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RESIDENTS' COLLECTIVE AGENCY AND LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

This research is connected to urban development with the aim of examining residents' collective agency and learning through participation in their neighborhood's developmental activities in collaboration with the enabling networks. The aim of this research is to contribute to the practices of residents' collective collaboration in the urban development.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The research is part of the participatory action research project in urban development aimed at:

- examining and enhancing residents' participation
- developing effective means for residents', public servants' and associations' collaboration
- engaging residents to take responsibility for their living environment

The project took place in one of the municipal districts in the city of Espoo, Finland. In terms of social and economic indicators, the district represents the least advantaged area of the city, and is characterized by a poor reputation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research draws on:

- cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)
- theory of expansive learning
- main concepts of the study : object of activity, agency, participation

It helps to understand the relationship between the individual and social context, mediated by cultural means, tools and signs, and the interdependence between the object of activity and object motives shaping our actions in collaborative learning.

The agency is explicated in investigating the practices and relationships of active residents in their environments and communities while they try to make a difference in prevailing circumstances in their residential area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Main interventions were:

- a series of workshops for residents
- a series of workshops for residents, public servants, associations, and other actors
- residents' interviews

The workshops provided a forum for shared learning and reflection. The objective was to find a common vision, resources and new ways of collaboration at the communal development of the area.

Table 1. The research questions, data collection, and methods.

Research questions	Data collection	Methods
How do residents manifest agency during the development of their living area?	Thirty residents' interviews by snowball sampling, (2014-15)	Thematic analysis of the manifestations of residents' agency in their neighborhood
How does residents' agency emerge in residents' workshops?	Four creative workshops for residents, ethnographic data: observations, video- and audiotapes, posters, photographs, notes, (2014-15)	Analysis of the object of commonly negotiated development goals in the neighborhood based on the interactional episodes
How does the interagency emerge between the participants in community workshops? What are learning challenges on the workshop collaboration?	Five community workshops based on the method of Change Laboratory®, ethnographic data: observations, video- and audiotapes, posters, photographs, notes, (2015)	Analysis of the object of the collaborative activity, critical events and conflicts in the formation and social processes of interagency



FINDINGS

The analysis provides insights into:

- residents' agency in their efforts to participate and exert influence in their local community
- potential of residents' collective agency as a capacity to act together, to impact and change things in their residential area
- residents' capacity to take a collective action to expand their agency further
- collective ways of acting in urban governance

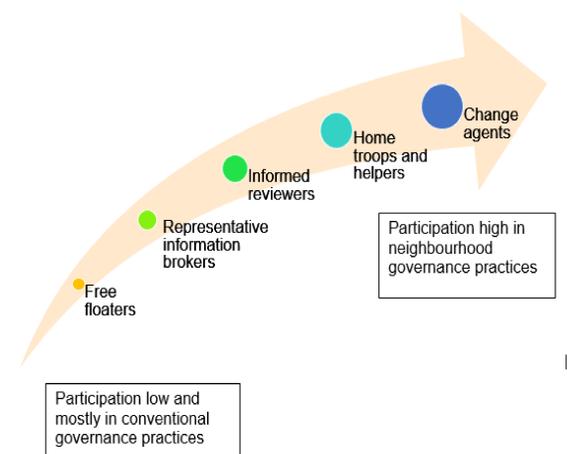


Fig. 1 Residents' five agency types describing their participation in governance practices (Lund & Juujärvi, 2018).

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