

# The “Sociocratic Negotiation” Lever of Realurbanism: Towards an Anarchical Implementation of the Urban Project

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## ABSTRACT

“Realurbanism”, which has been recently introduced as an innovative model for “realist” analysis of urban policies and practices in order to permit better understanding of urban governance in anarchy contexts (state-of-anarchy) where limits between public and private interests are permanently negotiated, actually stems from a “realistic” ground approach whose context outskirts are encircled by issues such as: weakness or instability of the public power (particularly in developing countries), privatisation of public services and its funding, but also public policies largely decentralised and hardly competed (even dominated) by private spheres. Constructed on three corollary theses: 1). The anarchical urban governance; 2). The privatisation of urbanism; 3). The power relationships and their balance, the Realurbanism model fundamentally reproduces a systemic balance resulting from a power struggle between the most powerful actors. In order to free Realurbanism from its deterministic power relationships that have a restrictive and discriminatory purpose (as it is defined in its third thesis), and in order to recover its original sense of “anarchy”, balance of power should be “replaced” by consent-by-negotiation relationships between actors, not only powerful ones, but extended to representative circles of the civil society, thus permitting to empower original state-of-anarchy, where actors do not undergo any exterior coercion form. The “sociocratic negotiation” as introduced here is inspired from systemic theories (cybernetics) developed by “Sociocracy” which aims to a consent mode of governance. Thus, it constitutes a proposition force of Realurbanism in the sense that it constitutes *per se* an effective processing tool of the urban project.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of a territorial concept (spatialisation) of the Realist Paradigm (International Relations - IR) into the field of Urbanism concerns the effective synthesis of a double convergence - empirical and paradigmatic - thus leading through an empiric-inductive method, to the transposition of the realist model from international relations theories into urbanism, and the consequent construction of the “Realurbanism” model [1].

Accordingly, Realurbanism is constructed on the following triptych corollary theses:

1). The anarchical urban governance.

2). The privatisation of urbanism.

3). The power relationships and their balance.

Essentially conveyed by an anarchical governance mode of the (political) urban affair leading to the privatisation of the urban process, at the level of both the empowerment of private actors’ role and the spatial processing funding, Realurbanism needs to be appreciated relative to the “state-of-anarchy” (Realism) [2] and more particularly relative to the refusal of any coercive, directive and hierarchic role of the public power (authority), for the benefit of an egalitarian auto-organisation among social partners.

The first thesis of Realurbanism (the anarchical urban governance) attempts to conceptualise

an anarchical approach of the urban governance - that is considered here within the meaning of the power deconstruction (devolution), its legitimacy sharing and the interactive roles of the different involved actors.

Indeed, within the search for the best adapted way to govern cities and to accompany them into their societal and spatial development (demography and construction), an important transfer of power and urban prerogatives has been operated from a historical central government towards its “*greater*” outskirts in all its societal components: there has so been a shift from an emphasis on the role of “*urban government*” to an emphasis on “*urban governance*” [3].

Relations, that are by now hierarchically-disrupted between public power levels and public private partnerships, have largely contributed to the emancipation of that other management mode which is governance. Besides, the “*territorialisation*” and the privatisation of the political power (prerogatives) in terms of urban planning can accept and support a higher objective than the “*classic*” acceptance of the concept of urban governance, so to integrate the “*anarchical*” dimension of the political acting. The anarchical “*qualifier*” refers here directly to the “*state-of-anarchy*” as theorised into International Relations; it transposes the anarchical model at the level of the urban governance. The anarchical urban governance illustrates an advanced level of urban governance as conceived and practiced currently; it presupposes, as every anarchical system, an original (for origin) and structural equality between actors, as we place them at the same level of autonomy and independency, despite natural (and historical) divergences in status and stature; this “*governance orthodoxy*” [3] involves a veritable partnership within a network of actors: the governance orthodoxy is that relationships are collaborative and consensual, expressed through ideas about partnerships and networks.

More concretely, the public power (central or local governments) is, at best, a simple actor among all others; it has no authority over other actors and can, neither pretend to an exclusive strategic decision-making for planning policies, nor advance common rules to be de facto followed by other social partners.

The second thesis of Realurbanism (the privatisation of urbanism) tries to emphasise the greater role of the civil society in the definition of urban policies. The questioning of a mode of politics exercise based on domination and aspiring to more citizen participation [4] inevitably partakes in the privatisation of urban implementation policies (regulatory, operational and financial) and especially in the appreciation of the general interest (as a coagulum of particular interests) that it infers.

This reconfiguration of public power between its centre and peripheries has consequently conducted to the introduction of multiple interpretation models

(Networking - i.e. social networks), Urban regimes [5], Policy communities, Issue networks, etc.) in the objective of better understanding the interactions (acc. School of Chicago) between intra-public versus private actor’s aggregate. However, all these models are associated with an emphasis on the “*individual*” as an actor in an interaction situation in front of a decreasingly “*concentrated*” public power which is hence increasingly constrained to cooperate, collaborate and negotiate with peripheral actors.

The third thesis of Realurbanism (the power relationships and their balance) highlights the issue that private actors following their own interests manage finally to auto-balance and to auto-organise without the intervention of any external power which could be potentially led by the public power: it is here an interesting concretisation of the anarchical governance (“*anarchy is order without power - or authority*” [6]).

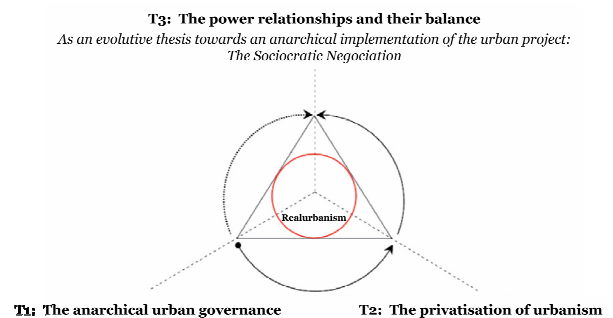


Fig. 1. The Realurbanism corollary triptych [1].

This auto-organisation of the planning aggregate that fundamentally requests the anarchism theories is however characterised by balance-of-power relationships that underlie it. In fact, in the absence of a central power reproducing an authoritarian and coercive commandment, private actors, who hold alternative prerogative in terms of spatial planning, try naturally in a social-political context of anarchy to “*polarise*” power.

This third thesis poses the fact that spatial planning actors entertain between themselves relations that are essentially characterised by balance-of-power. Because anarchy (state-of-anarchy) presents a paradigmatic paradox: namely once “*freed*” from public power, it is almost delivered to a “*war of succession*” of the public power between partners supposed to share on equal and balanced bases the inherited prerogatives from public power.

Paradoxically, therefore, a polarisation phenomenon of power appears within the system that finishes being monopolised by a power minority.

Hence, at the end, the balance-of-power between the most powerful actors (including public actors) would lead to a systemic polarised balance, implying a form of cohabitation between horizontal and vertical hierarchical relations within the anarchical

system, with a final tendency for balance between the dominating poles.

The Realurbanism model - similar to the Realism paradigm that it transposes into the field of urbanism [7] fundamentally reproduces a systemic balance resulting from a power struggle between the most powerful restricted actors circle of the socio-urbanistic scene. This is because, within the power struggle that underlies relations between the concerned actors (most powerful ones), the pursuit of balance, is from a realist angle, inseparable from these power relationships, in the sense of a resulting systemic stabilisation that allows for beneficiaries to profit from the status-quo in the pursuit of their own interests, but also, and consequently, to benefit all of actors who are indirectly concerned.

Nevertheless, this balance can only be done by force (might is right); thus paradoxically, while trying to be freed from any hierarchical power, anarchy - the central characteristic of Realism (urban and political) - is subordinated to an internal hierarchical power organisation and to an intra-hegemonic relationship between those powers: some balances end up leading towards unipolar systems dominated by some major powers; *“Hierarchy within Anarchy”* is then the fundamental characteristic of the inter-states’ modern order [8]. In this sense, the modelling of Realurbanism can only concern, at a first level, most powerful and present actors of the civil society, like as the international politics is modulated by major powers (nations) of the international scene.

However, as Urbanism and broadly Territories Sciences highly require the largest actors’ integration into the implementation process of any urban project that owe to in fine provide effective answers to society demands, we propose therefore to *“upgrade”* (make evolve) Realurbanism from an analysis model (lecture grid) for urban policies and practices, where the urban object is the constant result of power relationships and vital balances between major powers of the social-urban scene, towards an effective tool for anarchical processing of the *“urban project”* yet integrating in a participative initiative the concerned societal micro-powers of the civil society, the final *“recipient”* of any urban project.

The objective is hence to liberate the realurbanistical model from its inherent power relationship essentially due to a weakened collective representativeness thus victim of a democratic majority and of an anarchical urban governance limited to those most powerful actors.

Within the framework of the realist tradition of International Relations, recreating the conditions for urban anarchical governance in its original *“realist”* sense of egalitarian and equivalent relations between actors passes through the transformation of the

Balance-of-power thesis into an anarchical consultation within consent relations amongst civil society’s actors.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to free Realurbanism from its determinist power relationships that have a restrictive and discriminatory purpose as it is defined in its third thesis, and in order to recover its original sense of anarchy as it is defined in international realism, balance-of-power should be *“replaced”* by consent-by-negotiation anarchic relationships between actors, not only major and powerful ones but extended to the representative circles of the interested civil society (the participation of the concerned [9]).

This will permit to empower original state-of-anarchy, where actors do not undergo any external coercion form: in International Relations, we observe that, due to the absence of a *“common higher”*, States are structurally in a state-of-anarchy, but they are quickly propelled into a polar system that is paradoxically questioning the anarchy principle itself: power relationships lead to either an unipolar form of hegemony or to a multi-polar balance of power - a majority of actors would therefore be constrained to undergo *“laws”* of powerful ones (the force law). This down-side underlies the fragility of ideal-typical constructions [10] that are prevailing in International Relations [11] (and consequently in Realurbanism).

Nevertheless, in (real) urbanism, it is possible to release from this ideal-typical impasse: so, by developing (making it evolve) the third realurbanism thesis from a power relationship issue (typical of international realism) towards a form of negotiation relationship, whereby all concerned actors would create, by consent, the conditions of their own balance, in the framework of an anarchical governance where all actors have their place and legitimate role.

This proposition that ensues from Realurbanism permits therefore its extraction from its determinist framework towards a proactive dynamic within the processing of the urban project (regarding urban project as a model of currently practiced urban processing).

The *“sociocratic negotiation”* as introduced here is fundamentally inspired from systemic theories (cybernetics) developed by *“Sociocracy”* which aims to a consent mode of governance [12]. Thus, it constitutes a proposition force of Realurbanism in the sense that it constitutes *“per se”* an effective processing tool of the urban project.

But before introducing the sociocracy concept, links and correlations between Realurbanism model and Urban Project model should be analysed through this proposition.

What sort of convergence/divergence is it?

Indeed, because “*urban project*” (the term first appeared in the 1970s as an alternative concept to the traditional planning; acc. Carlo Aymonimo, Aldo Rossi, Leonardo Benevolo, etc.) is the result of a political-cultural choice, rather than the result of a technical model: while trying to disrupt and reformulate the old urban conception processes [13], the urban project, no more reserved for a specialists’ corporation, supposes thus the active participation of all impacted actors (including inhabitants), not only in the aim of informing them at the end of studies but completely in the elaboration of the project itself [13]. It is more about an elaboration method rather than an innovative ideology for the city; it addresses the real city and its processing mechanisms rather than the dreamed one [14]; the urban project is no more idealistic but yet realistic [15].

This is what makes the integration of this realurbanist proposition within the dynamics of the urban project as currently practiced an evolution in its citizen’s participation way.

Through this proposition, processing methods of urban project are to be (re)defined. In other words, one can postulate that Realurbanism, through this proposition, radicalises or decentralises the urban project debate, because it clearly claims power capturing by societal dynamics to the same level as public powers (authorities), outside any coercion relationships and consequently it proposes the inception of an anarchical urban governance system where policies and strategic planning options are negotiated and constructed within a negotiation frame and no more through a restrictive-orientated power struggle (most powerful actors) that is inevitably discriminating vis-à-vis of less powerful and less represented actors.

Actually the title “*participate*” is weak because it does not clearly invoke the willingness to fundamentally integrate social partners in the project processing. We empirically observe that the citizen participation established in the framework of current participative urbanism and more generally of current social-political democratic representative model hardly succeeds and leads constantly towards an empowerment and legitimacy-increasing phenomenon of the public power, which is still the commendatory and the addressee of the participative process and has the final and exclusive prerogative (power) and right to “*decide*” (principle of power delegation in democratic societies).

That is how politics structurally (and paradoxically) monopolises a hierarchical power in its authoritarian and coercive sense yet fundamentally unequal, however we could consider this participation process as a soft-power oriented authority practice.

In the participative process analysis literature has been underlined some methodical limits of the

consultation (participation) system as practiced nowadays, ones that lead to relativise the revolutionary input of this urban design method while questioning both the politics’ (deciders) and the planners’ (designers) prerogatives (powers): it is evident that designers’ values, perceptions and sensibilities broadly guide the whole process. Even when they take or try to take a relative withdrawal position, they still play a determinant role in the reality production [16]. It is clearly the “*translation*” power issue, a chief competency held by the designer (technician) that is questioned here. Throughout interpreting and transcribing expressed views, they contribute to impose a dominant space-representation of the spatial expected interventions (actions) [16]. Thus, every pacification process is inevitably linked to the power of exercising a power, of orientating current and future acts [17].

The other limit of the consultation system (process) is – one due to the limited representativeness and participation of concerned actors, because the participation rule would not operate without the presence of actors that identify themselves as “*players*”; yet one does “*play*” only if two conditions are guaranteed: being assured that the rules and their implementation are fair and having some likelihood to “*win*” [18]. One last limit of the participation system is one resulting from diverging interests that are resulting from the increasing particular interests load in the decision-making dispositive: the general interest is no more a given but a constantly negotiated object.

In a political-urban context marked by three contemporary tendencies: “*decentralisation*”, “*fragmentation of civil society*” and “*individualisation*” [19], power relationships and conflicts of interest appear to be one of the most prominent contradictions of the participation issue within the urban project process.

a). Therefore, how to implement a concerted project while so many actors (politics, economic, associative, users, etc.) are concerned and often defending divergent opinions, or even incompatible ones (in certain cases)?

b). Does the participation process have to let explicitly and maximally express cohabitating societal and private power struggles?

c). Does a legitimate arbitration method which could permit to democratically reach consent choices and overstep a discord situation really exist?

It is on these questionings and issues that the sociocratic negotiation tool proposes to meet.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Everyone agrees today on the persuasion importance and on the fact that one should convince rather than impose. In such a purpose, the sociocratic negotiation seems to be the appropriate dispositive to reach, through interactions, shared preferences.

In a system that is based on sociocratic negotiation, any hierarchy should be rejected, as much between actors themselves as towards the public power, politics having no more purpose than to monitor or supervise the successful performance of the social “game” [18].

Should one absolutely define a precise role for the public power given its historical and central stature hardly crossed-over, the public power should restrictively implement and formalise (or institutionalise) the “consent” that would be reached by the different civil society’s actors. “Consent” is employed here to qualify an act-of-will by which one could declare expressly that he would not oppose a determined action whose initiative was taken by another one [20].

Beyond this “monarchic” issue that calls for a minimum public power (relatively to Minarchism: minimal-statism), it should therefore be introduced at this stage a systemic concept that would serve as a model: *Sociocracy*.

Indeed, the objective of Sociocracy is to develop actors’ accountability, equitable treatment and maximal integration of different actors in the decision-making process: in a sociocratic organisation we become one of the rule-makers [21].

We refer here to the work of Auguste Comte [22] who developed the concept of sociocracy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an auto-governed society, then subsumed by Gerard Edenbourg (1998) who developed its methodology (based on cybernetics theories) itself based on the work of Kees Boeke, a Dutch pedagogue and humanist [12].

The sociocratic governance model is constructed around four principles of sociocracy as defined by Edenbourg in the 1970s: the semi-autonomous circle organisation (dynamic hierarchy), the double-linking, the consent decision-making and the non-candidates election method through consent.

Based on an organisation that is based itself on equality between individuals at the decision-making stage, departing thus from the “one person one voice” principle and stating the “no more valuable argued objections from no one” principle, thus Sociocracy fundamentally implies an anarchic process where no decision is taken without the approval of all the participants.

Therefore, it is a method through negotiation: participant parties express their respective positions in a strategic decision-making, then gradually tent to accommodate it through little measured concessions, till they reach a form of an “opinion uniformity” - as Le Littré (2007) defines the consent. We could qualify this approach as a “Self-out” approach, since it is initially inner-constructed around the personnel interests of the participating actors and then “exposed” to potential partners’ “interests” [23]. It concerns the

quest of permanent consent that is resulting from cumulative (added) self-out approaches of the concerned actors yet relating to ongoing issues of the urban project.

It is on the opposite side of bottom-up policies that presuppose a leadership of the public power which has the legitimate monopoly of political-urban (final) decision: the State can no more pretend to exclusively “own” the idea of the general interest that its action - even relatively negotiated - could implement [24].

In brief, State should be the mandatory of societal expresses, the servant of individual needs, possessions and profits [25].

This is how the Realurbanism proposition constitutes a review conception of the urban project model from which it finally distances in the implementation conditions of the public debate.

Finally, the “sociocratic negotiation” permits to “free” Realurbanism from its structural determinism (as clearly identified in its third thesis and as clearly inherited from the Realist paradigm in international relations theories): thus, it upgrades it from an analysis model and a lecture grid of the urban object towards a proactive tool for anarchical processing of the “urban project”, by the fundamental willingness of integration of the concerned actors in the framework of an urban governance-by-consent. It therefore strengthens the realurbanistical theses by extracting Realurbanism from its paradigmatic fragility of whose is often accused the “Realist paradigm”.

Beyond that, it permits a correlation between the urban project process - as currently undergoing, especially in the social-political context of representative democracy - and a realurbanistical process plainly anarchic, because sociocratic, and where decision-making is egalitarian and equally shared amongst a wider actors’ aggregate that includes micro-societal-powers, all together performing in the pursuit of a consent that pretends through the accomplishment of players’ particular interest composing the general interest - in its modern acceptance, one that is increasingly individualised and privatised.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Sociocratic negotiation at urban project scale requires the implementation of participation and engagement practices of all the actors, equitably, equally and autonomously.

For that purpose, we define three fundamental principles that guarantee the creation of that consent (circle) aggregate:

- 1). First, as a player in the urban process, public power (authority) - hardly crossed-over in the current democratic and representative system - should restrain his role to the role of an “equivalent” actor amongst private actors of the project.

2). Secondly, auto-organisation of actors groups, in the sense of the appropriate self-engagement of each interested and concerned individual in the evaluation and implementation of the project, should be settled up, essentially through the construction of decision-making consent circles.

This effective and direct participation of inhabitants and residents (for example), should permit a quasi-exhaustive census of their preferences, ones that are strategic for the project.

This is all the more important, since the usual individual preferences “*filtration*” through the heavy administrative and public grid is here avoided, given the fact that, due to the auto-organisation of actors, they decide on the project conditions by consent, without any form of public power injunction or interpretation (manipulation) which is coercive and hierarchical.

The “*information*” circuit in this context is of a crucial interest and its continuance is to be guaranteed for the optimisation of organisation and the decision-making process of those actors.

3). Thirdly (and beforehand), the implementation of urban participative policies, where different concerned actors co-construct and define in a negotiated and consented dynamic the urban settlement to implement and the content of laws to edict (by public power): this would permit to achieve a participative and shared urban project processing and therefore would prevent “*ideal cities*” from ending up fulfilling the wishes and dreams of a powerful minority while neglecting the needs of most of the others [26].

It is important for the actors to engage and participate at a same level as for the public authority and for the most powerful actors - that usually interfere (lobbying) - in order to construct consented settlements that is integrating consented preferences, since Sociocracy is a governing model by consent.

Finally, since “*Anarchy*” concept experience lacks globally of historical endorsement, and as a contemporary concretisation of both merged-concepts of Anarchy and Sociocracy, the Porto Alegre case would be really evocative here for the demonstration of the sociocratic negotiation dynamics within urban (cities) policies.

The participative budget of the Brazilian city (estimated population = 1.5 M), set up in 1998 by the Labour party, represents indeed an authentic attempt to implement a sociocratic negotiation and governance process as a local government mode at the scale of the municipality policies.

In fact, in a tough financial and political context, the new municipality has set an innovative method to define primary budget allocations and investment plans through the participation of citizens; population was therefore invited to meet by neighbourhoods (circles equivalent) then to choose representatives to serve on the participative budget

board in order to achieve the synthesis and negotiate with the municipal administration.

Although this example does not exactly concern urban policies, it therefore permits to promote the debate on the possible opening perspectives of the urban project processing towards civil society through a sociocratic construction that is fundamentally anarchical and rational - while still recalling (as discussed before) that “*anarchical*” urban process is “*anarchic*” yet not “*chaotic*”, as often the term is emptied from its paradigmatic material and misused by major political, urban and social experts to qualify chaotic and non-rational processes.

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