

Strategic Projects: Vehicles for Socio-Spatial Innovation?

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ABSTRACT

There is a persistent call for societies to meet the major developments, challenges and opportunities that are affecting their cities and regions directly or indirectly. It means that society is urged to study the forces of (structural) change and to look for means and instruments to make alternatives happen.

In our field, plans are seen as instruments to provoke change. Unfortunately many plans, as regulative and control instruments, remain too much of an “administrative framework” for development instead of an “action plan” aimed at the implementation of visions, policies and concepts.

Occasionally we witness, in cases, experimental practices that challenge conventional urban development. Such initiatives question pre-dominant physical urban transformations such as urban redevelopment based on remove-and-replace practices, and question undemocratic modes of governance. Instead, practices emerge where no clear boundaries exist between those that imagine, direct, implement, make use and take benefit of a project; and thus where new ways for socio-spatial innovation and transformation become possible. Therefore, the paper argues that socio-spatial innovative strategic projects could serve as instruments to tackle, in an open and creative way, the challenges, developments, and opportunities and act as vehicles to close the gap between planning and implementation.

The paper argues for a cross-fertilization between more model-based and top-down planning views, innovative discourses from the social, cultural, social, political, ecological, participative, economic fields and more casuistic, bottom-up experiences. The paper relies on a selective literature review, case studies and the outcome of the Strategic Planning to Strategic Projects research program.

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