

APRIlab – Action oriented planning, regulation and investment dilemmas for innovative urban development in living lab experiences

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Summary of results

The main project goal was to understand and to co-design how municipalities and planning offices deal with the challenges of uncertainty and economic instability in urban development. The project adopted six projects in total: in Istanbul, Amsterdam, Helsinki, Copenhagen and Aalborg. It experimented with a community of practice that included housing corporations, municipal officers and private companies to study the economic, legal and design challenges of urban projects.

Projects in Europe have witnessed high stress from the global financial crisis. Municipalities addressed socio-economic challenges by reregulating urban design, building requirements and financial models. These policies appear to hardly improve the spatial qualities delivered in the projects and rarely develop an innovative governance process. They rather keep focus on privatization, deregulation and private-led coordination. The research team expects that these projects will suffer even more from uncertain market conditions in the future and require heavier public support in dealing with unpredictable market events.

Empirical case studies were done in line with the conceptual framework that was already prepared before the project started. The case studies were employed in three rounds, following the three core dilemmas of the project: intervention, regulation and investment. The project ended with an oversight of findings at level of case studies and an institutional reflection on the whole set of outcomes.

Summary of conclusions:

- There is a strong interdependence of the three dilemmas at strategic and at operational level of policy-making in cities. The strategic and operational levels differ in abstraction, function and specific outcomes. Effective interaction between the two levels is key to enable a productive and successful policy-making. However, this requires a very concise use of intervention, regulation and investment at both levels. Moreover, interactive forms of knowledge co-production seems the most appropriate to discuss the different aspects of these dilemmas.



- Both in practice and in theory, there is a wide spread tendency to analyze strategic and operational planning processes from a utilitarian or pragmatic perspective. Issues of legitimacy and effectiveness of planning are then simply considered as a matter of achieving aspirations or solving problems. The institutional function of public action is more fundamentally normative in generally conditioning pragmatic action and enabling the viability of systems rather than just solving specific problems at hand.
- For strategic perspectives it means that they should limit to normative conditions (both material and processual) rather than programming action themselves. This goes for all three dilemmas. We learned from the failures and successes in cases with this regards. The failures demonstrated the mismatches of programming at strategic level, the successes of strategic policies demonstrated a good use of normative conditions.
- The decisions at operational level are more allocative. In most of the cases, operational policy deliberations actively elaborate on experimental action and on the new definitions of social self-regulation, including co-production and civic the initiatives. Public action at local level has become more dynamic.
- However, a concise and actively sustained interconnection between the two levels of public action is the critical variable. In many cases of experimental operational decision-making the public dimension was lost because of lacking interaction with normative conditions at strategic level. Then, social selfregulation tends to be misunderstood and under-supported as simply privatization of decision making.

Possible societal impact:

- The use and nature of principle legal norms allows to more effectively enable adaptation and innovation in light of uncertain changes
- Financial mechanisms of redistribution of risk are key variables to take into consideration when conducting legal reform in the field of planning
- Context embedded decision making is necessary to ensure adaptation by all parties involved
- Urban development is increasingly dependent on contracts between public and private parties (in Amsterdam) and therefore requires solid principles of negotiation between parties. These are crucial task of public authorities.
- Action oriented research requires methods of mutual understanding based on contextual data.

Video on the research question

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5CxXZqPd1Q>

Read more

- [Planning projects in transition](#), Federico Savini & Willem Salet

Verbinden van Duurzame Steden

