DISCIPLINES, ATTITUDES - AND PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR A CHANGE

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Abstract

Discussing urban conservation on a Norwegian background, we want to highlight the meaning of communication in multi-disciplinary processes and demonstrate communicology as a research-based professional tool for enhancing your own communication and understanding that of others. Communicology is the study of the structure and dynamics of communication and change. Using meta-keys to recognize elements and patterns in communication, it is a help to clarify intentions, check the frames of understanding and see if views formed in advance (presuppositions) disturb or distort communication. We stress the importance of taking a meta-position to understand and evaluate events and situations.

To illustrate our points, we follow and evaluate the process of urban conservation in Mosjøen, a small Norwegian town. Starting with a conflict-dominated situation around 1970, an alliance between local enthusiasts and professional conservators gradually managed to build understanding and support for the conservation of Sjögata, the oldest part of the town. Strong negative feelings were obstacles in the beginning, and it has taken decades to turn the tide. Today, however, Sjögata is profiled as a main attraction of the town.

We recommend communicology as a means to help poets talk to engineers. Communication between groups that different requires awareness of intentions, frames of understanding and a consequent sorting of elements and patterns.

Key words: urban conservation, communication, management

1. Introduction

One of the sessions in the 4th international seminar has a title containing the question “How can poets talk to engineers?” We interpret this question as a metaphor, intended to show the need to create communication between groups with extremely different approaches to understanding and describing the world. According to the Norwegian philosopher Helge Svare (2003), a metaphor is “a way of thinking where we attempt to describe or understand one part of reality in the light of another”.

Our intention with this presentation is to create understanding of some research-based principles for interdisciplinary communication by means of practical tools – and to arouse curiosity to learn more about these tools and their use.

Our professional approaches are:

A: Scientific, research-based: Planning, architecture, urban conservation, social sciences, politics, communication, communicology

B: Theory based on our own professional experience: Planning, conservation, human communications work and artistic performance.

C: Metaphoric: Referring to the Ename charter, latest draft version, article 3.5 (2004): “Intangible elements of a site’s heritage such as food, music, dance …… should be noted and included in its interpretation.”

Our context is discussing urban conservation as interdisciplinary activity, referring to the definition: “Urban conservation ….. a process that seeks to co-ordinate and regulate the process of continuity and change of an urban structure and its values.” (Zancheti and Jokilehto 1997, p. 44)

Integrated conservation was introduced in the Amsterdam charter of the Council of Europe (1975): “….conservation should be one of the first considerations in all urban and regional planning. Integrated conservation depends on legal, administrative, financial and technical support. Integrated conservation cannot succeed without the cooperation of all.”

Cooperation involves communication. (From Latin, “communicae”, to make common - used to describe the exchange of thoughts, ideas etc. through any visual, auditory or other channels)¹

Our background for discussing urban conservation is the development in Norway through the last 30-35 years. Heritage protection has changed from being a limited activity focused on single national monuments to protecting larger contexts. According to statistics and national monitoring, local conservation areas have become frequently found features in urban areas. Unfortunately we also see from research and other sources that management of these areas does not always follow the original intentions.

Local conservation plans, based on municipal decisions according to their mandate in the legislation, are “easy” to approve but difficult to manage afterwards – it has been proven too easy to make exceptions from the rule. Owners involved do not necessarily share the values and aims of the public administration. Political bodies are sensitive to the interests of the voters, and are often persuaded to accept projects that damage heritage values.

In other words: The system of legal and institutional frameworks we thought would protect valuable urban heritage cannot manage this by enforcing the law. Something else is needed.

2. A Norwegian case

Mosjøen, a small town situated in the middle of Norway just south of the Arctic Circle, will be used as one of the illustrations, being in many ways a typical representative of small Norwegian towns. Mosjøen gained its urban status in 1875, when timber trade had triggered a short period of rapid growth in the small community. In 1968, it had developed to an industrial town with 10 000 inhabitants. Small and worn down wooden houses from late 19th century still dominated Sjögata, the oldest street in town, but the municipal council led by a resolute mayor were determined to create a more efficient and modern centre. This meant demolishing 27 of the oldest houses to make room for 220 new parking spaces. The mayor claimed that the proposal was really a preservation plan, since nobody had previously proposed to safeguard any of the old houses. He also meant that

¹ Gregory Bateson defines communication as any kind of behavior or sensory experience.
conservation would turn out to be too expensive. Others protested that this demolition would destroy cultural values and make the town less attractive. A local NGO was established to fight for the conservation of Sjögata.

The protests grew in strength after an illustration was published in the local newspaper, showing two alternative ways of development. Newspaper columns were filled with articles for and against demolition, sometimes using strong language. In the meanwhile, another three houses were demolished.

Parallel to this, conservation enthusiasts (professionals from Oslo and local people) decided that visible action was necessary. Raising the necessary sum, they bought a small sea-house and started to repair and restore it helped by voluntary workers. The house was one of the most decayed in the area, and the goal was to show that even a house in that bad condition could be repaired at a reasonable cost.

In 1974, the NGO made two initiatives that proved to be extremely important. First, they managed to organise a major national seminar to discuss the possible future of Sjögata. Second, they contacted the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Trondheim, proposing that students could do a survey on Sjögata and propose how to maintain the heritage values of the area. The seminar clearly demonstrated the differences in beliefs and opinions between the different groups involved. The mayor persisted that he had proposed a conservation plan, that more extensive conservation would be too expensive, and last but not least that his strongest opponents were outsiders. The chairman of the local NGO (himself a native of the town) replied that also the mayor was born in another community. Professional conservators claimed that from their experience it seemed realistic to preserve the entire area. Yet, it seemed that the conflicting parts had entered the trenches to stay there.

3. A typical situation

Situations where parts do not really communicate are well known from the field of urban conservation. We would like to present a simple one that may serve as case for our discussions:

Once there was a conservation officer employed in a municipal conservation office. Mr. Houseman was a very dedicated professional with several years of experience, and believed strongly in sticking to the rules and regulations. “When a conservation plan is approved, we have to defend it - nobody else has full understanding of the implications of such plans!” Then, one day, he was asked to prepare a meeting with an engineer who had bought three houses in a conservation area, and who wanted to discuss a property development project on these premises. Mr. Houseman had read and heard much about single-minded and profit-seeking investors, and prepared himself to maintain a firm attitude, not matter what happened.

The meeting started with the engineer – Mrs. Carpenter – explaining the commercial importance of her project, the need for quick decisions and approval of her plans which would mean only minor interventions in the buildings. Mr. Houseman immediately defended the conservation plan, and would not accept any short cuts. Mrs. Carpenter soon concluded that this meeting was wasted time, and left the office.
4. The importance of communication.

Integrated urban conservation aims to manage cultural heritage values. According to Norwegian legislation, heritage is defined as follows:

Cultural heritage comprises all tangible and intangible traces of human actions and interactions. Cultural heritage environment means contexts where cultural heritage forms part of a larger whole.

For a definition of culture, we shall quote the psychologists Kaufmann and Kaufmann:

“A system of shared values and shared ideas of how things work and “how to do it””. (1998)

Values can be defined in a general sense as: “Relative worth, merit or importance” (Websters unabridged dictionary) A more specific definition related to cultural heritage may be quoted as: “It is the relative social attribution of qualities to things that makes them have values” (Zancheti & Jokilehto 1997, p. 40)

This means that values exist only through the actions and interactions of humans, defined by or in relation to some cultural context. And these actions and interactions require some kind of communication.

Urban conservation takes place in a complex interaction involving several groups as actors or/ and stakeholders. The most important groups directly involved in management are shown in the table below. Each of these groups is acting on the basis of knowledge and culture, consciously or unconsciously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Culture, values, tacit knowledge</th>
<th>Explicit knowledge - tools and methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owners/ investors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenants, users</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs, craftsmen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil servants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It may be argued who are the poets and who are the engineers in this system. At this stage let us just state that it contains groups with very different approaches to understanding and describing the world, and how to deal with it.

As indicated in the introduction and in the illustration in session 2, conflicts concerning urban conservation are a well known phenomenon. A precise description of the main reasons for conflicts is found in Stephen S. Townsend’s doctoral thesis from the university of Cape Town (2003):

“in essence, these (reasons) are differences of intention and expectations about the object of urban conservation endeavours.” (p. 253)
Is this then a specific South African problem? Townsend says no, and relates it to comparing his findings with readings on European and particularly British conservation history.

What may provide an extra obstacle to communication is the general paradox of project development: The inverse relation between the possible influence on and the general understanding of the same project, depending on which stage the project is in. At the starting point, nothing is decided and everything may be influenced, but implications are hard to understand. In the end, everything is easy to understand, but nothing can be influenced.

![Project development diagram](image)

**Project development**

Our hypothesis is that it is important to establish a sufficient degree of common understanding to achieve good results. In other words, we claim that the basis for conservation is an ability to define and communicate values that have to be relevant for – and accepted by - a sufficient number of the socio-cultural groups involved.

We will claim that this requires an understanding of the relation between behaviour (or communication) and the forces that create and control this behaviour. It is hard to establish any degree of confidence in the process if you believe that other parts do not understand or accept your motives or intentions and will work against your interests anyway. A lack of trust is bound to affect the outcome of the process, especially when this outcome depends on the interaction and often co-operation of a number of groups and individuals.

5. Communicology as approach.

As a basis for the further discussion we need a systematic approach to human communication. We shall use communicology as our approach in this presentation. Communicology may in short be described as the study of what is common; a true interdisciplinary approach. The scientific basis for this approach is:

- The communication-tradition in general (including systemic thinking) and – since the 1950's – Gregory Bateson and the Palo-Alto school in particular.
- The research and subject-development by Jorunn Sjöbakken and Truls Fleiner since the 1970’s, mainly inspired by Bateson’s interdisciplinary ambition and John Grinders competence-research since the early 1970’s.

Communicology cannot and does not intend to replace any of the disciplines involved in urban conservation. It is a means to use your knowledge more effectively in the interaction with others. It may be applied to any human activity where the goal is change and the means are communication. It is not a method for better communication (or analysing the communication of others), but a descriptions of tools (meta-keys) which may ensure that our communication will inflict the desired changes. These keys are relevant and applicable on all system levels – individual, relation, group, organisation and society.

We shall concentrate on a few criteria for sorting and understanding communication. A crucial starting point is to be able to see yourself and your situation from a position outside yourself (meta-position).

We have to observe not only behaviour, but:

1. Behaviour – actions that we can observe and/or hear.
2. Intentions, that consciously or unconsciously direct our behaviour.
3. Frames (not just physical, also frames of understanding, of time, organisational frames etc.) and presuppositions (beliefs, prejudices, expectations, hypothesis or any other kind of opinion we may have formed in advance), that consciously or unconsciously may form the background for our intentions and thus affect our behaviour. Typical examples of presuppositions in heritage management are: Values, professional paradigms and traditions, doctrinal texts and political attitudes.

Some patterns of behaviour:

Pacing, keeping apace with the person(s) we communicate with.
Leading, attempting to make the other(s) accept your views.
Pattern interruption, breaking the established pattern of communication to affect the state of the other(s).
Triggers (or anchors) – connecting a situation or event with a condition or state.

Check the logical level of communication.

The diagram shows an example of three different logical levels. Dialogues may be difficult when one part is discussing main categories and structures while another is preoccupied with details.

[Diagram: Building]

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2 Presupposition, of latin: Pre (in advance, in front), sup (sub, under, underneath), positid (to place or position)
Sorting and checking balance/unbalance between

You/yours and me/mine: We do not enter somebody else’s house unless we are welcome. Still, as planners and conservationists we take actions that “enter” the premises of other people. Unless we are extremely conscious of the situation and its implications, we may create conflicts that prove counter-productive.

Past – present – future: We must be aware that future possibilities will always be a central concern for most actors in urban development processes, and that it is a legitimate concern.

6. Analysing the typical situation

Let us repeat the conflict meeting from session 2, this time evaluated by means of communicology – to see why Mr Houseman and Mrs Carpenter act as they do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public conservation officer Houseman</th>
<th>Engineer Mrs. Carpenter</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presuppositions</td>
<td>Development pressure will destroy heritage values unless <strong>we control</strong> it, no one else understands the importance of this</td>
<td>My business is a valuable contribution to society, and should be given priority. Public servants may not understand this, but the politicians will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame(s) of understanding</td>
<td>The physical environment, especially related to heritage values. The obligation to regulate on behalf of society.</td>
<td>The laws and dynamics of the commercial market. My own project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time frame(s) considered</td>
<td>Long term aims should govern actions on short term.</td>
<td>The market is here and now. The ideal solutions cannot be reached unless I make money this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions</td>
<td>Make all actors follow the rules of the accepted conservation plan</td>
<td>Utilise the economic potential in solid estate to secure the economic base for her company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resulting pattern of behaviour</td>
<td>Only leading, no pacing.</td>
<td>Only leading, no pacing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result of communication</td>
<td>No understanding of the other part. All presuppositions were confirmed.</td>
<td>No understanding of the other part. All presuppositions were confirmed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. The Norwegian case, beneath the surface

We return to Mosjöen to review development in communicology terms. The slow but steady decay of the old part of town together with a history of poverty and poor living conditions had turned into a trigger, which could be interpreted as creating a feeling of shame. This of course made it easy for the mayor to communicate the presupposition that conservation of this old environment would be expensive and that it could not be combined with a modern and healthy standard of housing. One might also ask whether the concern for the welfare and prosperity of the town was the mayor’s only intention – or if he had a non-spoken intention to help his own business.

The groups advocating conservation seemed to be aware of the triggers that supported presuppositions of expensive and impossible conservation. One of their actions was to counter-prove these presuppositions through a concrete restoration project that everybody in town could perceive with their own senses.

If we move to the big seminar and public meeting in March 1975, part of the speeches and discussions were characterised by strong presuppositions and negative triggers to create distrust towards those with different views. Some of the invited speakers from other towns described experience that differed distinctively from the negative presuppositions of the mayor, but this did not affect his line of arguing.

Now let us look at what happened next. The events in 1975 proved to initiate new and important discussions and initiatives, although this was not easy to see for anyone who listened at the seminar.

The student project performed in winter and spring 1975 brought a thorough survey with measured drawings and technical data on the houses in Sjögata, and proposals for conservation. This documentation and ideas on use of houses were brought to the attention of the National Board of Culture, who gave grants for conservation of cultural heritage. The members of the board saw the potential value of Sjögata, and entered a dialogue with the municipality. From now on, events took a different course.

In September 1975 there was an election for municipal councils. The social democrat party won majority, but elected a new mayor. This one did not share all the presuppositions of his predecessor regarding conservation, and proved a constructive dialogue partner in meetings with the National Board of Culture. An agreement was made, stating that the municipality would prepare a conservation plan for the entire Sjögata area, and the board of culture would provide funding that should support conservation efforts over a period of 10 years.

We do not know what had happened if the old mayor had held his office in 1975, but scepticism against conservation in the municipal administration changed rather quickly after the National Board of Culture had entered the stage. Although not everybody embraced the conservation plan immediately, the process was now understood within a frame characterised by the presupposition that this was a serious and professional effort – which usually is a positive trigger for the professionals in the administration.

In winter 86, the municipal council decided to update the master plan for central parts of Mosjöen. Like in 1975 a seminar was arranged, and a project was organised. Now the conflict level was not as dramatic as then, but some politicians were extremely sceptic.
towards the process and its possible intentions. “We cannot have the whole town contaminated by Sjögata!” Those were the words of a representative in the municipal council, expressing his presupposition that conservation efforts would paralyse the whole town. 10 years of restoration and repair had proved that conservation was possible in technical and economical terms - within Sjögata. Still, there were people who regarded this experience as valid only within that limited frame, and who maintained their negative presuppositions on what effect conservation would have if applied elsewhere. In the municipal planning office we saw the importance of pacing the politicians. The first phases were therefore dedicated to discussions on qualities and strategies, and the political steering group proved very useful. It offered a working frame where discussions could take an informal character, and where politicians and administration started to understand each other.

Agreement on main goals was hard to reach. The most difficult part proved to be car parking solutions. Conservation issues that did not affect parking were accepted as a natural part of the process. The informal discussions in the steering group helped us change the presuppositions concerning conservation. Through a process of discussing analyses, maps, pictures and possibilities, we achieved a common understanding of a scale of values and a more dynamic conservation policy. This was reflected in the plans approved. It seemed that the generally negative presuppositions and the negative triggers connected with conservation had been changed in groups large enough to constitute a majority. While this planning process was going on, the conservation project in Sjögata was awarded the most prestigious national award for architecture in Norway.

In 2002 we invited the municipality in Mosjøen to be a partner in an international project called “Sustainable Historic Towns - Urban Heritage as an Asset of Development.” They accepted the invitation, and are now cooperating with state conservation authorities, researchers and other municipalities to develop new understanding of urban heritage. When we came to Mosjøen to meet the municipality, we could observe that the tourist office profiled Sjögata as the major attraction of the town. We have noticed that demolition and changes of old houses still is a discussed, but in a very different frame of understanding. We cannot any longer find presuppositions that conservation is impossible, or that urban heritage is a disgrace. On the contrary, most people seem to be proud of this heritage. Old triggers and presuppositions have been replaced by new ones, much more in favour of conservation.

8. Evaluating a practical approach to situation analysis

The Directorate for Cultural Heritage has published guidance in planning as part of their website www.riksantikvaren.no. It is the output of a project completed in 2003, based on a survey from NIBR (Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research) and on supplementary surveying. Most of the material will be published in an English version later in 2004. Priority is given to theory and practice regarding analysis of the physical environment, including some practical advice. We shall extract a checklist, and show by means of communicology how it is written to link intentions and frames of understanding with proposed actions, and help establish a basis for effective and targeted interaction.

| Starting point and purpose: Situation analysis has many uses within the field of physical local development planning. When starting, it is important to find out what the starting | Check intentions and presuppositions |

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point and purpose will mean for the content, methodology and implementation of the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework and premises: For the analysis to be carried out successfully it is necessary to define the work’s outline, framework and the resources available to produce it. A firm foundation, defined intentions and resource requirements will strengthen the analysis as an effective tool.</th>
<th>Check and define frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content and focus: Definition of the content and focus should be based on the character of the task and the resources available. To ensure a purposeful process we recommend that a working program is made, which explains the need for analysis, defines the topic, geographical area to be treated and the degree of detailing.</td>
<td>When main frames are clear, proceed to a more detailed level of frames, and propose actions within these frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method and standpoint (foundation values): A situation analysis can be made by various methods, dependant upon the character of the task, its requirements, and the scope of the various methods. The method should be chosen according to its standpoint and approach.</td>
<td>Check that the chosen frames of understanding will support the intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process and participation: The various elements of the analysis are coordinated and synthesized during the analysis process or the plan process following. How this process is planned and carried out depends upon various things, some of the more important being requirements for participation, open communication and existing planning regulations.</td>
<td>Check that the defined frames comprise all parts involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and communication: Already at the earliest stages, attention should be paid to communication. Consideration of all the main target groups, decision-makers and the public in general should be central in the assessments.</td>
<td>Check that the sequence of working frames allows interchange of necessary information before decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up and use: Situation analyses have little value if not put into practical use. A systematic and critical review of the points on this checklist, before starting, can help create local ownership to the results. And this will help to ensure that the analysis is put into practical use and followed up.</td>
<td>Use triggers that create a sense of responsibility.</td>
</tr>
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### 9. The typical situation, and how to change the story

We shall once again return to Mr Houseman and Mrs Carpenter, this time to change the story. We let Houseman learn a bit about communicology, and this knowledge soon affects his behaviour:

He meets Mrs. Carpenter, who starts to talk about her project. Now Houseman asks her to explain a bit more about her intentions. She reacts in a positive way and tells him that her company is not a big one, but she wants to build a reputation of delivering high quality projects on a sound economic basis. She thinks this conservation area is a most suitable
context, and that these historic buildings are considered attractive. Therefore she wants to maintain this historic character in her project. Mr. Houseman discovers that a dialogue may be possible, and decides to look into the project to check the degree of conflict with the frames defined in the conservation plan. As a result of this meeting, Mrs. Carpenter adjusts her project, and Houseman ends up recommending an approval, stating that this development will contribute to the conservation plan by adding an attraction to the area.

This may seem banal, but it shows the importance of checking frames of understanding and intentions instead of letting presuppositions guide your actions.

**Conclusions**

Both the previous illustration and the case from Mosjöen indicated situations where the parts came closer to such a consensus through working with what lay behind the behaviour we could observe with our senses – frames, presuppositions and intentions among others. This means paying attention to questions like:

| Frames | Are they known?  
|        | Are they adequate and relevant in relation to the objective of the process?  
|        | Are they agreed upon?  
|        | If not, are the parts involved willing to negotiate on frames?  
| Presuppositions | What presuppositions are affecting the process?  
|                | Do they support or contradict the process?  
|                | Are they relevant, adequate or true in relation to the frames?  
|                | Are they expressed or not?  
|                | When expressed – are they understood?  
| Intentions | Are you conscious of all your own intentions?  
|            | Are intentions defined in an adequate way?  
|            | Are they expressed clearly?  
|            | When expressed – are they understood?  
|            | Do the parts involved have the same or similar intentions?  
|            | If not, are they willing to enter an open discussion (or negotiation) on intentions?  
| Behaviour | Consider when to pace others and when to lead, according to your intentions.  
|           | When can pattern interruption be useful?  
|           | Do the parts communicate on the same logical level, and on a level suitable for the task?  

The practical approaches of communicology are used by many people, and may be learned in more or less systematic ways. We do not here offer an education or even a course, but hope to have awoken your interest in the subject. Nor do we give you the complete recipe to success in three steps – we do not believe in such concepts. Instead we want to point out the importance of learning how to use meta-keys as a means to create changes through communication. These keys are constituted by a limited number of elements forming patterns, and these patterns must be sorted and balanced.

We remind you of the importance of taking a meta-perspective on yourself and your situation when needed. This is useful to check balance/unbalance between behaviour, intentions and presuppositions and frames. It can help you sort between what is yours and what belongs to others, to check the balance between past, present and future. Being able to recognise existing triggers, you may have a better chance of replacing them with new ones that support your intentions. Being conscious of these aspects, you may find better ways to utilise frames that are adequate and to change those that are not.

Last but not least, being aware of different frames of understanding is necessary in interdisciplinary contexts like integrated urban conservation – or other situations when poets want to talk to engineers.

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