

Martijn Duineveld and Kristof van Assche

Socio-spatial Analysis Group, Wageningen University
Community Studies Department, Minnesota State Universities
The Life and Death of Citizenship and Resistance

Drawing on Machiavelli, Foucault, Scott, Flyvbjerg and resistance scholars within cultural and political geography, we develop a conceptual framework of resistance, for analysing the power technologies utilized in the silencing, subjugation, marginalisation of public voices in contested places. We illustrate this framework by means of a detailed examination of power technologies deployed to deal with public opposition to a proposed modernist building in historic Groningen.

The building, named the Groninger Forum (GF), is an initiative of the local government. It is consistently presented by the local government as a contribution to the liveliness of the inner city and a boost to economic development. The GF will mainly host public services, such as the movie theatre, the public library, the city archives and a debating centre. Although a majority of the citizens opposes the plans, and ironically refers to it as a 'palace of culture', their opposition has been silenced and the plans are being implemented. This process will be explained by means of a reconstruction of the social and political context of decision-making, and a detailed analysis of the planning process.

Since World War II, the political system and the cultural elite of the city of Groningen are strongly entwined within a powerful social democratic network in which the local town planners could operate more or less autonomously. Within this network some shared ideas on urbanism dominated since the late seventies, most profoundly the idea of a compact, lively and dynamic inner city. The town planners share the strong belief that their expertise is a prerequisite for good and successful town planning. The demand for citizen participation, which

re-emerged in the late nineties and the quest for democratic legitimacy, is perceived by these town planners as frustrating. At the same time, more and more citizens distrust the social democratic local government, the closed circuit of town planners and their claims on expertise.

It is within this context that we can delineate several power technologies in the planning process that preceded the construction of the GF:

1. The political proponents of the Forum Building negotiated with the political opposition and managed to form a coalition, turning them into allies. This affected the power and possibilities of public resistance, since previously these political parties were highly instrumental in the articulation and coordination of public resistance against local governmental initiatives.
2. The proponents used carefully designed citizen representation, referenda and elections pragmatically and rhetorically to achieve their goals. By keeping plans vague, they managed to minimise opposition and to take the angle out of a participatory planning process used to increase legitimacy.
3. A project organisation was created, in charge of the architectural, economic and logistic programming for the building; that organization was placed outside the system of politics and administration. Henceforth, the pseudo- autonomous entity was used as a pseudo-neutral propaganda tool, a depoliticized voice in favour of the project.
4. The irreversibility of the project, real and imagined, was actively managed and communicated.

We re-articulate these findings in our resistance framework and argue that these and related power technologies perform success in planning by means of silencing opposition. Since the possibilities and constraints to resist or oppose governmental plans is highly dependent on the political and social networks, we argue that only an amoral, second order observation of resistance / power practices in contested places can both scrutinize power technologies in the socio-spatial context from which they arise and make explicit the democratic deficit of urban planning practices.