

NORDREGIO NEWS

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on the agenda



The Opera House in Oslo, a natural meeting point. Photo: Nordregio

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THEME ISSUE



IT'S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE – WELCOME TO NORDREGIO NEWS

At Nordregio Forum 2015 "Nordic City Regions in a Global Environment" all the international speakers emphasized unique qualities of Nordic cities' in terms of human scale and sustainable solutions from a social and environmental perspective. The world's leading expert on the so-called mega-projects, Professor Bent Flyvbjerg of Oxford University, stated that instead of investing in costly prestige projects we should continue to put people first in Nordic urban planning.

It was also the starting point of a conversation with Professor Stig Andersson, creative director and founder of SLA, the architectural firm that won the competition Nordic Built Cities in November 2016. Their basic point is always the same. It is about bringing people together, to create conditions for a social life in the city. The concepts may vary, it can be like in the winning proposal for Hans Tavsens Park about climate adaptation, another time it may be about urban farming, but the point is always the same. It's all about people.

It means that new professions with new skills have entered into the urban planning process. From having been the exclusive domain of architects and engineers; currently a winning concept often consists of a team where sociologists and cultural workers play an important role in engaging and including people in the city's development. And they bring new methods such as urban labs and e-governance into the planning process. An example of such a player is Färgfabriken, an art gallery and experimental platform for art and architecture. They have participated in several research projects

where interaction with the public is an important dimension. In this issue of Nordregio News you will find an interview with Jan Rydén, artist and co-curator of the exhibition Experiment Stockholm at Färgfabriken.

Färgfabriken was a local partner in the European project CASUAL described by Lukas Smas on page 9. The exhibition Experiment Stockholm was an important part of the project as a laboratory for exploring urban development and participation. The notion of urban labs is also used in the Interreg project Baltic Urban Lab here described by Liisa Perjo which is about the involvement of citizen groups and the business community in the transformation of former industrial areas, so-called brownfields, in the city. The vast majority agrees that citizen participation is a positive thing, but how does it really effect city planning practice? This is the main issue in the newly established TIPTOP project funded by the Swedish Research Council Formas and described by Moa Tunström on page 14. Finally, Christian Fredricsson presents a new EU project on how greening strategies for making buildings more energy-efficient can improve life quality in social housing on page 19.

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URBAN ISSUES ON THE AGENDA

During the period 2013–2016, the Nordic Working Group for Green Growth: Sustainable Urban Development and Nordregio have developed and shared knowledge about sustainable urban development, planning and green growth. In close collaboration with representatives from ministries and national authorities, policymakers and planners in the municipalities and regions within larger Nordic city-regions, the working group has identified a number of common challenges and possibilities for sustainable urban development. The work has now been collated in a synthesis report which you can access on www.nordregio.se/nwgcityregions. The report is primarily targeted at planners and policymakers at national, regional and local levels and can be accessed at www.nordregio.se/nwgcityregions along with additional material including policy briefs, working papers and presentations.

This issue of Nordregio News looks at some of the issues that have been examined by the working group but also some of the other major projects within the urban theme that Nordregio have been and are involved in.

This issue is also the last of four that have been designated to the themes that the Nordic working groups have been working with over the last four years. Nordregio has summarized the main highlights and policy recommendations of all four working groups in a special policy brief. However, it does not mark the end of working with these issues, rather the opposite as we are facing large challenges within all fields. If we look closer at the urban issues we know that sustainable development, continuous urbanization and densification as well as socio-economic polarization and fragmentation within urban areas are growing challenges in the Nordic region.

What about the opportunities? There are several. Involving citizens early in the planning processes opens up for new ideas and approaches and including art when discussing architecture and urban planning might be the way forward when planning and building sustainable cities. ★



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TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE NORDIC CITY-REGIONS

A synthesis of the activities of the
Nordic Working Group for Green Growth:
Sustainable Urban Regions

Nordregio Report 2016:2



NORDREGIO POLICY BRIEF SPECIAL EDITION PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 2016



Nordic working groups 2013–2016

Nordregio contributes to the Nordic co-operation and regional policy development by acting as the secretariat for four working groups under the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EKR). The Nordic working groups provide arenas for Nordic policy-makers and planners to meet, exchange ideas and experiences, discuss trends and policy measures and produce new knowledge on regional development, policies and planning tools.

The activities of the working groups are coordinated by Nordregio. The working groups are: 1. Nordic Working Group for Green Growth: Sustainable Urban Development; 2. Nordic Working Group for Regional Policy; 3. Nordic Working Group for Sustainable Transport; 4. Nordic Working Group for Sustainable Energy.

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INSIDE NORDREGIO



Photo by: José Martín

Public–Private–People partnerships – a new concept to bring public and private actors and citizens together?

The concept of the Public–Private–People partnership (4P) is one emerging way of highlighting the need for developing the involvement of private actors and the general public in a joint process. But what challenges can it address and what kind of potential could this new concept have?

BY LIISA PERJO



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gap between public–private partnerships and public participation. It is a recognised problem that binding agreements between public and private actors may outline the development principles early in the project, while the public participation processes often take place later in the process.² Lack of public input early in the planning process is found to risk increasing the focus on the economic considerations and economic sustainability of the project at the expense of creating a liveable urban environment based on the needs of the local communities.³

The concept of Public–Private–People partnerships has emerged as a way to address the problems related to public–private partnerships by bringing the general public (“people”) into the partnerships alongside public and

private actors. There are also other new policy concepts with an aim to create more inclusive governance involving different actors, but the 4P-approach specifically targets the intention of adding the general public and citizens to public–private partnerships and particularly addressing the problems of exclusion and lack of transparency. There is no single model or definition of the concept, and its principles can be adapted in different ways case by case. In general, however, 4P-approaches focus on developing planning processes that can be both efficient and open, by including both private actors and citizens. It should be noted that practices of stakeholder involvement stem from legislation and local and national planning cultures, and can thereby be difficult to influence by individual planners. By pointing attention to the inbuilt imbalances >

The Nordic countries emphasise the importance of citizen participation in their planning legislations and policies. At the same time, they continuously develop new models in order to make private companies more involved in planning processes through different types of public–private partnerships and cooperation modes. Typically, city administrations' cooperation with companies and citizen participation are discussed separately, although both are expected to influence the same planning process.

Research reviewed by Nordregio as part of the Central Baltic INTERREG project Baltic Urban Lab shows that there are many challenges in the current ways of combining public–private partnerships and citizen participation. It is, for example, often emphasised by

critical researchers how public–private cooperation between city administrations and private actors such as landowners and developers limit the transparency of decision-making and the possibility for public input. Emphasising the different positions of private actors and citizens in planning processes, Higdem and Hanssen¹ point out how public–private partnerships and citizen participation are based on different ideas and principles. Public–private partnerships are based on an idea of networked governance practised through negotiations and formalised through binding contracts. Citizen participation, in turn, is conducted top-down and is based on the principles of hierarchical governance and the idea of offering a possibility of “making one's voice heard”.

The imbalance between the influence of private actors and the general public is also affected by the temporal



Baltic Urban Lab – Integrated Planning & Partnership Model for Brownfield Regeneration

In the Baltic Urban Lab project, the cities of Riga, Tallinn, Turku and Norrköping develop and test new integrated models for brownfield regeneration. The project aims to find ways to make urban planning more inclusive to better utilise the knowledge and resources of different actors. It also has an important component of exchange of experience on brownfield

regeneration in the Central Baltic region. This INTERREG Central Baltic project is led by Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission and the city partners are also supported by Nordregio and the University of Turku. The project started in 2015 and will continue until 2018.

Project website:
<http://www.balticurbanlab.eu/>

> in terms of positions and influence between private actors and the general public, however, the concept of Public-Private-People partnerships could at least be a first step in helping planners to become aware of and to address the differences in resources and influence between actors, and also find ways to utilise the strengths of the different actors.

In the Baltic Urban Lab project, the cities of Riga, Tallinn, Turku and Norrköping take on the challenge of applying and testing the 4P-concept. In the project, the cities try to find ways to pool much-needed resources with private actors in brownfield redevelopment projects while exploring ways to involve citizens early on in open processes alongside the public and private actors. By involving both private actors, such as landowners and developers, and the general public (e.g. local inhabitants and NGOs) early in the planning process, the cities will test ways to bridge the gap between partnerships and participation in order to create economically efficient and broadly inclusive planning processes. Nordregio will follow and analyse these processes, and as a result, there will be more knowledge about the possibilities and problems of including public and private actors together with citizens, and what can be done to create efficient and inclusive processes. ★

¹ Higdem, U. & Hanssen, G. (2014). Handling the two conflicting discourses of partnership and participation in regional planning. *European Planning Studies*, 22(7), 1444–1461.

² Mäntysalo, R. & Saglie, I.-L. (2009). Private influence preceding public involvement: strategies for legitimizing preliminary partnership arrangements in urban housing planning in Norway and Finland. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 11(3), 317–338.

³ Schmidt-Thomé, K. (2015). Between fulfilment and vitiation – discerning incapacitation in urban regeneration. Aalto University publication series, Doctoral dissertation 176/2015.; Fainstein, S. (2009). Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(4), 768–785.

**“4P-APPROACHES
FOCUS ON
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PROCESSES THAT CAN
BE BOTH EFFICIENT
AND OPEN.”**



The Academic Center for Natural Sciences of the University of Latvia in Torņakalns. Photo: www.lu.lv



PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PEOPLE PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Anna Semjonova reflects on involvement of public and private sector actors, inhabitants and NGOs in Tallinn.

INTERVIEW BY LIISA PERJO

What is Tallinn doing in the Baltic Urban Lab project to improve the involvement of public and private sector actors, inhabitants and NGOs?

Since the beginning of this project, we have organized meetings with stakeholders representing the public sector, the private sector and citizens. Together we have discussed their ideas and interests in developing the Skoone Bastion area, which is our pilot site in the Baltic Urban Lab project. We have also actively informed the public about the project in the media.

One of our key events so far was in September 2016, when we organized a three-day workshop event together with the Estonian Academy of Arts and the University of Tallinn. All of our key stakeholders participated, and the goal was to discuss and map possible urban development solutions for the pilot site. Students from the Academy of Arts

and the University of Tallinn also presented five different ideas for the site, from different angles and for different focus areas.

Since the workshop, we have worked on integrating all the ideas that we received from stakeholders and students into an overall structural plan for the Tallinn pilot site. The task is challenging because the stakeholders' visions and needs can vary widely, and finding a balance between them is difficult.

Our next step is to introduce the first draft of the structural plan to key stakeholders and students for feedback. This will take place in February 2017 and gives all stakeholders the opportunity to discuss and comment on the ideas. We are also working to develop new digital involvement methods (a web-based map and a smart app) to be able to gather a wide variety of ideas from citizens early in the planning process. >



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Skoone Activity Belt Workshop in September 2016. Read more on <http://www.balticurbanlab.eu/>. Photo: City of Tallinn

How does this differ from the usual planning practices in Tallinn?

Most of Tallinn's land is privately owned and private owners and developers are usually the main drivers of urban development. In most detailed planning processes, a private owner takes the initiative and presents a development idea to the city administration. After that, the city officials assess whether the idea fits with the master plan or the city districts' comprehensive plan. Usually, consulting citizens or NGOs are not part of the procedure, so working with the 4P-approach to better involve citizens is for us a way to increase the influence of citizens in the detailed planning processes in our city, where the role of private actors is strong.

In the Baltic Urban Lab project, the city of Tallinn is the initiator of urban development and planning, contrary to the usual process, which is driven by private land owners and developers. We want to develop a vision for redeveloping the Skoone Bastion area in a process that involves stakeholders, such as possible developers and NGOs, on an equal basis.

In the case of larger areas where a vision or a comprehensive plan is made, our planning practice has gradually been moving towards wider collaboration between different interest groups and better involvement of citizens. This is an issue of increasing inter-

est in Estonia. Our new Planning Act was passed in 2015 and it emphasizes the involvement of interest groups and NGOs early in the planning process.

Why is it important for the City of Tallinn to improve the cooperation between public and private actors and citizens and NGOs in spatial planning?

Collaboration at the beginning of the planning phase is important to avoid possible future conflicts. If we involve, for example, citizens or NGOs only in the later phases, it can lead to long-term confrontations which might be difficult to solve.

The 4P approach is an increasing trend in planning practice. Cooperation between public and private actors is part of our daily work, but involving citizens and NGOs is something we have to improve so that it becomes a natural part of planning procedures in Tallinn. Because we create and plan urban space for local residents, we should not be afraid to listen to them and take their needs and wishes into account, even if these might initially be seen as idealistic by planners. We should start our planning processes by listening to the citizens and then including their views in making concrete and realistic plans. ★

Anna Semjonova was interviewed by Liisa Perjo in November 2016.

Exploring new forms of inclusive urban governance

Urban policies and projects that are expected to promote sustainability often focus on the built environment and the technical infrastructure. Less attention is given to changing lifestyles and everyday practices, even though citizen and consumer behaviour have tremendous impacts on our cities. However, including issues such as sustainable living and consumption patterns in the development of urban areas requires adapted forms of urban governance and planning. During the last three years, we have, in collaboration with partners from Austria and the Netherlands, explored these issues in a number of ways within the CASUAL project. We have, in particular, focused on new forms of inclusive urban governance and the notion of so-called urban living labs.

BY LUKAS SMAS



What is an urban living lab?

Urban living labs can be seen as a form of 'experimental' governance because the rules of the game often are not defined in order to avoid restricting innovative and visionary thinking. In our research with the CASUAL project, we have identified four key principles for urban living labs: co-creation, exploration, experimentation and evaluation.

Urban living labs should offer an inclusive, participatory and do-it-yourself setting for co-creation that engages citizens and local actors in the processes of shaping the city. They should also be places for exploration where actors, in an open-minded way, can pursue ideas without having a clearly defined aim or outcome and experiment with creative or provocative initiatives without the fear of long-term negative consequences should the initiatives fail to deploy as expected. Moreover, urban living labs should also have an impact, even if evaluation is not as straight-forward as with more result-oriented initiatives.

Urban living labs as a planning practice or methodology have a number of merits in terms of defining innovative pathways for beyond business-as-usual thinking. However, in our research, we have also identified risks associated with these forms of collectively organised initiatives. Urban living labs (as do other forms of governance) risk becoming arenas of unequal expectations, power games and conflicts. Caution must be taken to manage the inherent shortcomings of urban living labs with respect to

democratic legitimacy, tendencies towards exclusiveness, and extreme temporality. It is important to think about how these informal soft modes of governance relate to formal, hard modes of government.

The core principles of urban living labs (co-creation, exploration, experimentation and evaluation) offer an analytical and theoretical framework for understanding and positioning various informal self-organising initiatives in contemporary urban development. In the CASUAL project, we used these four principles to analyse the exhibition Experiment Stockholm.

Stockholm experimentations

Experiment Stockholm was an exhibition and a forum for exploring challenges and opportunities in the Stockholm region through different kinds of events that brought together different actors from different sectors and organisations. The public exhibition took place during fall 2015 and was curated by Färgfabriken, a Stockholm-based foundation for art, architecture and urbanism.

The public exhibition included both original artworks such as a liveable greenhouse, a soundscape, a video installation and other artwork that was developed during the exhibition in the main hall, and a more academically oriented project room. The former you enter with your body while the latter you enter with your mind. In close vicinity outside the exhibition, there were more activities, such as a floating cultural house, and activities also occurred at other places in the city. A key feature was the different seminars, debates and workshops that took



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place during the exhibition. The exhibition was, to a large degree, the result of a number of projects, meetings, and other activities that had taken place during the preceding years between different project partners.

Nordregio was a project partner in Experiment Stockholm and Färgfabriken was a local partner in the CASUAL project. We researchers thus had direct access to the empirical field through our involvement in the preparation and implementation of the exhibition. We used participant observation as the main methodological approach but we also did interviews with a selection of the project partners. In our analysis, we focused on the activities that included the project partners and were designated as 'Experiments' in the extensive programme for Experiment Stockholm.

Experiment Stockholm has offered a learning environment with many networking potentials for members within the so-called 'experiments', but also for other people interested in the numerous seminars and events, as well as the artistic exhibition. Also, some of our respondents mentioned that the various activities have helped them think in a more comprehensive way about urban planning and thus overcome the prevailing silo mentality in urban planning, opening avenues for cross-sectoral coordination.

Fundamental to setting-up Experiment Stockholm

were fees from project partners which included municipalities and state authorities, research institutes, NGOs and private firms. This has of course been critical when considering this in terms of urban living labs and inclusive urban governance. The membership principle, included those with the willingness to spend their resources (money and time), but excluded others.

As a consequence, the established temporary multi-disciplinary networks can be characterised by an exclusive, if not elitist, urbanist community within the Stockholm city-region. However, the different meetings and experiments have, for example, highlighted the important role of more organisational issues including the role and performance of the facilitator as well as the moderator, in practicing 'co-creation' and 'experimentation' within a multi-disciplinary network.

Our participatory observations within Experiment Stockholm have helped us to critically investigate the underlying core principles of urban living labs. We argue that this

example can indeed be characterised as a soft mode of urban governance that can help unlock creativity and open avenues for experimentation and alternative solutions. Here one needs to emphasise again that most of the interviewed partners have noticed this positively. However, caution must be taken to not overvalue such approaches, as our example implies

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Meeting with the partners in Experiment Stockholm at Färgfabriken in April 2015. Photo: Lukas Smas, Nordregio.



Students in urban and regional planning from Stockholm University at Experiment Stockholm inspecting the video installation by dancer and choreographer Anna Asplind which explores the (sub-) urban landscape often designed but instead moves through the landscape beyond the inner-city by walking and biking. Photo: Lukas Smas

a rather exclusive expert forum instead of a mode of governance that might be associated with openness and wider engagement. In addition, our example illustrates the significance of suitable and unconventional methods, which otherwise considerably limits the innovative capacity of the participating stakeholders and their

search for alternative solutions. Hence, we argue that if considered as a complementary approach to public urban planning, the applicability and legitimacy of such soft and experimental modes of governance as discussed above need to be carefully considered. ★

The CASUAL (Co-creating Attractive and Sustainable Urban Areas and Lifestyles) project was part of the Joint Programme Initiative Urban Europe, which is a Member State-led initiative co-ordinating the urban-related research of the participating countries. CASUAL has been a collaboration among researchers from Nordregio in Stockholm, Sweden; the Austrian Institute for Spatial Planning (ÖIR) in Vienna, Austria; and Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands.

The project was founded by national research from the respective country The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) and The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning.

In the project, new forms of urban governance and the concept of urban living labs were explored but we also

investigated urban sustainable policies and planning practice; analysed interactions between transport and land use, and did empirical investigations on mobility patterns. This was done through different approaches and methods including participatory observation within urban living labs, mapping and statistical analysis of mobility patterns and discourse analysis of planning narratives. The results from the project include empirical findings on the relations between planning concepts and the built environment, and on the tensions between sustainability and individual practices but also a sympathetic critique on the usefulness of urban living labs within public planning. Read more about our results on our project website where policy briefs, our synthesis report and other outcomes are available: <http://www.nordregio.se/casual/>

Reflecting on participation through *art*

Färgfabriken is an interesting space for exploring new forms of inclusive urban governance and new ways of thinking about participation in urban planning and development. It describes itself “as a platform for contemporary cultural expressions, with an emphasis on art, architecture and urban planning”. Through artistic and cultural expressions, events and exhibitions, Färgfabriken raises many questions regarding participation in urban planning and development. Furthermore, it actually provokes fundamental epistemological questions for both researchers and planners alike. What is legitimate (planning) knowledge and how is the knowledge produced?

REFLECTIONS AND INTERVIEW BY LUKAS SMAS

“Färgfabriken wants to push the boundaries of what an exhibition space can be, both metaphorically and literary”, says Jan Rydén, independent artist and co-curator of the exhibition Experiment Stockholm that took place in Färgfabriken during the fall of 2015.

We sit in the old paint factory, which is the main exhibition space of Färgfabriken, and talk about our shared – but somewhat different – experiences of the exhibition Experiment Stockholm. Nordregio followed the work with the exhibition within the CASUAL research project and contributed to events within it. Färgfabriken was a local partner in the research project involved already in the application phase but Experiment Stockholm was also the study object through which we investigated alternative forms of inclusive urban governance and the concept of urban living labs.

My conversation with Jan starts with a discussion on Färgfabriken’s general engagement in urban planning and development, its function as an arena for participation, but it ends up with a critical reflection on art, different forms of knowledge and epistemology.

“Färgfabriken wants to be an independent intellectual voice, both inside and outside the mainstream urban planning debate”, says Jan, and continues; “perhaps we are considered a bit naïve by some, but we want to critically question the taken-for-granted, and our way of doing that is to experiment with different forms of artistic expression and perspectives. Similar to universities and research institutes we strive to contribute with knowledge but with a different kind of knowledge that is not only logical and

rational but also involves all senses and bodily experiences. We claim our right to participate in the debate about the future city as any other private stakeholder or organisation.” Jan continues to explain that they do this through their own initiatives which are often based on the intersection between current concerns in society and previous projects.

As researchers, we have followed the exhibition from 2012 when the initial ideas were formulated (and we wrote the application for the CASUAL project), via the preparatory activities and the setting up of the exhibition

during 2014–2015, to the opening in September 2015 and the closing in late November the same year. During this period, we as researchers participated in a selection of seminars and workshops and tried to find a logical process and analytical pathway through the exhibition project. We were particularly focused on if, and how, the exhibition and the space could be understood as an urban living lab. In what sense did it allow for experimentation, exploration, co-creation and evaluation? Reflecting

on the outcomes and outputs of the CASUAL project, Jan Rydén is critical on what he sees as the narrow-mindedness of the research project:

“You researchers focused only on a limited number of activities, and thus you missed perhaps the more creative and innovative dimensions of the exhibition, that included participants beyond the ‘usual suspects’. There were a number of public activities around the art installations such as bicycle *dérive* across the Southern suburbs of Stockholm, Luis Berriós- Negrón, the (literally) in-house resident in the Earthscore Specularium organised a number of open lunch seminars, and public debate was also organised on the floating ecological culture house Maretopia. Many

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school classes also visited the exhibition and there were activities at other places in the Stockholm region organised within the frame of Experiment Stockholm.”

I recall that Jan, many times during the Experiment Stockholm working process, emphasised that you could either enter the exhibition through your mind or through your body. As researchers, we are used to focusing on the intellectual experience, and perhaps we entered the exhibition only through our (research) minds, and thus privileging certain types of experiences and certain types of knowledge over other types. Asking if perhaps the exhibition left a little bit too much over to the interpreter (and, also, in this case, researchers searching for a (logical) process), Jan elaborates:

“We want to encourage people to be critical, to question and to make them see and find connections. This is one thing that the artistic perspective can contribute with, to connect things through metaphors and associations not only through linear logics and rational reasoning. Humans generally think in images and stories even when we pretend to be logical. Thinking is linked to our bodily experiences, so-called embodied cognition that has been researched by, among others, Georg Lakoff.”

It is also here that the added value of artistic perspectives on urban development becomes most apparent. Art and culture help us question the taken-for-granted, help us see things differently. But Jan wants to go even further:

“If we are to take participation seriously, and we should, then we need to move beyond citizen dialogue and involve people literally in building the city. Not only talk about the city but actually and concretely build buildings together.”

According to the exhibition’s website, Experiment Stockholm “raises questions about, and seeks to examine and experiment with, strategies and solutions for dealing with the challenges of a rapidly growing Stockholm



The Earthscore Specularium was an installation in the exhibition Experiment Stockholm at Färgfabriken during fall 2015. The artist Luis Berriós-Negrón lived in the ‘greenhouse’ with his family during the exhibition and experimented with sustainable living and circular systems. Photos: David Fischer.

region”, and the hope has been that “people will meet in this experimental environment where we challenge old ways and propose and test new models and ideas together”. And it certainly has been an urban living lab in the sense of a space for co-creation, exploration, experimentation and evaluation even if it was never intentionally designed as one.

As a final reflection, the collaboration with Färgfabriken from a personal research perspective has been very rewarding. Both the exhibition and the staff at Färgfabriken have challenged many of my taken-for-granted views on the production of knowledge for urban planning purposes. The art and the artists’ perspectives have helped me to reflect on participation processes in urban planning and development, and on what we conceive of as valid knowledge within the domain of urban planning. ★

Andrew Karvonen on EXPERIMENTS and URBAN LIVING LABS

Andrew Karvonen is an Assistant Professor in Urban and Regional Studies at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm where he conducts research on the politics and practice of sustainable urban development. Nordregio had a talk with him about urban labs, urban planning and 'experimenting'.

INTERVIEW BY PETER SCHMITT

Why do you think that there is a growing interest in 'experimenting' in view of urban development and planning?

Experimentation activities in cities are a highly visible and attractive way to address intransigent urban problems. This includes disruptions due to climate change, struggles to develop local economic opportunities, increasing social inequality, and so on. Experiments are compelling to a wide range of actors because they provide hope that a better future is possible. On the other hand, there is reason to worry about the rise of urban experiments. Since the global economic crash of 2008, local authorities have less and less funding to maintain existing infrastructure services. Local authorities can use experiments to promote public-private partnerships and effectively offload the management of urban services to the private and third sectors. So, experiments cut both ways, they can be progressive as well as regressive.

Why now and what are the differences to earlier 'experimental approaches' in the history of urban planning and development work?

Experimentation has a long history in urban planning. The most well-known example is the Chicago School of the 1910s and 1920s when sociologists treated Chicago as an urban laboratory to generate data and provide insights for urban policies. Various forms of urban experiments continued to be developed throughout the 20th century and emphasized the application of natural science laboratory methods to study cities. In the last decade, a new wave of urban experimentation has emerged with the spread of the internet. We now have the ability to monitor and evaluate urban interventions with relative ease using sensor networks and data hubs. When we compare this with setting up an experiment in the pre-internet days and collecting measurements by

hand, we can see why experiments are becoming more commonplace. Sensors are increasingly being integrated into our personal gadgets, our houses and workplaces, and even our cities.

There is apparently a current interest in considering laboratory-like settings for pursuing urban policies and projects. Often these settings are called (urban) living labs. Could you describe what these labs distinguish from other laboratory-like settings we used to know in research and development in general?

Urban living labs are distinct from other forms of experimentation in cities because they require 'co-creation'. This notion of 'co-creation' is a contemporary buzzword that refers to input and buy-in from all affected stakeholders. Urban planners will be very familiar with this idea as they have grappled with notions of democracy and participation since the 1960s. I am continually surprised by the lack of knowledge of participatory planning by advocates of urban living labs. But in many ways, this makes sense. The notion of living labs was first developed by Bill Mitchell at MIT and was inspired by open source software. Urban living labs have continued along this IT trajectory and introduced notions of civic hacking that call for greater participation in the collection and use of public data. There are significant opportunities for urban planners to bring participatory planning methods and approaches to urban living labs.

What are the potential benefits of applying laboratory-like settings in urban planning and development work? Who and what can gain from these? What promotes successful applications? >



Photo: David Fischer

Urban laboratories are beneficial because they generate enthusiasm and interest in realizing improved conditions for cities. They provide a compelling storyline that draws in a wide range of stakeholders. Who can resist the allure of an urban living lab?

I think the most successful urban living labs are those that are modest in scale and scope. They provide clear, evidence-based insights on whether a particular intervention works or not and why. Traditionally, when we innovate in cities, we conduct a project to challenge business-as-usual approaches but we often fail to evaluate the project in a rigorous way. Instead, we are left with anecdotal evidence about the pros and cons of a new cycling lane design, an affordable housing funding programme, or an energy saving device. With urban living labs, there is a conscious effort to monitor and evaluate. This creates explicit and robust learning loops in urban development. It says that it is not enough to just do something differently, you also need to evaluate it so you can learn from it.

To what extent can urban living labs (or similarly termed approaches) complement traditional urban planning and development work? What are the potential benefits, but also risks in this respect?

Urban living labs have significant potential to inform evidence-based policymaking. These projects complement master planning and development frameworks by pushing the boundaries of planning

practice. At the same time, there is a danger that urban living labs could replace traditional urban planning and development work. Rather than complement and extend traditional planning and development work, experiments could become the new modus operandi for urban development. Imagine if municipalities abandon master planning and development frameworks altogether and instead, engaged in a series of different short-term, discrete interventions that they called urban living labs. What kind of city would this produce?

“WITH URBAN LIVING LABS, THERE IS A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE.”

More specifically, to what extent can urban living labs (or similar termed approaches) be beneficial in view of strengthening participatory engagement, transparency and democratic quality in urban planning and development work?

The democratic potential of urban living labs is their most exciting and most challenging attribute. We know from planning history that participatory decision-making and buy-in is incredibly difficult to achieve. And to date, the rhetoric of co-creation in urban living labs seems to be racing ahead of the reality. I have not seen a great deal of evidence of urban experiments being democratic and participatory despite the continual promises made by advocates of urban living labs. So, there is a need to prioritise the participatory or co-creation aspects of urban living labs from the start. The greatest benefit of urban living labs is in reforming development processes to be more inclusive and responsive to a wider public. We have a lot of work to do on this! ★

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING is on the agenda

What are the results of citizen participation in urban planning? How are citizens invited to participate? To what extent will their input be influential? Questions such as these are at the centre of a recently launched research project with Nordregio as one of the partners, addressing the concept of a just city.

BY MOA TUNSTRÖM

The 3-year research project titled *The Impact of Participation* is a joint project with the School of Public Administration at Gothenburg University and the Division of Urban and Regional Studies at KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Its purpose is to map and understand the scope, forms and impacts of citizen dialogues within the urban planning process in the three Swedish greater city regions of Gothenburg, Stockholm and Malmö. Mapping in this project refers not only to collecting information on the organization of the many participatory activities, but also to the ambition of actually mapping participation and asking where it takes place—In districts with a certain socio-economic profile or status? In the city centre? Or in the urban periphery?

The emphasis on citizen participation in planning during the 2000s must be seen in the context of a critique of planning as top-down, large scale and not responding to the needs and desires of local citizens—planning at the drawing board rather than in the neighbourhood, and planning for the city rather than for and with the citizens. In light of this, several major cities in Sweden have formulated ambitious policy programmes for participatory practices—often also framed as social sustainability efforts. Participatory methods such as citizen dialogues, focus groups, work shop methods and participatory events are encouraged, for example by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) and the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverkett), and are increasingly used in planning in order to ensure that local democratic goals are met. In addition, there is a market for participatory planning methods such as methods for interaction, communication and e-governance, which are increasingly being commercialized. Simultaneously, citizens are raising their voices through local grassroots movements and through protests against planning projects, cutbacks or lack of local service provision.

However, the Swedish planning system is still a product of the modern era. Even though information

and consultation procedures have been strengthened in the last few decades, it is still a very rationalist process, with elected municipal politicians as the final decision makers and certain types of expert knowledge dominating. So, there is still reason to ask whether citizen participation can actually influence decision making. Similarly, what kind of citizens' knowledge is allowed to—or should—influence urban planning and development? The frequency of participatory planning efforts, the way participants are included and how issues are being communicated are other important aspects influencing the impact of participation. Finally, it is relevant to investigate whether the impact can be experienced in the local environment in the form of the built environment, public art, infrastructure, etc., or if it is more of a 'feeling' among citizens of having been included. Both of course are important results, but very different ones.

Citizen dialogues as social sustainability

As mentioned, citizens' influence on and participation in local development is often framed as efforts to strengthen social sustainability. Moreover, participatory planning should, in the same way as social sustainability policies of different kinds, be understood as being both about the democratic planning process and about the outcome of planning—the city and its built environment, accessibility issues, feelings of community and place identity, etc. Both a democratic planning process and the just city are envisioned, as is a sustainable urban development. Insufficient dialogue with the citizens on issues of urban development has been pointed out as a main obstacle to sustainable urban development by the Swedish governmental Delegation for Sustainable Cities. The Delegation connect participation to public health and to accepting responsibility for one's local environment, in addition to the already familiar aspect of inefficiency of planning processes caused by appeals and protests. What is often referred to as social aspects of sustainability appear to be key here, and also clearly connected to environmental aspects of sustainability. So, in spite of eco-tech innovations or an increased interest



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in and planning for urban agriculture, participatory planning might be the decisive factor.

Participatory competence needed

Because of the abundance of current examples, tools and methods, some risks associated with participatory planning can be mentioned—risks that the research project hopes to investigate more deeply and for which solutions may be developed. First, there is a clear risk that participatory planning, in the name of efficiency, becomes a way to legitimize goals that have already been confirmed politically. Second, there is the risk of project fatigue in the housing areas or districts. Participatory planning efforts that are not well organized or followed up, or that have unclear effects, risk tiring the participants and may also lead to loss of confidence in the local government. Finally, from the perspective of the planners, there are risks in this, such as the lack of deeper knowledge about methods and how best to invite participants, and then not being fully able to take care of the democratic process and the results.

A participatory project about participation

So far, participatory planning in Sweden has mainly been investigated through single case studies. Using data and information with a wider reach gathered from several municipalities, in this project it will be possible to draw comprehensive conclusions on what outcomes will arise from citizen participation. In addition, the extended time perspective in this project (the 2000s) will allow investigations into the consequences of the different participatory methods, such as if the results of the participatory efforts make their way into comprehensive or detailed development plans. Do they change the established planning discourse and practice? Is it possible to see the visible and tangible results in the urban landscape—in the built environment, infrastructure, signage, etc.?

This project started during 2016 and will continue until the end of 2019. It not only deals with participation, but is also participatory in its project organization. The idea and the research questions have been elaborated in deliberation with policy and planning officials from the 12 municipalities that will be mapped, and during the project there will be a continuing dialogue, both with them and with representatives from the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Transport Administration, The Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities and Mistra Urban Futures—sharing experiences, analysing results and disseminating knowledge. ★

Read more about *The Impact of Participation* on the project website: <http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/project/impact-participation-0>



Public–private cooperation in the early stages of the planning process

Cooperation between municipal planners and private developers, their conflicting interests, and challenges regarding how to involve citizens, were issues addressed at a workshop arranged within the project Södertörn model.

BY CHRISTIAN FREDRICSSON

Over the last two years, Nordregio has been involved in a project entitled **the Södertörn model**. The project is based in eight municipalities south of the City of Stockholm in the area of Södertörn, and aims to facilitate urban development potential by connecting academia, the public and the private stakeholders to promote sustainable urban development. One of the key activities within the project has been to improve and facilitate public and private collaboration in the early stages of detailed planning processes between municipalities in the Södertörn region and the private developers. The focus of the activity is related to current planning challenges, including the low level of housing construction over recent decades and a general housing deficit throughout the region. The planning challenges are also augmented by a low share of municipally-owned land and of buildable land in all municipalities of Södertörn. It has not made it easier that the region has been seen as less “attractive” (from a normative perspective) than the Stockholm municipality and Södertörn’s counterpart municipalities north of Stockholm. Now, the political ambition in the municipalities has changed, as have the economic prerequisites to build more in Södertörn, and the aim is to build 50,000 new homes by 2030.

With this point of departure, private developers and planners from the municipalities of Södertörn held a workshop to discuss the potential of improving early-phase cooperation. The participants from the building sector and heads of planning departments from municipalities in Södertörn were given the task of jointly developing and designing a desirable planning process, working with a fictitious planning case for a new housing construction project. The results of the workshop showed that all actors

agreed on the importance of better cooperation between public and private actors in the early phases of the planning process. This was seen as an essential component for creating a more efficient and sustainable process, and for reaching the high political aims of reducing the housing deficit. Furthermore, a key conclusion was the need to develop joint visions and discuss conflicting aims of creating sustainable and affordable housing for the region’s tenants. It was also argued that a joint vision would foster trust and cooperation between the actors, and contribute to reducing the risks of conflicts in the later stages of the planning process. Continuous and open dialogue between the municipal planners and developers was seen as a solution for creating better understanding between the actors and improving the culture of cooperation. The potential of formalizing cooperation in the early stages through partnership agreements was also highlighted.

However, the key conclusions also raised critical questions regarding risks in relation to citizens’ participation. There is obviously a challenge in establishing a vision between private and public actors early in the informal planning process without involving concerned tenants. There was no clear idea on how to develop a model including not only the public and private sectors but also the citizens in a shared process. Moreover, the need for continuous and open dialogue also shed light on the importance of municipal capacity and resources to handle intense dialogues both with private developers and citizens. Finally, the municipal planners addressed the challenges of how to select the private developers to be involved and the need to develop clear criteria for selecting them based on high-level political support. ★



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Södertörnsmodellen / the Södertörn model

Project Leader: White Arkitekter, Project Co-ordinator KTH- Royal Institute of Technology
Partners: Nordregio, Södertörn municipalities, Södertörn University, Swedish Green Building Council, EcoLoop, Skanska, WSP, SKL International. Funding: VINNOVA
Read more about the project and other results at <http://sodertornsmodellen.com/>



Social Green: Making social housing more energy efficient and affordable

Although social housing development is generally declining throughout the EU, homelessness, fuel poverty, and housing shortages remain critical issues across the continent. In addition to this challenge, social housing is generally the least energy-efficient portion of a country’s housing stock, which means that the most vulnerable populations are often unable to experience adequate home environments. This emphasizes social housing is a particularly important and sensitive issue for greening strategies and means that retrofitting or renovation programs must be designed and implemented that minimize disruptions and costs to tenants as much as possible. These are issues that lie at the core of the Social Green INTERREG project.

BY PIPSA SALOLAMMI AND CHRISTIAN FREDRICSSON

In this context, the Social Green project aims to promote the greening of the social housing sector through mutual learning and development of improved regional policies. It will provide the opportunity to explore green building practices and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions through cost-effective means while providing much-needed housing in a healthy and sustainable manner. Through interregional cooperation, Social Green stakeholder regions will identify, share and transfer innovative methodologies, processes and good practices in developing and implementing greener social housing sector policies, targeting new constructions or retrofitting existing buildings.

Social housing and public housing have different roles, definitions and settings in different EU countries, and in some cases, social housing may even include private-owned housing by vulnerable groups. Over the next four years, the Social Green project will focus on developing regional policies towards greening the social housing sector. The City of Mizil and Alba Iulia Municipality from Romania and, also, the Portuguese North Regional Coordination

and Development Commission, are partners which intend to carry out retrofitting and greening of social housing in their regions. Furthermore, to ensure the project’s relevance in decision-making and continuation after the project, a political dimension is included in the form of a political board. The political board consists of relevant political decision-makers from partner countries and will meet throughout the project, to ensure a direct link at the political level within the partner regions.

As a lead partner, Nordregio’s main task will be to supervise the project, create a framework and guidelines for partners who will then implement them while carrying out actual projects in their municipalities. Nordregio will support and advise the partners throughout the process. Social Green is a continuation of the RE-GREEN project that took place in 2012–2014. ★

More about the project:
<http://www.interregeurope.eu/socialgreen/>



PIPSA SALOLAMMI

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Social Green
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

NORDIC WORKING GROUP FOR GREEN GROWTH – SUSTAINABLE URBAN REGIONS 2013-2016

The Nordic Working Group for Green Growth: Sustainable Urban Regions was set up under the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R) for the programme period of 2013–2016. Nordregio has functioned as the secretariat but has also carried out commissioned projects on behalf of the working group, occasionally in collaboration with others. The main task for this working group was specifically to explore how spatial planning can contribute to green growth within the context of Nordic city-regions.

The objectives of the working group have been to 1) identify and analyse examples of urban forms and planning processes that can be models for different types of Nordic city-regions, and also inspire other city-regions in Europe, 2) contribute to knowledge on city-regional planning tools/models/concepts, and 3) facilitate exchange of planning and policy experiences between the Nordic city-regions with regards to development and planning for attractive and sustainable city-regions.

The field of knowledge in urban and regional sustainability is vast, but by providing comparisons and producing state-of-the-art reports that synthesize the latest research, highlight the specificities as well as the commonalities between different city-regions, Nordic collaboration contributes to the planning and development of attractive and sustainable city-regions. The work of this working group has been collated in a synthesis report which can be found on

www.nordregio.se/nwgcityregions

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ABOUT NORDREGIO

Nordregio is a leading Nordic research institute within the broad fields of regional development and urban planning. We undertake strategic research and provide policy relevant knowledge with a Nordic and European comparative perspective. We specialise in international comparative and collaborative research. Using our leading-edge skills, we carry out quantitative and qualitative analyses on many different geographic scales: Nordic, Baltic, Arctic and European. Our main target groups are planners and decision-makers at the international, national and regional levels. Main areas of research include regional development - urban and rural, city regional planning, demography, governance and gender, innovation and green growth, and sustainable development in the Arctic. ★



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