Placing the stakes: the enactment of territorial stakeholders in planning processes

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Abstract:

This paper is an investigation into processes of becoming-stakeholder. It specifically focuses on strategic spatial planning where the stakeholder concept has become one of the linchpins of much contemporary theory and practice. Through drawing upon the sociology of attachments and scholarship on subjectification it is argued that the enactment of stakeholders in strategic planning processes can be gainfully understood as the production of stakeholder subjectivities by way of practices of ontological choreography which can generate territorial attachments and re-articulate existing attachments into a specifically territorial format. From this perspective, stakeholderness is never an ontologically pre-given property that is to be uncovered by diligent analysis. Rather, we might come to see that stakeholder subjectification is a process through which actors learn to be affected, and where these affections further come to be articulated as territorial attachments engendering or at least prompting a 'caring for place'. Still, as relational effects, subjectivities are always potentially precarious achievements and it is important not to take for granted that the subjectivities enacted in a specific situation or setting will be easily transposable to other contexts.

Keywords: stakeholders, subjectification, strategic spatial planning, attachment, ontological choreography.

Introduction: Strategic spatial planning and the concept of the stakeholder

The "strategic spatial" approach to planning rose to prominence in European planning discourse and practice primarily during the 1990's. In an influential paper strategic spatial planning it is defined as:

> …the pursuit of spatial policy for a region in such a way that the components of that policy reinforce each other, also that they take account of the characteristics of the region. We contrast that with functional/sectoral policies, where for each sector separately (e.g. energy, transport, minerals, water, housing, industry) policy is made for a particular region by applying national norms and with little regard for the policies being pursued in that region for the other sectors. (Healey et al, 1999: 340)

Further, the authors state that "[i]f developed selectively, spatial planning strategies can provide a frame of reference, language and metaphors for focusing and coordinating the actions of the many *stakeholders* in urban regional changes" (Healey et al, 1999: 340, emphasis added), thus placing the concept of the "stakeholder" in a prominent position with regards to

the purpose and potential outcome of a strategic spatial planning approach. Recently John Forester, a leading theorist of the communicative turn in planning and a major sources of inspiration for much strategic spatial planning theory, has even more forcefully centre-staged the role of stakeholders in planning processes by likening the role of the planner to that of a midwife, arguing by analogy that "[i]t is parents not midwives, who make babies, and it is stakeholders and representative parties, not mediators, who make mediated agreements, even if those stakeholders may be assisted by skillful, sensitive, and probing intermediaries" (Forester, in press).

Nevertheless, in this paper it is argued that such a view of planner-stakeholder relations is far from unproblematic. For already three decades ago, in a seminal paper which was among the first to discuss environmental issues in the language of parties holding "stakes", planning scholars Susskind & Weinstein cautioned that: "[n]aming the interests that have a stake in a particular dispute is not only a procedural problem that must be solved… it is also a substantive problem" (Susskind & Weinstein, 1980:337). In other words: the question concerning who is to be considered a stakeholder in a particular context or situation is not only an epistemological challenge, but also a fundamentally ontological issue. Still, this crucial caveat appears to have been all but forgotten when the stakeholder-concept was introduced in the strategic spatial planning literature, primarily by way of Patsy Healey's book *Collaborative planning* (1997/2006). Introducing the term, Healey states that if we reflect upon the environments or

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"places" in which we live our lives, we will be able to discover "layers of 'stakes'" (Healey 2006:95), that consist of existing but perhaps unconscious interests in the fate of a specific place. So, for placemaking activities or strategic planning to be successful, a key task for the planner is to "explore who has a 'stake' in an issue" (p. 269), conduct an "analysis to identify the stakeholders" (p. 260) and make sure that planning efforts "grow out of the specific concerns of stakeholders" (Healey 2006:268). As Healey explains in a different text (Healey, 1998:1538), in her perspective, people can "have a 'stake' in what is going on, even though they may not quite know how to think about it and what to do with it". Some actor just needs to open the eyes of the stakeholders to their a priori actually existing stakes – and that 'someone' is the planner. The stakeholders are out there, it is just up to the planner to bring forth the 'stakeholderness' from within the stakeholders. So who is a stakeholder and not appears to be an underlying ontological property, or perhaps rather: a slumbering potentiality inscribed in the order of the world which can be located, uncovered and activated through diligent stakeholder analysis and follow-up. Nevertheless, already in *Collaborative Planning* Healey seems to have been at least partially conscious of the problematic implications of such an ontological position on stakeholderness and has since also considerably nuanced her conceptualization of planning stakeholders[1], but in the planning literature beyond her own writing the concept of the stakeholder has today become so well established that its meaning and relevance appears to be

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[1] For instance in Healey (2010) she not only raises the issue of the potentially spatially trans-contextual character of stakeholderness (p 32) but also appears to be approaching a conceptualization of stakeholderness as a socially learned ability or actively established positioning of actors (see for instance p 39 & p 59).

taken for granted as generally unproblematic and self-evident, even functioning as a linchpin of much contemporary theory and practice in spatial planning.

To give but two examples of this we may turn to two recent papers on planning methodology in Great Britain (Baker et al 2010) and Canada and Australia (Legacy 2010). Both papers explicitly deal with stakeholder involvement in strategic planning processes, and as recent publications in leading international planning journals, can be taken to represent the state-of-the-art of contemporary scholarship on planning methodology. The papers repeatedly invoke the stakeholder as a central analytical concept. Baker et al raise the question concerning how the concept should be defined, but then immediately settle for a definition which appears to assume that the group of stakeholders related to a specific process or territorial entity is a priori given, even though they may fall into different categories and thus have to be approached in different manners and using a variety of more or less innovative methods (Baker et al, 2010: 577). Legacy (2010) on the other hand simply defines stakeholders as "those who will be affected in one way or the other" by the results of planning processes (Legacy 2010:2708). Following Susskind & Weinstein we can thus see that Baker et al quickly brush past the *substantive* question of stakeholderness, i.e. who is to be considered a legitimate stakeholder, instead translating it into a *procedural* question regarding how to deal with recognized stakeholders – while Legacy settles for a seemingly straightforward and clear substantive definition of stakeholders, but one which we will soon see is deeply problematic.

In an in-depth study of public controversies concerning development projects STS-scholar Noortje Marres (2005) observed that one of the key points of contestation in these controversies concerned the definition of the legitimately concerned parties to the disputes; in other words, conflicts over who were the legitimate stakeholders with a right to have their opinion heard and considered. This leads Marres to conclude that it is "important to acknowledge the disputability and partiality of subjects and procedures of (democratic) politics" (Marres, 2005: 137), meaning that the question regarding what actors are to be considered legitimate stakeholders in a particular context in no way can be viewed as a given property, but rather constitutes one of the fundamental points of dispute in many policy controversies. Or as Swyngedouw (2005:1999) has noted, "[w]hile the concept of (stake)'holder' is inclusive and presumably exhaustive, the actual concrete forms of governance are necessarily constrained and limited in terms of who can, is, or will be allowed to participate" (Swyngedouw, 2005:1999). Thus, diverging apprehensions of who are ascribed the property of being "affected" may radically shift the composition of the group of stakeholders who should be considered to legitimately hold a right to partake in deliberations within the planning process (e.g. are the citizens of the Maldives to be considered as legitimate stakeholders in Vancouver's planning process, and thus to be given a right to voice in that process, seeing that they are "affected" by the potential sea-level rise resulting from global warming which may be the result of a development of road traffic infrastructure in any urban area such as Vancouver?).

But if there are no 'objective' ways of deciding who are the legitimate stakeholders in any given planning process, the recognition of who is and isn't a legitimate stakeholder in relation to a particular planning process then fundamentally becomes a question of discretion – pointing towards the need for rethinking both the ascribed role and ontological status of the actors that become attributed stakeholder-status in planning processes. Along these lines this paper will argue that planners inevitably do more than merely "convene" and "assist" stakeholders. They also contribute to fundamentally constituting the legitimately concerned parties of any planning processes, generating and fostering stakeholders by manipulating the interests and attachments of actors through the reality-crafting practices described as "ontological choreography" by Thompson (2005). This paper thus puts forth the argument that territorial stakeholders can never be 'found' as pre-existing ontologically independent entities in the world, but that they are rather manufactured through painstaking and elaborate series of procedures so to say 'in process'. Stakeholder subjectivities are thus both an achievement – a specific 'produced' mode of action and thought established through investments and efforts – but at the same time also very 'real' in that they can have concrete and sometimes dramatic effects in the world, albeit sometimes only under limited durations of time and in specific settings or situations. In other words: that 'stakeholderness' could perhaps be gainfully conceptualized as a relational effect rather than as an ontologically given property of certain actors. Planners are thus fundamentally implicated not only in generating a plan, but actively partake in formatting the space of the possible and trajectory towards the future for all the

actors engaged in the process of collective becoming that a successful strategic spatial planning endeavor entails. Still, it is concluded that *manipulative* in this case need in no way imply *malevolent*, but may rather be thought of as a careful attention to conditions of collective becoming which may be a fundamental necessity of a democratically conscious craft of planning. From such a perspective Forester's parable about the planner as midwife is not only powerfully persuasive, it is also fundamentally flawed. And even worse, counter to Forester's declared ambition of contributing to a democratization of planning practice (which the author of this paper also subscribes to), it may actually function to obscure from view the magnitude of the ethical and political burden of responsibility that planners carry in planning processes.

To make the above points the paper will, apart from planning studies and human geography, primarily also draw upon literature from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and sociological scholarship on processes of subjectification, a strand of research previously scantly explored in relation to planning issues (for notable exceptions see Gibson, 2001 and Raco, 2003). Further inspiration is also drawn from the sociology of attachments and the related study of "passion-mobilizing practices" which function through the "situated mobilization of feelings, understandings, identities, practices and organizations" (Gherardi et al, 2007:323), while paying attention to the devices, settings and means that generate attachments.

The paper is organized in five sections. Following this introduction is an account of an episode from planning practice, more specifically: from regional planning in a Scandinavian country,

which serves as a concrete empirical entry point into the question concerning the role played by territorial attachments in planning processes. With the help of STS, subjectification theory and the sociology of attachments the third section of the paper reconceptualizes the stakeholder-concept and attempts to provide a theoretical grasp of the property of 'stakeholderness' and activities towards 'stakeholderization'. The fourth section of the paper revisits the empirical case and attempts to further make sense of the previously recounted events with the help of the conceptual arsenal developed in the preceding section. The paper is rounded off with a concluding discussion.

"In the interest of the region": the subject of place in an episode from planning practice

The story which is to be retold here brings us right into the middle of a planning process, a big planning process for a major metropolitan county in Scandinavia – let's call it *Bigcity County*.[2] The major undertaking of generating a new regional development plan has been rolling along for a couple of years already, run according to the book as a 'strategic' and 'communicative' planning process. At present the staff of the regional planning office of *Bigcity County* are engaged in one more hectic dialogue round where they travel out to pay personal visits to a small number of organizations that have been identified as key stakeholders in relation to the new regional plan, with the purpose of holding semi-formal discussions to glean out their

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[2] The empirical material presented in the paper was collected by the author while employed as a project manager at a regional planning office in a Scandinavian metropolitan region. It has been further corroborated with official documents and the accuracy of the account of the episodes retold in the paper has also been verified by staff and management at the regional planning office in question. All names that appear in the empirical account are pseudonyms employed to protect the anonymity of the involved persons and organizations.

reactions to the contents of a planned first draft of the new plan. One of these visits takes two *Bigcity* planners to the *Regional Association* of *Nextdoor County*, a type of municipality-county alliance active in the formulation of regional development policy for a semi-urban and partially post-industrial county directly neighboring *Bigcity County*.

In the discussion with the leadership of the Association, one of the crucial points concerns the two alternative maps which are to be presented in the regional plan as potential 'goal frames' for the development of land use and transport links between *Bigcity County* and the neighboring counties. One of the main purposes of the goal frames is to lay down overarching strategic principles for the long term structural development of the trans-county transport system, primarily focusing on the rail traffic network. The two goal frames have some considerable differences between them. Let's call them *Distributed* and *Concentrated* for the sake of simplicity. In the documentation concerning the two alternatives it is clearly stated that *Distributed* provides for a structure which facilitates an enlargement of the functional labor market of *Bigcity County*, the economic engine of this part of the country, to also include smaller towns along the trans-county rail network as commuting points. In *Concentrated*, on the other hand, settlements and economic activities will be further concentrated to the central parts of a handful of bigger cities in the trans-county area. In this alternative, high-speed links between the bigger cities are strengthened at the expense of the smaller towns, since far fewer trains would stop at the smaller stations. According to the statistical analysis performed by the

regional planning office to evaluate the two structures, for *Concentrated* a quite bleak picture is painted regarding the potential future for cities of less than 50,000 inhabitants. As a contrast, in *Distributed*, the small towns would be given the preconditions for a dramatic increase in both population and economic activity. Still, on an aggregated trans-county regional scale, the total growth of economic activity and population is expected to be higher in *Concentrated* than in *Distributed*.

The meeting between the Association and the planners from *Bigcity* opens up with a presentation by the planners who give a short introduction to the proposed general tenets of the plan, specifically focusing on introducing the two alternative 'goal frames'. The board of directors of the Regional Association consists of twelve representatives of the member municipalities, elected on a municipal mandate, and two elected representatives from the county assembly, elected on a regional mandate. There is some degree of uneasiness in the room when the planners present the two alternative structure maps. Two municipal representatives quickly speak out in direct support of *Distributed*, saying that this alternative is most in line with the future plans of their municipality. But after these opening critical remarks the general tangent of the discussion shifted into a cautiously positive tone, and instead came to be carried out from a regional rather than local perspective, focusing primarily on what would be the best long term solution for the broader trans-county region rather than for individual municipalities. As the discussions progress, an implicit consensus appears to take

form that a structure in line with *Concentrated*, providing for a higher concentration of settlements and economic functions in highly urbanized areas, would be the most gainful development for the region as a whole.

After the meeting, the representatives from the planning office expressed surprise at how the discussions turned out. They expected a higher degree of skepticism towards *Concentrated*, which could easily be framed as having strongly negative long-term local effects for the municipalities which some of the board members were elected representatives of. As an example, two of the board members were elected municipal representatives from the municipality of *Tracktown*. *Tracktown* is located at a junction between two national rail arteries. It is not an exaggeration to call it a railway town since its historical existence has been completely bound up with the extension of the railway system, with initial settlement agglomeration in the area occurring only as a result of its strategic position on the network. The municipality has seen a steady decline in population from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s, when the negative trend was bucked, much thanks to an increase in commuting opportunities to *Bigcity*.

The contemporary trends in settlement and economic activity suggest that for its future prosperity, *Tracktown* will be completely dependent on offering attractive commuting opportunities to *Bigcity County*. This would in turn imply that there would be a strong interest for the representatives of the municipality to advocate *Distributed* as a goal frame for the

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regional plan, so as to secure an overarching development which would seem to favor the municipality and its inhabitants. In contrast, in the alternative *Concentrated*, *Tracktown* is not even on the map. Quite literally. Which means that only very few and quite slow trains will stop there. So *Tracktown* would have very slim chances of remaining an attractive commuter point to *Bigcity County*, where the job market is booming (and all projections say will keep on booming) while the local labour market in *Tracktown* and the surrounding *Nextdoor County* has been dwindling. Still, at the meeting where the two alternative transport structures were discussed, nothing of this kind was said by the representatives from *Tracktown*. Instead, their comments invoked the interest of the broader *region* and the challenges facing the *region*.

As retold by the participating planners from the regional planning office, at the meeting – the way the discussions went – it was as if the fate of the wider trans-county region as a 'place'[3] was allowed to take a precedence over the specific local concerns and interests of representatives' municipalities. Of course, this could be framed as a form of betrayal on behalf of the representatives in relation to their local constituencies, a token of a flagrant neglect of duties and responsibilities as elected local representatives. But another way of putting forth the issue would be to recognize that the board members obviously and expressedly seemed to care a lot for the fate of the greater *Bigcity* trans-county region and how it will fare in a world

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[3]In the context of the paper, the concept of 'place' is used in a non-scalar manner to denote spatial entities invested with strong human attachments. Thus 'places', in the manner used in the paper, can be of any geographical extension such as a 'region', 'nation' or 'planet'.

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perceived to be ruled by fierce competition between global city region. In the meeting, the board members appear to have been primarily speaking as subjects of the trans-county region, minding and caring for its well-being and future – even if this to some degree might have implied sacrificing the future prospects of some of the local municipalities they were elected to represent. So the board members of the Regional Association in this situation not only came to act as stakeholders *in* the region, but also as stakeholders *of* the region, and in a manner they appear to be committing themselves as fellow guardians of the fate of the region. And to add to that, this 'region-minding' position appears to have taken precedence among the board members over other alternative positions that could reasonably have been enacted in this situation.

The territorial(ized) stakeholder: learning to care for place

From the above related episode it could be reasoned, using a terminology similar to that which was developed by Callon (1986), that the board members seem to have become enrolled in a specific project – a trans-county regional project – at the expense of a municipal project. What we appear to be dealing with is the application of a specific frame of thinking used to pass judgment on desirable outcomes and for qualifying and calculating better or worse alternative futures against a specific norm: what appears as good or bad for 'the region'. The 'region' thus came to function as a fix-point for the situated subjectivity of the board members at this specific occasion – or what perhaps could be called a region-minding *subject position*, to use an

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established concept used to describe how humans in specific situations come to enact particular repertoires of thought and behavior which "immediately positions them in certain relations with one another and with the world of which they speak" (Rose, 1996: 186; see further Foucault, 1974 and also Deleuze, 1988). But how and why is it that the board members came to enact a regional subject position in the meeting instead of alternative positions that could reasonably have been enacted in this situation, such as say, a municipal or party-political subject position?

In the essentialist perspective of much contemporary planning methodology it appears to be somehow inscribed in the metaphysical order of the world who are the legitimately concerned stakeholders in relation to any specific planning endeavour, and if you act as a stakeholder when you really are not – or fail to act as one when you are supposed to – you are accordingly committing some form of cosmic error. From such a standpoint the municipal representatives at the meeting of the Regional Association either have found that the fate of the region is truly their primary concern, and that they have previously only been deluded; or they must have become misguided when they are showing more concern for the fate of the wider region than the more direct interests of the local municipality. It is a question of getting it right or wrong – either-or. But if we for a moment leave to the side the notion of stakeholderness as an ontologically given property and instead approach the phenomenon of the stakeholder from a different route passing through STS and the sociologies of attachments and subjectivities, we

might find means by which we can actually pry open the black-box of 'stakeholderness', defined as the unique property that stakeholders exhibit. This approach focuses on investigating the processes through which stakeholders and stakeholderness are generated or enacted in planning processes and attempts to learn something about the *substantive* question of stakeholderness by studying its *procedural* enactment in practice.

In this context it becomes more than a curiosity to note that the noun 'stake' and the expression to 'have a stake' shares a common etymological root with the verb 'to attach' and the noun 'attachment'. In the sociology of attachments, the concept of attachment is used to defined those things that we allow to overtake us in our action (Latour, 2010), those relationships that we willingly let guide our action, those things we become agents of and which can prod us into, and guide, our action (Gomart & Hennion, 1999). Rather than seeing engagements with those actors who become qualified as stakeholders in strategic spatial planning processes as the mere uncovering of a priori existing stakes, an approach towards stakeholderness that centre-stages attachments would instead proceed from a conceputalization of the enrolment of stakeholders into strategic planning processes as a form of operation on attachments by way of *subjectification*. Subjectification is a term that may be used to designate "all those heterogeneous processes and practices by means of which human beings come to relate to themselves and others as subjects of a certain type" (Rose, 1996:25). This would entail approaching the issues from a distributed view of agency and subjectivity, and

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see agentic subjects not as integrated, coherent and atomistic – but rather as complex sites of more or less flexible, evolving and sometimes even conflicting subject positions related to specific ways of ontological organization (see also Latour, 2005:213).[4] Subjectification generates the enactment of subject positions, and such subject positions are constituted in relation to different fix-points (Olsson, 2007; cf. Foucault, 1970). The fix-point or "point of subjectification" is that which takes precedence, the ordering principle, the commanding imperative. At the same time, the point of subjectification also impels a responsibility on behalf of the subject to carry forth and actualize the imperative of the fix-point (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:127ff).

Bringing together theories of subjectification with the sociology of attachment in the study of planning processes thus invites to concrete investigations into how humans produce sense and coherence in the world so as to deal with and negotiate the constant, overflowing complexity of the world through stabilized forms of framing 'reality' and ascribing meaning, relevance and worth – thus consciously and subconsciously answering up to the constantly re-emerging questions: Who (or *what*) am I? What is of utmost concern to me here – and how should 'one such as I' act under these circumstances or in this situation?' (see for instance Foucault, 1970;

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[4] The degree of flexibility of individual humans to slip between different modes of subjectification and the parameters that may make various subject positions more-or-less available to a specific human being at a certain conjuncture, thus affecting the probability to enact new subjectivities which may conflict with already assimilated subjectivities, is one of the central questions of much psychological research. The specific nuances of this debate are beyond the scope of this paper, but see further Blackman et al (2008).

Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 75ff; and further Olsson, 2007). From such a perspective it further becomes reasonable to conceptualize the enrolment of actors as stakeholders in strategic planning exercises as a process of subjectification which generates specific forms of attachments. A quote from Healey can further help us understand what specific types of attachments are constituted as fix-points for subjectification by the fostering of stakeholderness in planning processes, for in Healey (1998) it is stated that the links between "*territorial*" stakeholders are created through integrating economic, social and environmental relationships "*territorially*" (emphasis added; see also Healey et al, 1999). The terms "territorial" and "territorially" are stressed here to make this central point: that the fostering of stakeholder subjectivities in planning processes actually entails a process of *territorializing* actors – of attaching them to specific articulations of places, through establishing a *territorial logic*, defined by Harvey (2004) as the mission of "trying to maintain the health and well-being of a particular place". The territorial logic there-through infers and enacts *identity of place* – that is, the apprehended fundamental sharing-of-essence or belonging-together of things residing in geographic proximity and their "folding together" into commonality(see Hillier, 2007; Metzger, forthcoming).

Becoming-territorial stakeholder thus entails a process whereby self-articulated or solicited statements of interest, attachments and points-of-view are translated into stakes within a specific process of 'stakeholderization' (see also Marres, 2007). As actors become enrolled as

stakeholders a re-articulation of attachments or "translational drift" occurs (see Latour 1999a) whence their stated interests are more or less radically transformed through being re-articulated in a particular territorial framing. A 'stakeholder', as it emerges in a specific planning process, could thus perhaps be conceputalized as an enrolled and translated actor whose interest has been (re)articulated into a specific territorial formatting and connected to a range of other issues that also are framed within the same territorial setting: e.g. 'so you care about the local playgrounds? Then you are a stakeholder in this place, and you should also take an interest in issues x, y, z'. Thus, in the enactment of a territorial stakeholder subjectivity, things and issues that become framed as geographically proximate and related become not only analytically but also normatively associated; if you care about 'issue x' you *should* also care about 'y' and 'z', thus articulating a "space of solidarity" (Lagendijk, 2005; see also Syssner, 2006:130) and generating shared "geographies of concern" (Thrift, 2008). So becoming attached to a place, enacting a territorial stakeholder subjectivity, in a way means both seeing oneself as *part of* and also as *caring for* a specific place, seeing the interests of the place to be one's own interests, and one's own interests to be a part of the interests of the place – in a way: to inscribe oneself in a collectivity.

Thus, when we are studying processes of stakeholder enrolment in planning processes or the enactment of territorial stakeholder subjectivities we could actually say that we are looking at the attachment of actors to territories/places through the link of a specific territorial subject

position which builds on ideas of territorial identity, in the meaning of envisaged and enacted shared concerns and/or features based on proximity in Cartesian space. We can therefore argue that when an actor proceeds to act as a stakeholder, that is, when it begins to enact a territorial logic, it allows the perceived well-being of a specific place to some extent guide or overtake its actions. Thus, when the territorial stakeholder subjectivity is enacted, alternative subject positions – alternative possible logics of ordering and action – such as professional, ideological or sectoral logics become overtaken by orsubsumed under the territorial logic of caring for place, which becomes a central motif for, as well as driver of action.

But the question still beckons: *how* do territorial stakeholders practically come to be fostered and enacted in the context of strategic spatial planning processes? *How* does subjectification play out in strategic spatial planning processes? Marres (2005:62) argues that "the state of being affected by an issue should not be understood as given, but rather as the achievement of a process of 'learning to be affected'". Along these lines, but without drawing an explicit connection to the concept of the stakeholder, Healey has also suggested that the forging of territorial solidarities must be seen as a process of "shifting and re-shaping of *convictions*" [emphasis in original] which function through "entering the consciousness" of actors (Healey, 2006:245). From such a perspective, strategic spatial planning in this aspect thus appears to become not so much a cartography of or negotiation between given stakeholder interests, but rather what Rose (1996:10) describes as a "*creation* of 'interests', the forging of novel relations

between knowledge and politics, and the association and mobilization of forces around them".

This implies that in planning processes, subject positions may become established and stabilized through purposely designed and deployed techniques and devices which operate both discursively and non-discursively to condition patterns of feeling, thought and judgment.

If we take a closer look at the policy analysis scholars that for instance Healey draws upon when introducing the stakeholder concept into spatial planning (primarily Bryson & Crosby, 1992), we will also see that to them, a recognized 'stakeholder' in relation to a specific policy context or situation emerges only *after*, and as a *result of* numerous stipulated procedures. Crosby & Bryson further clearly recognize the element of discretion in the performance of such "stakeholder analysis" stating that "*Deciding* who should be involved, how, and when in doing stakeholder analysis is a key strategic *choice*" (Crosby & Bryson 2005:167, emphasis added). Stakeholder analysis here thus appears to entail a process of selection and engagement or selective engagement. Or as Crosby and Bryson put it, quite bluntly, stakeholder analysis in policy processes actually amount to "a kind of marketing research into how policies need to be found, tailored and sold" (Crosby & Bryson, 2005:255), which can function as a basis for strategically enrolling actors with the view of successfully pursuing a specific policy project. It is a "staged process" aimed at "generating information", to "build political acceptance" and establish "legitimacy, representation and credibility" in which "[s]takeholders are included when there are good and prudent reasons to do so, but not when their involvement is

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impractical, unnecessary or imprudent" (Bryson 2004:29). Becoming 'stakeholderized' thus appears as the result of being enticed into a specific process and actively prompted to engage. The laborious process of stakeholder analysis more amounts to a methodology for generating engagement among a select group of actors in relation to a specific cause than an even-handed cartography of a set of a priori given stakeholders related to a specific context or issue, and thus more of a process of *making* stakeholders than of *finding* them. Thus, the engagement of actors as in the role of stakeholders in a planning process entails an ascription of a property of stakeholderness and a normative prompting that some actors *should* care about the fate of some specific place, combined with specific methods of 'analysis' and consultation which fill a pedagogic just as much as an analytic function so as to generate engagement and a sense of care on behalf of that actor. A term which succinctly captures these dynamics is Charis Thompson's expression *ontological choreography*. Thompson (2005) describes this as the "dynamic coordination" of heterogeneous elements, a "deftly balanced coming together of things that are generally considered parts of different ontological orders (part of nature, part of the self, part of society" which "becomes coordinated in highly staged ways" (Thompson, 2005: 8). It is an active practice of entwining subjects and environments that is "intensely technical, intensely personal and political" and carried out through various material and symbolic practices (p. 9).

Tracktown **revisited: on the practical craft of ontological choreography and stakeholder subjectivities as precarious achievements**

There is always an unaccounted-for *before* and *after* as well as *outside* and *inside* of any retold account of events. And to understand how the 'region' came to be enacted as a priviledged ontological fix-point in the meeting of the Regional Association of Nextdoor County, we must now – equipped with the conceptual tooling provided in the preceeding section – turn to the 'outside' and 'before' of the previously retold meeting to investigate the laborious acts of ontological choreography staged by the *Bigcity* planners at other sites, earlier in the process. For already three years before, at the very start of the process, the elected representatives of *Bigcity county* explicitly gave their planners the directive (based on a recommendation from the planning office itself) to focus considerable attention and resources upon involving the actors of the 'functional region' beyond *Bigcity County* proper in the regional planning process so as to be able to generate a "deepened cooperation" based on the explicitly expressed premise that what is good for *Bigcity* is also good for the surrounding trans-county region. In the internal work documents stipulating the guiding principles for the planning process the management of the planning office lists a set of "strategic stakeholders" who are to be particularly attended to in the process – among which are listed the planning organs of the surrounding counties, such as the Regional Association of Nextdoor county. The internal work document further clearly states that the goal of "communication" is to affect "behaviors", "attitudes", "knowledge" and

"interests" among the parties to be actively enticed into in the process and it is highlighted that the planning process should "incorporate important values of the regions actors in the structure of the development plan", which in turn will lead to that "many actors will take responsibility for the totality".

Based on these directives, the activities aimed at involving stakeholders in the planning process are initiated, beginning with three 'dialogue rounds' that preceded the meeting recounted in the beginning of the paper. In these dialogues, which in total extended over a period of a year, representatives and staff of Nextdoor County Regional Association where among those especially invited to partake in activities and have their voices heard in the process. But the planners did not only passively listen to the designated stakeholders. Rather, communication was very much two-way. For example, before each of the three rounds, a so-called 'dialogue brief' was distributed as guidance to the stakeholders. The first brief is quite open in its formulations, for instance discussing "criteria that could be used" for deciding the basic principles of the plan and briefly presenting a description of "the current situation" including ,among other things, a brief introduction to theories of New Economic Geography and a discussion on international competition between metropolitan regions. The second brief contains a more thorough discussion on "long-term trends" and "possible goals", as well as suggestions for "strategies" and "topics for planning". The final brief is a detailed proposition of

what issues and goals to include in the plan, which later with only minor adjustments came to be formalized as the topical structure and work programme for the plan proper.

Parallel to the dialogue rounds a handful of 'programming teams' staffed by *Bigcity* planners, crack process consultants and hand-picked stakeholder representatives worked together to formulate "challenges" and concrete "strategy suggestions" that fed into the dialogue rounds. In the internal work programme of the planning office it is stated that the teams should be carefully "rigged", taking into consideration the specific constellation of stakeholders – and that the planners and consultants should take care to tailor the work methods to fit with the unique composition of the groups. The design and chairing of meetings was often delegated to the consultants who staged workshops with a careful balance between more participatory exercises, such as various forms of SWOT-analyses, and instructive feed-ins of expert-type knowledge that generated a picture of 'the current situation' and 'future trends' in the region, nation, world, etc.

As can be seen from the above, the contact with the designated stakeholders in the planning process was from the very beginning carefully planned and staged. The activities and distributed materials explicitly had the purpose of getting everybody 'on the same page', in a process amounting to what perhaps could be called *ontological alignment by way of ontological choreography*. The aim of achieving such ontological alignment – or as expressed in the public materials of the planning office: generating "shared views" and a "shared idea of reality", was

never covert or tacit – but repeatedly stated in official documents. It was skillfully achieved by the planners by way of a process of mutual alignments, through on the one hand actively working to influence the designated stakeholders, and on the other hand by using the information gained from the participants as cues to revise their own ideas and approaches where deemed necessary for success. Further, it is obvious that the dialogue briefs also functioned as devices of such ontological alignment through providing increasingly detailed 'information' in the form of reality-statements ('this is how the world is'), and step by step also translating these statements into increasingly concrete propositions towards collective action, translating statements of 'is' into 'ought's.

Together with consultants and designated stakeholders the planners thus carefully staged a collective reality where it with time came to appear as self evident that 1) they were all part of the region, 2) it was important to care for the fate of the region, 3) to do so it was necessary to act collectively. So through the process, notwithstanding their prior self-imaged, those involved as designated stakeholders with time also came to act as stakeholders – and further – not only *in* the region but *of* the region. The planning process entailed a subjectification process of collective becoming-stakeholder. So we can see that organizations such as the regional association of *Nextdoor county* had been carefully courted and groomed to think and act with the region as a fix-point over an extended period of time prior to the fateful meeting previously recounted. They had purposely been made implicated in the fate of the region by actively being

woven into a regionalization process (see Metzger, forthcoming) through a deftly choreographed balance between "epistemic disciplining" (Thompson, 2005) and a less pronounced but ever-present and concomitant mobilization and manipulation of attachments achieved through a selective integration into the emerging agenda of the regional plan of the issues and cares raised by the designated stakeholders.

Obviously, in the previously recounted meeting, it appears as if the hard labor of the planners bore fruit. The regional territorial stakeholder subjectivity they had so carefully nurtured for an extended period came to be enacted with an impact on the turn of events at the meeting of the board of the Nextdoor County Regional Association. The operation was seemingly a full success and the planners appear as powerful, almost demonic Machiavellian masterminds, unchallenged crafters of reality. At least at this particular place and at this moment in time. But if we take seriously the suggestion in the introduction of the paper that stakeholderness should gainfully be conceptualized as a relational effect rather than an ontological property, this implies that such an effect may or may not be stabilized to a high enough degree to be able to migrate beyond the specific and sometimes painstakingly formatted sites, networks or situations generated to achieve such effects (see also Callon & Law, 2005). Such a perspective thus invites us to consider stakeholder subjectivities as potentially precarious and local achievements which may break down or become de-actualized in the face of the many alternative subject positions on offering for any human actor in any given situation, some which

might be more easy to slip into and comfortable to act out of than the territorial stakeholder subjectivity for a specific actor at a specific time-space conjuncture (see Law, 1997). But even if a territorial logic holds firm across sites, a fundamental question remains: caring for *what* place or even what 'version' of a specific place?

In the case of the *Bigcity County* planning process, an examination of the later rounds of consultation that followed *after* the events described above gives a valuable illustration of this. In these consultations, which were conducted according to a more formalized protocol based on official written replies, the position of *Tracktown* is no longer as clear-cut as it appeared to have been in the meeting with the Regional Association board. Instead a delicate attempt is made to articulate a middle way between *Distributed* and *Concentrated*, claiming that the quite divergent guiding principles between these two alternative goal frames might actually be efficiently bridged if using *Distributed* as a fundament for development. In a different vocabulary it could be argued that here the representatives of *Tracktown* are actually attempting the enactment of a new possible reality through partially connecting and over-layering aspects of the discrete and separate potential realities on offer in the goal frames, but claiming that these are in no way mutually exclusive.[5] The position of the *Tracktown*-representatives thus appears to have drifted between the informal meeting recounted in the

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[5] On the other hand, it could also be argued that they are precisely enacting the role scripted for them by the regional planners, who in drawing up the two alternatives were very much aware that the conclusion that would be arrived at most probably would be a compromise somewhere in between them. This was also how the trans-county goal frame turned out in the final plan document, thus making the whole episode frameable as an illustrative example of "consensus steering" (Pløger, 2004) or "configuration of the user" (Woolgar, 1991), at least within certain roughly defined parameters.

beginning of the paper and the later rounds of consultation. It no longer neatly aligns with previous statements made about the desirability of *Concentrated*, as the best alternative for the 'region as a whole' that the representatives previously seemingly wholeheartedly backed. Instead a difficult balancing act between displaying a caring for the region and a caring for the fate of the local municipality is attempted, where if anything the focus is placed on caring for and promoting local interests and potentials. This could of course be read as a simple instance of *realpolitik* where elected representatives commit to something in a closed room and then attempt to obfuscate this position by not speaking truthfully to when 'on record'. But perhaps, somewhat less conspiratorially, it could also be taken as an illustration of how subjectivities, as reasoned above, are enacted locally as precarious achievements in the form of relational effects generated under specific conditions in a specific setting (see also Dugdale, 1999). At a different point in time, or in another context, conditions may be different in such a way that an actor may come to enact a, to a greater or lesser extent, different subjectivity. In the case of *Tracktown*, it appears that the subject positions that were enacted by the representatives in the setting and atmosphere of the Regional Association meeting did not manage to hold steady when travelling to the different setting of a municipal board meeting involving other people, at another occasion, and in a materially different room. Here the ontological choreography focusing on the 'region' as the fix-point of unparalleled importance, so carefully enacted with the help of the regional planners, appears to have all but broken down – and another point of

territorial subjectification, another 'place to care for' –the local municipality – came to take precedence.

Concluding discussion

Thrift (2008) has argued that if we seriously attend to subjectivities, we will see that what we call a person can be described as "numerous layered subjectivities" in the form of "shifting ensembles of states that are received and passed on, states over which that person rarely has much in the way of direct control but which can be modulated in the passing in such a way as to produce nuances or even, at the limit, quite new forms of going on". If we, following Thrift and the general line of reasoning in this paper, choose to do away with any remnant of an idealistic metaphysics of the subject it becomes difficult not to reject the idea of some truer or purer self or will lodged beneath the sedimentations of prior processes of subjectification. The point here is thus that even if a group of designated stakeholders in a planning process somehow would be completely shielded from practices of ontological choreography and subjectification in the process in question, they still wouldn't be more authentic or free in their decisions. It would simply mean that they would base their actions on other subject positions, inculcated in previous subjectificaiton processes. Thus, a passive or neutral planner – if such could ever exist – would in no way facilitate the pure, unadulterated will of some a priori objectively given stakeholders, they would merely make room for judgments based on the sedimentations of previous subjectification processes and already well-stabilized stakeholder subject positions.

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The search for the real, proper stakeholders in relation to any planning endeavor turns out to be a futile 'turtles all the way down'-project. Such a conclusion in turn proves Forester's injunction for planners to merely "assist" stakeholders as not just empirically problematic ('things don't work this way in practice'), but also ethically questionable ('why should we?'). This in turn fundamentally challenges the legitimacy of any planning ethics or method that employs as its fundament the granting of a privileged status to any self-proclaimed or habitually taken-for-given stakeholder, actualizing Stengers (2005) dismissal of contemporary stakeholder-based governance methods as generally serving as nothing more than an excuse to exclusively tend to vested or already well-articulated interests.

But if there is no authentic will to be excavated from beneath subject positions, if the subject simply is a site or sum total of enacted subjectivities, manipulation – in the sense of deliberate attempts at subjectification – cannot be evil or malevolent *per se*. As Stengers (2005) has noted the wholesale condemnation of manipulation is also a peculiar Western idea based on a specific assumption that humans possess some form of nuclear, pure free will that is always deformed and subjugated through external influences and which can be liberated if such manipulation is curtailed (see also Latour, 1999b). As Stengers further explains, for instance in the Chinese intellectual tradition manipulation is a skill celebrated as an art of disposition – the ability to utilize the propensity of things in such a way that they 'spontaneously' accomplish what is wished for. Such a conceptualization of manipulation – neither as being inherently 'good' nor

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'evil' but rather as a practical skill – puts the spotlight on the role of the planner and her influence and responsibility, not merely as the neutral facilitator or Socratic midwife that orthodox communicative planning theory would have her be, but rather as an active generator of conditions of collective becoming within planning processes. From such a perspective it can still be argued that planners are mediators, although not at all in the meaning given to the term by Forester, but rather in a Latourian sense – as denoting a relay of forces which may also function to divert these forces in new and sometimes unexpected directions at a particular conjuncture (Latour, 2005). A cog in a larger machinery, but nevertheless with some potential traction.

With no pure, unmanipulated will to be found anywhere in the planning process, does this by necessity then mean that 'anything goes', an opening towards an academically sanctioned complete nihilism? Not at all. To the contrary it can instead be argued that what we in lack of a better term may call 'planning ethics' becomes even more crucial to practice since there are now no imagined ontological foundations to fall back on, no posited hidden reality to can function as an excuse to absolve the planner from taking responsibility for the consequences of her actions. Planning thus conceptualized becomes a practical craft of ontological choreography and one of the key challenges for a democratically-minded planner becomes to keep her balance through the tightrope-walk of carefully weighting respect and understanding for what *is* against efforts towards generating the conditions fruitful for the emergence of what may yet

become by way of collective 'risky' explorations (cf. Hillier, 2007; Stengers, 2005). From such a perspective the planner is in no way a passive 'assistant' in these processes, but an active guide and manipulator of conditions of collective becoming, and an explicit recognition and attention to collective becoming in the name of "that which emerges" (Stengers, 2005) would warrant the planner to not just go looking for existing articulated interests, those that scream the loudest or lean against the most firmly entrenched positions, but to also actively aid in broadening the circle of those that are to be considered legitimately concerned – articulating and bringing to the table the 'interests that can be' of a collectivity that may yet become. This of course already happens daily in planning practice all over the globe, but to fully be able to institutionalize such a risky democratic(izing) practice planners must give up the ontological comfort blanket and instrument of covert dominance that is provided by the discourse of 'analysis' and 'assistance' in relation to practices concerning stakeholder relations to instead adopt a discourse and practice of more open-ended collective becoming (cf. also Metzger, 2011).

And here we may rediscover the persistent relevance of Healey's call for actively involving 'stakeholders who don't know about their stake yet'. But rather than a technical exercise of 'analysis' this becomes a creative task for generating collective *becomings* underwritten by a democratizing ethos. In this game there is no getting it right or wrong, only decisions of inclusion and exclusion that can have dramatic social, economical, ecological and political

consequences (Law, 2004). The planner can therefore never fall back upon a line of defence claiming that she is simply unearthing the pre-existing reality of objectively existing stakeholders, but must rather be seen to be participating in a process of generating stakeholder subjectivities. The relevant question to ask then becomes not so much 'are they being manipulative or not?', but rather: manipulation through what techniques and devices? Within which parameters? And to what ends and outcomes? Thus, accepting manipulation as an inherent component of planning practice in no way accounts for a cynical post-democratic position, but rather leads to a call for a clearer focus on the effects of the concrete techniques, practices and devices which to different degrees may either function to cultivate or erode democratic habits and values. So the ethical injunction remains, and is further strengthened by disposing of the ethical immunization offered by the analogy of the planner as a 'mere midwife' only convening pre-existing stakeholders, a parable which only functions to obscure from sight the full depth of responsibility on the part of the planner in the generation of conditions of collective becoming.

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