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Disconnected innovations : new urbanity in large-scale development projects: Zuidas Amsterdam, Ørestad Copenhagen and Forum Barcelona

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SUMMARY

1. Large-scale development projects and new urbanity

Large-scale development projects occupy a prominent place on the policy agendas of many ambitious metropolitan regions. On the one hand they are a prominent spatial outcome of underlying processes of economic and cultural globalization. On the other hand they cannot be understood without placing them in a more local cultural and institutional setting and planning culture.

In this study we specifically focused on the ambition evident in some of the latest generation of large-scale development projects to create ‘new urbanity’. By new urbanity we mean an ambition to create a mixed-use economic *and* urban area. These ambitions are often expressed in a preliminary stage of planning but hardly ever materialize in the spaces eventually built. In our study we therefore focused on the governance conditions that influence or hamper the realization of the ambition for new urbanity. The reason for studying this topic is that large-scale development projects have a lot of intrinsic significance due to their economic, spatial, political and cultural importance. However, most of these projects are also the focus of severe criticism, due especially to their lack of urban character.

Large-scale development projects played an important role in the policy agendas of metropolitan areas in the second half of the twentieth century. Although a detailed study would reveal a lot of variety between individual projects, there are some important constant factors, such as (1) their constant (symbolic) importance in spatial and economic policies, especially as regards creating civic pride and helping to revitalize areas; (2) their permanent role as a vehicle for private and public investments, often in the form of partnerships; (3) their persistent search for a ‘fashionable’ spatial outcome based on important drivers such as local, national and international streams of investment money on the one hand and a local cultural and political planning context on the other. Almost by definition, this creates a tension with the local planning and governance cultures in which this outcome has to be realized.

At the same time, there were important *variations* throughout the second half of the twentieth century as regards large-scale development projects. First of all there is variety in project location and programs. In the 1960s, most projects were located in the traditional inner cities and aimed, often quite heavy-handedly, to realize new Central Business Districts by demolishing ‘obsolete’ neighbourhoods. In recent decades, more attention has been paid to mitigating (some of the) negative consequences of large-scale development projects. The predominant location of projects has also become more varied, with a greater emphasis recently on out-of-town projects located in strategic infrastructure locations.

When studying the latest generation of projects, it is important to understand the changing conditions of urban development in western metropolitan areas in recent

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decades. In a changing economic, political and institutional context it is necessary to adopt a multi-scalar and multi-disciplinary perspective to analyse these projects as being embedded both in a local (planning) culture, in a metropolitan and regional context and in much wider (inter)national economic, institutional, cultural and political perspectives. The rapidly changing spatial-economic geography of metropolitan areas, which shows processes of concentration and deconcentration of economic functions at the same time is similarly important. These dynamic spatial-economic circumstances, which often lead to processes of polynuclear urbanisation in major metropolitan areas, have also influenced processes of governance.

Within this dynamic field, large-scale development projects are often criticized as pursuing a narrow economic agenda via closed neo-corporatist processes of decision-making which lack democratic accountability. Critics claim that their built results contribute to spatial fragmentation. The normative planning-oriented objective of 'new urbanity' has been put forward by its promoters as a way to deal partly with these forms of criticism. It is a planning concept that aims to introduce aspects of urbanity in a quite radical manner, for example by building in higher densities and by mixing spatial uses, especially in predominately 'non-urban' places like large-scale office development projects. In the way we perceive it, the concept is also related to innovations regarding predominant planning processes in these projects, by demanding a broader spectrum of voices and powers to be included in the decision-making process. The major question, however, is whether the spatial vision of new urbanity can become a salient argument in the policy direction taken by major actors during the course of development.

We studied this topic in connection with three projects, namely Amsterdam Zuidas, Copenhagen Ørestad and Barcelona Forum. All three projects are located outside the traditional inner city but close to existing or new infrastructure networks. In all these projects, new urbanity ambitions were set at an initial stage of development. Although they are all long-term development projects which started in the mid-Nineties, we can make an initial assessment in order to understand the working of the new urbanity concept in practice.

2. Conceptual framework: a multi-layered analysis of ambitions for new urbanity

Our conceptual framework, in which we emphasize aspects of change and innovation, distinguishes between two different dimensions and one important connecting device. The two dimensions are: (1) the connection of projects to the metropolitan action space, and (2) the operational dimension of interaction and decision-making in the project. The crucial term which can be used to connect these dimensions is the concept of 'social norms'.

The metropolitan action space is the societal setting consisting of numerous social, economic and political institutions and players that are important in order to understand the development and governing of space in a certain metropolitan area.

For our analysis we made a distinction between two aspects of the connectivity to the metropolitan action space. On the one hand, there is a content or symbolic-cognitive

dimension of framing and, on the other hand, a process or organisational dimension of framing. These two dimensions have a close and mutually-reinforcing relationship, as they refer to dimensions of social-institutional processes that jointly affect the behaviour of actors. In the organisational framing we distinguish four subdomains of the metropolitan action space that are of importance for large-scale development projects: (1) the private sector economic domain, (2) the interregional and international government domain, (3) the inner regional government domain and (4) the social, civic and cultural domain. We hypothesize that the interpretation, development and realisation of ambitions for new urbanity are linked to the strategic connection to the metropolitan action space, via the influence this has on the set of rules and the social norms that constitute the concrete action situations at an operational level. We hypothesise that the conditions for the implementation of concepts of new urbanity are likely to be better if a project is connected to all four domains of the metropolitan action space.

For the analysis of the operational dimension of projects we use a framework based on the principles of actor-centred institutionalism. Collective actors with their orientations and capabilities are the focus of analysis from this perspective. These actors operate in different constellations and in relation to the different sub-topics in which they are strategically interacting. However, they are influenced by an institutional setting which provides rules that structure the courses of action. We distinguish two broad sets of such rules, namely rules that affect the participating actors and the modes of interaction, and rules that affect the scope and strategy of participants. It is important to notice that we discard a strict rational choice institutionalism here. We see no direct relationship between a rule and action. In most cases, actors orientate their action around rules while also having their own. Self-evidently, rules can also develop or change over time.

We interpret social norms as being social rules of conduct that influence actions by explicitly, but mostly implicitly, enabling or disabling certain forms of behaviour. Based on this definition, social norms form a key device as regards understanding the structural aspects in interaction, since they help to comprehend the 'ought character' of agency. They specify what actions are regarded by a certain set of people as proper or correct, or improper or incorrect. We subsequently hypothesize that the development of what we defined in the previous chapter as a project of new urbanity is much more likely to happen if an initial ambition for this is normatively reflected upon in social practices over the course of time.

Although social norms are strongly connected to existing patterns of action in society, they evolve almost constantly. They are mostly functioning in situations in which actors are dependant on each other, when there are strong group ties and when group members share similar levels of awareness. In such a situation it can be both beneficial for individual actors and for groups to conform to a common social norm. This means that one of the possible outcomes is an interaction situation, which has some conspicuous features, is able to create an 'ought dimension' and gets accordingly accompanied by appropriate sanctioning mechanisms if actors fail to comply. This could enforce processes of norm alignment between actors.

Social norms are often not written down but are validated in action. It is important to study how they change over time. Literature indicates two basic conditions for this to happen, namely social network related dynamics (change in group composition, change

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in power of individual actors holding a certain social norm, or the role of a powerful ‘norm entrepreneur’) or, secondly, social and technological innovations (change in the perceived costs and benefits of certain outcomes).

We think social norms are relevant because actors in large-scale development projects are dependant on each other. Literature suggests that the planning concept of new urbanity can lead to higher common social and economic area-wide benefits, although it also demands an additional effort and most probably higher investment costs in individual building projects. At the same time there is ample room for free riders which can benefit from investments in more complex (and often more costly) mixed-use developments in the vicinity, while not contributing to this planning goal themselves. This could erode the working of this planning concept if no common social norm is validated. This is even more necessary since issues of competitiveness between locations have diminished the capacity of governments to successfully impose land use concepts like new urbanity in a top down manner.

Our main scientific oriented research question is:

As regards the initial ambition for new urbanity, how can we understand the dynamics between the connectivity of a project in the metropolitan action space and the systems of rules that structure operational domains and social norms in Amsterdam Zuidas, Copenhagen Ørestad and Barcelona Forum?

Our policy oriented research question is:

What can we learn from these projects regarding the conditions for the realization of new urbanity in large-scale development projects?

3. Amsterdam Zuidas

The Zuidas (‘South Axis’) in Amsterdam is the biggest and of the most complex contemporary urban projects in the Netherlands. Its aim is to transform an area around the southern ring road into a high-density mixed-use area with an even proportion of offices and apartments. The areas on both sides of the central infrastructure bundle are known as the ‘flanks’ of the Zuidas. Its most spectacular and complicated part is, however, a proposal to cover the entire infrastructure with a 1.2 kilometre tunnel to make a continuous urban area possible, known as the ‘dock’. This is seen as a crucial precondition for new urbanity in the area.

Zuidas is symbolic-cognitively framed in three ways: (1) as a new economic competitive location for Amsterdam; (2) as an intensively urbanised mixed-use area and (3) as an infrastructure project. The first two frames were strongly embedded and supported in the domains of the private sector and the local government. However, integration with the third three frame was necessary for the execution of the tunnel. Large infrastructure investments are mainly a matter for the national government in the Netherlands. However, based purely on infrastructure arguments, their reception of the tunnel proposal was only lukewarm. Eventually, against the backdrop of changing national spatio-economic policies in a period of economic stagnation, a slow process of reframing took place in recent years in which the three frames started to become integrated. This coincided with different innovations in the governance structure of Zuidas. Al-

ready from an early stage of the project, the operational modes of interaction on the flanks of the Zuidas experienced intensive cooperation between market actors and the municipality of Amsterdam, fuelled by a strong demand for private development of the area. After 2003, a slow process of operational integration started between the different layers of government and a wider range of private investors with a view to starting a joint privately-dominated development company to develop the dock model, including the remaining plots on the flanks. No definitive decisions have yet been taken. Although there is a strong private sector commitment to the plans, there are also doubts about their financial feasibility.

The ambition to create new urbanity has been an important aspect of the plans for the Zuidas. Nevertheless, it has scarcely featured in the way the area has been developed till now in the areas on the flanks which have undergone rapid development in the last decade. This is partly due to a technical reason. Because of the current central infrastructure bundle, a mixture of uses close to the highway is impossible, only office development is allowed. However, it is still questionable whether the future dock model, which will remove this obstacle, will create conditions which are beneficial for new urbanity in Zuidas. Some aspects could work in favour of a future social norm on new urbanity in the area. A major issue is that the ambition seems to be supported by private parties more so than in the other cases we studied. Another positive aspect is that private actors are relatively well organised, making a forum possible in which concepts for individual building projects can be discussed and criticized. The municipality can play an active role in this as well. However, the questionable financial rationale of the dock model could also lead to 'defensive' behaviour and a choice for short-term profitable functions, most often monofunctional uses, and a lack of attention for spatial uses which contribute to new urbanity but have a lower land value. In this respect, the future position of the local government, both as a stakeholder in the Zuidas Company and as the most important planning authority supporting new urbanity will be interesting. The fact that the project is scarcely linked to the social, civic and cultural domain in Amsterdam is regarded as a further negative condition for the realisation of new urbanity.

4. Copenhagen Ørestad

At the end of the Eighties, the content of urban development policies changed quickly from an orientation around welfare planning to more entrepreneurial policies in the Copenhagen region. The Ørestad project, together with the new bridge to Malmö, was one of the most visible markers of this transition in which Copenhagen played an active role in the establishment of a cross-border Oresund region together with Skåne in southern Sweden. The Ørestad project had a dual framing: (1) as a major economic pole in an emerging cross-border Oresund region and (2) as a new town development concept to finance a new urban transport system. It was located in a greenfield area on the island of Amager, a somewhat forgotten area that quickly gained importance in the Nineties due to its proximity to the new bridge and the expanding airport. The Ørestad project was initiated by the Copenhagen municipality, together with the national government. They founded the Ørestad Development Corporation which would arrange loans for the development of a new metro system in Copenhagen. It would earn back

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this investment by developing the Ørestad area in a 3.1 million square metre mixed-use development of offices, housing and facilities over a period of 30 years. The project was strongly framed, therefore, in the domains of local and national government, while it also benefited strategically from the Oresund integration program. However, its connectivity to the private sector economic domain and the social, civic and cultural parts of the metropolitan action space have been problematic throughout the project's history. After the first stages of the metro had been built there was a severe lack of interest in the building plots in Ørestad, especially with regard to office development. Together with the much higher construction costs for the metro and the disappointing ticket sales, the financial situation of the Ørestad Development Corporation quickly worsened. Although the project was strongly supported by the national government and the Copenhagen municipality, it suffered from strong competition from other office locations in the Copenhagen area which were more interesting for office development. The corporation decided to speed up the housing part of the development, but also allowed a huge box-shaped indoor-oriented shopping mall to be constructed at the most prominent location in the project area. Of the two areas developed till now, the Ørestad Nord area reflects some of the concepts of new urbanity which had been dominant features of the original masterplan. This is also due to some helpful national government interventions which helped to attract some large institutions to the area. The Ørestad centre area, which is dominated by this shopping mall, has not yet managed to create an urban feel.

From the first stages on, due to the special closed governance settings and the fact that the development partly took place in a protected green area, the project alienated itself from most residents of Copenhagen. The introverted operational domain and the problematic metro connection as well as the enforced speed of development due to the need to recover the investments for the metro have not generated satisfactory conditions for the implementation of concepts of new urbanity. The quite rigid structure of the project makes it difficult to innovate and diminishes chances for a social norm of new urbanity in the near future.

5. Barcelona Forum

The Forum project in Barcelona aims to prolong the city's reputation to successfully use public events for large-scale urban development schemes. The Forum site was planned in a run-down industrial area in the eastern part of the city from where it was expected eventually to reinforce a much larger ensemble of projects. The location for this new prestigious project was extremely challenging since the site occupied a huge coal power plant, an incinerator and a foul-smelling wastewater treatment plant. On its eastern side, the area was bordered by the heavily polluted Besòs river, while to the north there were two of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Spain, La Mina and La Catalana. It had already been decided that the three installations would stay in the area and would be upgraded. The challenge was therefore to incorporate them into the urbanization project. Forum was symbolical-cognitively framed in three ways: (1) as a physical regeneration project; as (2) an (inter)national and local cultural event and (3) as a project of major environmental investments. The Barcelona municipality used the Universal Forum of Cultures event, to be held in the spring and summer of 2004, as a

successful strategic device to obtain regional, national and EU subsidies for the transformation. In the event's initial preparation phase, it was also used to connect to local civic and cultural groups, which were given the opportunity to link with the themes of the manifestation. The latter eventually became a very political topic. For a variety of reasons the organisers of the event jeopardized the credibility of the Forum cultural event. Instead of a role as a connector to society, the event mainly alienated itself and became rather unpopular, even before it had actually been started. This also had a negative influence on the popular perception of the whole Forum urbanization project.

In the operational domain a strong division was made between the actors responsible for the urban transformation and for the cultural event. Urbanizing the Forum in an area with a lot of environmental installations was a quite unusual task. Concepts of new urbanity have played an important role in the initial vision for area, albeit in a quite strategic sense. The general aim was to make the area more accessible. It is therefore quite difficult to decide whether new urbanity has developed into a validated social norm. The area for the Forum event is mainly a collection of huge public open spaces, with two special new buildings, namely the Forum building and the new large convention centre. The direct ring of projects around the Forum event area reflects more traditional urbanization patterns. The Diagonal Mar area is already finished and reflects a very private urbanisation philosophy with free-standing condominiums, a semi-privatised park and a large indoor-oriented shopping mall.

We concluded that, although the Forum project was very innovatively framed and organised, it seems that it was not been very successful in repeating the Olympic formula. The project not only suffered from a lack of accessibility to its governance domains, it also resulted in a form of urbanisation that is not commonly appreciated by many residents of Barcelona. The Forum area has developed into a playground of modern architects and landscape designers, albeit without a smart functional program.

6. Conclusions

If we compare the connectivity to the metropolitan action space in the three cases we can detect symbolic-cognitive frames relating to economic development, new urbanity and infrastructure development in all three projects. Barcelona added two additional frames, that of a cultural event and that of environmental excellence.

One of the most important aspects we tried to study was the effect of the initial difference in organisational framing between the projects. Zuidas was initially framed in the domains of the local government and the private sector, Ørestad in the domains of the national government (and EU programmes) and the local government, while Forum was initially framed in the most connective way, with relationships to the social, civic and cultural domains as well. As we discovered, a remarkable aspect of these projects that aim to create areas of new urbanity, is that the organisational framing in all three cases was very introverted. In the initial phase, Barcelona was again the most innovative with its usage of a cultural event to attract attention and create broader societal identification with the urban transformation project. However, in the end this was not a successful initiative.

We were able to confirm the expected relationship between the connectivity of the organisational framing and the conditions for new urbanity in these projects. All three

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projects showed strategic weaknesses in this respect. In Amsterdam, the lack of national government framing resulted in a long stalemate as regards the infrastructure investments necessary to create a more urban area. In Ørestad, the lack of connectivity to the private domain resulted in a lack of demand for the available development parcels and, eventually, in a move away from some of the new urbanity planning intentions. In Barcelona, the lack of openness, in the governance domains, vis-à-vis citizens' input led to protests and a general feeling that the project's goals were not in line with citizens' needs. There have not been any major protests against the projects in Amsterdam and Copenhagen. However, in these cases as well, there is a lack of connection between the project and the rest of society.

We can therefore conclude that the ambition for new urbanity in these three projects is a 'disconnected innovation'. New urbanity is a planning concept that demands innovations in thinking and acting in these projects. Its problematic implementation in the first development stages of our three cases can mainly be attributed to the fact that it is largely unconnected to the organisational framing of projects and the functioning of their operational domains. Although the ambition is part of the symbolic-cognitive frames in all three projects, the conditions for its implementation are underdeveloped. All three projects are weakly connected to the whole metropolitan action space, especially to the social, civic and cultural domain. The result is that the ambition for new urbanity is supported in all three cases by some actors, but that it has hardly developed into an enforced social norm, giving new urbanity a positive 'ought' dimension. However, we also identified processes of change over the course of time that might work as a positive condition for the implementation of new urbanity in future stages of the projects. Especially in Amsterdam, the changing composition of actors in the operational domain has created more opportunities for a common development project. However we were unable to identify powerful norm entrepreneurs that could play a major role in promoting concepts of new urbanity. At the same time it is still rather questionable whether, in situations with a dominant private orientation, private actors will validate a social norm of new urbanity. A prerequisite for this is a more connective form of governance in which private actors organise themselves collectively, instead of being only clients, developers or financiers of individual building projects.

The concepts of analysis we used in this study, namely strategic framing, rules that organise the operational domains and social norms, revealed certain strengths and weaknesses as far as their analytic power is concerned. The concept of strategic framing was useful to compare different projects in general but it fails to grasp the complexity of the individual projects. It is difficult to study the organisational domains via the rules that structure action situations due to the complexity of the projects. The value of the concept of social norms is that it helps to understand that most decisions taken in these projects also have a strong normative dimension, especially in situations of uncertainty. However, studying social norms is no easy task since reconstructing them relies heavily on in-depth qualitative investigations and observations regarding the behaviour of actors.

This study is not the first to compare various large-scale development projects, and neither will it be the last. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this effort, and transform them into suggestions for possible further research. Two avenues appear

to be particularly interesting, namely (1) a specific focus on the (possible) role of the social, civic and cultural domain in these projects and (2) a specific focus on the (very dynamic) private domain. These two lines of research could complement our study with a more in-depth focus on the functioning of specific subdomains in these projects, something we were unable to carry out due to our more general framework.

Finally we provided some indicators on how to create conditions which would be more conducive to new urbanity. These were (1) do not try to develop new urbanity in every location, think strategically about the material preconditions like accessibility and the availability of existing buildings; (2) create connective framing in the metropolitan action space to secure the maximum amount of societal energy in these projects; (3) politicise planning, try to keep debates on options for these projects open, prevent large development schemes from taking place outside public scrutiny; (4) support the establishment of a social norm on new urbanity: acknowledge that it is very difficult to impose planning concepts in a top-down manner and, instead, organise projects in a way in which a broad range of actors discuss the direction of plans and the actual investment decisions. Do not be afraid, as a public authority, to complement ambitions with some ‘pioneering’ first investments; and finally (5) stay flexible: acknowledge that transformation processes are long-term endeavours and that the ‘product’ of such a process is not the realization of a predetermined scheme but a continuous adaptation of the built environment. Finding a balance between organized physical interventions and more organic processes of city-building in a broader sense continues to be at the heart of our profession.