Enhancing Institutional Learning and Embracing Disruptive Interventions as a Bottom-Up Way to Innovate Planning Practice

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Amsterdam strives to combat a shortage of homes by launching an ambitious housing development scheme for 32 designated most deprived neighborhoods. After decades of urban renewal projects, the local communities still suffer from difficult to resolve socioeconomic problems. Aside from a minimum of 40% social dwelling units, 40% of homes are reserved for the middle class and only 20% for high-end. Mixing income segments on its own will not lead to an improved socio-economic status of the inhabitants thus, a new urban renewal program has been developed. On top of that, the new progressive municipal council, intends to democratise the urban renewal processes towards more community-led developments with local support and structural solutions. Some experts may argue that we require a radical new way of planning whilst others counter, that current standardised planning procedures cannot be easily changed. In partnership with the municipality, we reflect on Amsterdam’s urban regeneration program and enhance collective cross-border learning by organising monthly learning sessions with the managers involved. Now that the first phases of the planning process have been completed, we follow a Grounded Theory (GT) method to structure the collected data and analyse the perceived barriers hindering the modernisation of planning practice. Observations and promising actions to make the participation process more inclusive, interactive and influential will be discussed. One example is that some managers on the ground who have to work with the system, are taking short cuts in planning procedures to ensure that citizens’ needs are incorporated in the developed plan. These disruptive interventions may be used to formalise and implement new policy and more effective pathways of community-based development.