ROLE PLAYING

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Role playing is a participatory learning method in which participants act out roles in specific situations to better understand perspectives, conflicts and decision-making contexts. As defined by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2022), role play involves behaving in the way someone else would behave in a particular situation. In educational settings, this method creates a safe environment where individuals can freely explore ideas, express opinions and test alternative solutions. It also supports communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills, making it highly relevant for disciplines that deal with people, space and community interaction, such as urban design and spatial planning.

In the context of community planning, Nick Wates (2000) describes role playing as a form of "gaming", a structured simulation that encourages people to work together to solve spatial challenges. Wates argues that such activities are especially useful in the early stages of planning processes, helping stakeholders understand one another's perspectives and collaborate constructively. Rather than simply accepting expert solutions, role playing encourages active participation and shared ownership of ideas. It helps community members, planners, local authorities and other stakeholders build mutual understanding and co-create better spatial solutions. Full participation is not about convincing people to agree with predefined proposals but about improving ideas through collaboration, ultimately leading to better and more inclusive environments.

Wates (2000) outlines a structured role play approach through a design workshop format, typically lasting around 90 minutes and involving 8–10 participants. The first step is organisational: participants are divided into groups and seated around a table with a map or model. This is followed by brief introductions to build trust and clarify roles. The workshop formally begins with a brainstorming phase, during which participants respond to guiding questions by writing ideas on notes and placing them onto the map: Where are the main problems? Where do opportunities lie? What types of change are most needed? These visual contributions make the discussion accessible to everyone, regardless of professional background.

In the next step, participants begin sketching design ideas with coloured pens and tracing paper. This creative stage allows multiple alternatives to emerge and encourages open dialogue. Ideas are gradually refined into proposals balancing individual needs with group interests. The workshop concludes with a summarisation stage, where main findings and suggestions are presented to the wider group. This creates a shared vision and a foundation for future development.

Role playing is closely linked to participatory planning tools such as Planning for Real, which uses physical 3D models to involve residents in identifying priorities and co-designing solutions for their local area (Watson, 2000). These tools empower communities by making planning processes tangible, visual and inclusive. Role playing is especially effective in addressing complex urban problems because it acknowledges emotional, social and cultural

dimensions and not just technical aspects. It is a method that builds empathy, challenges assumptions and enables constructive dialogue about space.

In conclusion, role playing is more than a classroom exercise; it is a powerful methodology for collaborative decision making in spatial planning and community development. By simulating real life scenarios, it helps participants prepare for challenges, negotiate interests and work creatively toward shared goals. As Wates (2000) emphasises, participatory methods like role playing are essential in creating better places and improving the quality of life for communities through collective action.