures capable of activating actors and sustaining action.

2. REAL PROBLEM

Actors do not participate automatically

Actors have their own motivations, resources, constraints and incentives for participating in urban policies.

If these are not considered early,

- actors may not participate at all,
- or may participate superficially,
- or may block or distort implementation.

Participation is not automatic: it must be activated.

3. PROMISE

Strategic Urban Planning as a Governance Shaping Instrument

Governance is shaped by structural constraints:

- Multilevel settings
- Distribution of competences
- Institutional constraints

However, Strategic Urban Planning instruments can contribute to building governance arrangements by:

- Clarifying responsibilities and defining coordination arenas
- Sequencing policy phases
- Signalling relevance and opportunity to actors.

Even though real institutional boundaries exist, **design matters.**

4. SOLUTION

Governance Must Be Designed from the Start

Governance should be thought through from the very beginning of policy design.

This means asking early:

- Which actors are needed?
- At which phase of the policy cycle?
- In what role and with what influence?
- What for?

Strategic urban planning is not neutral: it actively shapes who will later govern sustainability.

4. SOLUTION

Activating Actors: A Mechanism Based Perspective

Research on causal mechanisms shows that governance and participation depend on actor activation.

Activation requires understanding:

- actors' motivations,
- perceived costs and benefits,
- available resources,
- and expectations about effectiveness.

Designing governance means designing mechanisms that **trigger and maintain engagement**, not just inviting actors.

5. HOW IT WORKS

Typical Mechanisms For Activating Actors

Strategic urban planning instruments can activate actors when they incorporate design features that modify actors' perceptions of opportunity, relevance and risk:

- **1) Attribution of opportunity:** Making the policy visible and relevant to key actors, showing them that engagement can produce tangible benefits.
- **2) Recognition/Sanction of actors:** designing mechanisms for publicly recognizing participation and sanctioning those not participating
- **3) Gaining points:** matching “weak” and “strong” processes in order for cooperation in urban policies can become beneficial for them in other areas
- **4) Repeated interactions:** by attributing shared responsibilities, the cost of non cooperation increases and mutual trust is built

These mechanisms are not accidental — they are produced through **specific design choices**.

CLOSING

Why This Matters for SUP4SUD

Sustainability requires:

- broad governance arrangements,
- that work in activating actors from the moment of policy design
- in order for them to play relevant roles throughout the policy process.

Sustainability is not only about defining goals, but about designing the governance that makes actors move.

CLOSING

Questions guiding Thematic Seminar #1

- What governance arrangements help participation continue beyond the drafting phase and remain connected to delivery, monitoring and revision?
- How can partners move from consultation towards more meaningful co-creation without making processes too slow or unmanageable?
- How can participation be adapted to regional or metropolitan scales, where direct citizen involvement is harder to organise?
- What kinds of feedback and monitoring mechanisms are needed so that participation is not only visible, but also consequential?

Thank you!

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