

Using environmental issues to stimulate placemaking: local initiatives in the first climate resilient neighborhood in Copenhagen

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This paper explores the use of environmental issues to stimulate placemaking in urban areas challenged by socio-environmental matters.

Considering that placemaking is a collaborative process by which one can shape public spaces in order to maximize shared values, it can involve more than just promoting better urban design, but also facilitating innovative patterns of use, with particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its continuous integration with the city (Jacobs 1961; Altman & Setha 1992; Gehl 2010).

In recent years, citizens collectives concerned with socio-environmental issues are starting bottom-up initiatives all over the world. Often, they start from creative individuals who share values and ideas with groups and practice placemaking, as well as other temporary projects that connect local citizens in a transdisciplinary and collaborative network. Mostly, they are people who are able to establish connections (Boonstra 2015). At the same time, local authorities in Europe are looking for effective urban renewals moving toward sustainable regeneration in urban areas (URBACT 2015). Environmental issues are increasingly being used as an integrative core for social and economic dimensions through local authorities' top-down strategies

combined with bottom-up citizen initiatives (Friedman & Weaver 1980), through a sort of bottom-linked citizen participation (Eizaguirre et al 2012).

Based on collaborative planning approaches and looking for innovative design and planning solutions that contribute to social and spatial change, new strategies seem to emerge which combine horizontal and vertical approaches and a diversity of actors to reach better results for neighborhood planning. Commonly, it involves participatory processes that merge local inputs with technical contributions in integrated urban renewal projects, driven by local authorities. In this context, a recurring argument is that solutions for environmental challenges also hold potential for improving place and social cohesion (Novy et al 2012; City of Copenhagen 2011).

This is a central concern in the discussed case of the redevelopment of Sankt Kjelds Kvarter into a “climate resilient” neighborhood in Copenhagen, through a five years municipal area renewal programme. Its starting point was a Neighborhood Plan (2011-2015) made by Østerbro Local Committee and passed in the City Council and the Ministry of City, Housing and Rural Areas (2011), competing with other neighborhoods to improve worn down public spaces, physical building adaptation needs and social indicators such as arising social problems, along with increasing unemployment rates and poverty. Furthermore, according to the committee, many streets, sidewalks, squares and green areas appeared worn down. The winning proposal of an architectural competition conducted in conjunction with the area renewal programme in 2011, raised the issue of climate change adaptation and, in particular, storm water management (Europas 2011). This coincided with a cloudburst in July 2011 which created damage for 6 billion Danish kroner (\$ 1.04 billion) in Copenhagen and was followed up by a comprehensive Copenhagen Climate Adaptation Plan (2011) for the city, of which the development of the climate resilient Sankt Kjelds neighborhood became an important part. This ensured further funds for the area renewal programme to solve storm water management issues which have been applied to develop collaborative solutions which also create more attractive public spaces and stimulate new activities and uses.

In the case study we have applied a qualitative multimethod approach combining document studies of strategies, plans, minutes of meetings etc., and

interviews with 15 core actors from the development project: project managers, entrepreneurs, citizen representatives and individual citizens. Actor-Network theory (ANT) was inspirational in comprehending the networks of collaboration and the role that 'non-human actors' played in the entire project (Latour 2005). Among diverse subprojects, the chosen ones for this investigation were Tåsinge Plads, a re-designed public space from a "dog's toilet to a family friendly meeting place, through diverse temporary projects, place activation and cultural events, planned by the Local Committee. And Østergro, an urban rooftop garden, thought by three visionary young people who proposed an urban farm project and had initial support of a local green activities fund and support of neighbors stakeholders. This sort of process tracing helped to reveal part of the strategies used since the conceptual plan, the visions for the neighborhood, the phases of social participation, the inputs for the program by the locals, the phases of design, and the implementation of some sub-projects, while the focus was the link between the participation process and the design results.

The findings from this case study suggest that environmental issues can be treated as potentialities to stimulate placemaking, while technical solutions are developed in parallel to solve specific and complex project demands. In this particular arrangement, it was important to support a diversity of actors, organized through representatives who have shared responsibilities in the development and implementation of crucial activities, cooperatively, but always linked to the steering committee.

It also concludes that the environmental dimension of an urban renewal project may potentiate interests, partnerships, collaborators and more economic efforts to ensure the implementation of a design that qualifies the space and enables the use of tools that intend to support social transformation in medium and long term. Its effects in a coherent and consistent urban planning context reveal that placemaking stimulated by climate adaptation aims combined with collaborative planning within a transdisciplinary approach can be considered an actor for social cohesion and public life. These issues are complementary contributions that go beyond urban resilience as a metaphor applied to environmental challenges, but towards the rescue of solidarity between local people, activated by means of green and cultural activities.

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