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Tasks in post-modern municipal planning

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REVITAPLAN

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Tasks in post-modern municipal planning

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Abstract

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1. Introduction

Municipal planners are part of public administrations that have the goal to carry out public duties. They are democratically legitimized persons who operate within the institutions of public law and who must conform to established bureaucratic models. Their work tasks are concerned with preparing, realising and monitoring decisions and actions to continuously improve the urban spaces of their municipality [2]. The focus of these tasks is on the provision of health, social services, transport, housing, and public amenities as well as on the promotion of trade and industry. Some of these tasks are obligatory and have to be conducted within the framework of existing laws, while others are voluntary and free to carry out. Overall, the tasks and activities of municipal planners can be associated somewhere between the fields of real estate development, economics, landscape architecture, social sciences, governance, law, civil engineering, and architecture [8].

In recent years, the role of municipal planners has changed from simply being responsible for devising plans for the spatial development of a municipality to a much broader field of tasks. This is because the transformation of an urban area, be it industrial or residential, can no longer be "simply concerned with perceiving an areas imagined future and devising documents to describe it" [5]. Municipal planners also need to account for the existence of

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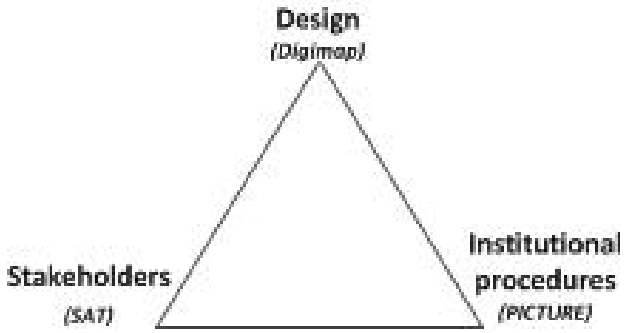

Figure 1: The three aspects municipal planners need to be concerned with in practice (loosely following [5]).

an organized civil society that expects that all planning efforts are transparent and democratic. In such contexts, planners need to implement procedures that allow for mutual and ongoing social learning processes between stakeholders about the real needs and prospects of a specific urban area. Such joint construction of knowledge requires planners to foster intensive interpersonal and group dynamics with a wide variety of different stakeholders. Planning alternatives that account for the different needs of an area have to be developed together with these stakeholders. Each of the developed planning alternatives should then be discussed, justified, and compared in an open forum.

To enable such democratic planning processes, involved stakeholders will need to gain understanding of different alternatives for the spatial transformation of an area, about the existing institutional regulations and procedures, and about the existing stakeholder networks and stakeholder objectives. Better yet, they should be empowered to actively get involved with shaping stakeholder networks, stakeholder objectives, and public regulations and procedures. The three aspects of developing ideas and alternatives for spatial urban transformation, stakeholder management, and public regulations all need to be the subject of social learning and participatory shaping efforts. This new extended field of tasks is depicted in Figure 1.

The REVITAPLAN project was established in 2011 to develop processes, methods, and tools to support this enlarged task field that municipal planners currently face. This report summarizes the outcomes of the project's first work package: The inventorying of state-of-

the-art practices in the three tasks fields depicted in Figure 1. The content of this report was developed together with the industry and academic partners of the REVITAPLAN project to bring together a broad range of different expertise. Hence, the report can provide an in-depth status of current best practices that, hopefully, will be informative for practicing municipal planners.

The report is structured as follows: After this brief introduction, we will introduce the state of the art in each of the three fields mentioned above. We will then underscore these best practices using brief examples from "real world" planning projects and by showing how IT technologies can support the best practices put forward here.

2. Urban Design

Urban design is the activity that gives structure and reality to two-dimensional masterplans and abstract planning briefs before detailed architecture or engineering can take place. It is the creative activity by which the form and character of the urban environment at the local scale may be devised, modified, and controlled [9]. At the municipal level, urban design is usually concerned with three different scales that need to meaningfully integrate and bridge:

- the individual scale of single buildings and structures,
- the assembly of these individual buildings and structures into land parcels,
- and the planning of whole districts and cities.

Where ever regional institutions overarch single municipalities, different urban scales must meaningfully integrate into plans for a complete region. This task then often requires the collaboration between different municipal planners across city boundaries.

For each of these scales planners need to develop creative ideas for transforming an urban area by an appropriate restructuring of its built and natural environment. This transformation should improve the quality of the area with respect to the public realm and

spaces, the area's density, with respect to mobility within the area and accessibility to the area, and with the allocation of compatible uses [8].

The main physical activity during urban design is labelled by Harris [6] as sketch planning. Sketch planning is the activity of proposing different development patterns for an urban area. It is concerned with thinking and looking at different development patterns from the many different existing presentations about an area, such as maps, development reports, or economic and demographic assessments. During sketch planning all these presentations have to be looked at and thought about in different ways as they are often skewed away from reality and their content is contradicting. By making sense about the representations, the outcome of sketch planning exercises is then the specification of a set of interventions, the estimation of probable consequences, and the evaluation of the interventions in light of the goals that are pursued with an urban design project.

3. Stakeholder Management

Stakeholders are parties that (a) can affect or be affected by the transformation of an urban area, (b) possess information, resources and expertise required for a transformation, and/or (c) have access or control over important drivers to implement a transformation. By definition, stakeholders have a very prominent role within every municipal planning effort. Therefore, it is vital that municipal planners understand the existing stakeholders on a project well and devise strategies to mobilize stakeholders and to ensure their sustained participation.

Because of the large number of possible stakeholders, it is usually not possible to find such strategies that allow for the mobilization of all stakeholders that exist [7]. Therefore, municipal planners need to thoroughly analyse the existing stakeholder environment of their project and make decisions about who will attend to what and who not. To this end, well accepted methods for stakeholder analysis exist.

These methods usually suggest to start by identifying possibly important stakeholders. This identification step can, for example, begin with a long list of all possible persons that might have a stake and that are easily identifiable. Once such an initial list exist, other

important parties can then be found by focused snowballing activities exploring persons and parties that stand in a positive, but also negative, relation with the initially identified persons. Other stakeholders can also be identified by asking earlier identified persons. During this inital step it is also important to focus on persons that, at the moment of the analysis, do not fall under the definition of stakeholders, but might become stakeholder at a later point in time. These persons and institutions are often referred to as dormant stakeholders.

After a wide range of stakeholders has been identified they can be categorized along two dimensions:

- Influence, defined as the power and legitimacy a specific stakeholder has to influence the municipal planning project, and
- Interest, the urgency that a specific stakeholder has to use their given possibilities to influence a project. Interest can be caused for example, because specific stakeholders have strong feelings of ownership or sentiment towards an aspect of the planning project, or because they have certain expectations.

Using these dimensions stakeholders can then be grouped in three categories:

- Definitive stakeholders. These are stakeholders with high interest and influence in the project that should be well accounted for in the stakeholder mobilization strategy for the project.
- Dormant stakeholders. These are stakeholders with low interest in, but high possibilities to influence a project. These stakeholders do not need to be integrated yet within the mobilization strategy, but need to be closely monitored with respect to whether they might develop more interest in the project. Interest can, for example, develop due to a drastic change in plans, or by the inclusion of new stakeholders in the mobilization strategy. Planners should also keep in mind that if it is possible to mobilize dormant stakeholders they can become powerful allies during planning efforts.

- Demanding stakeholders. These are stakeholders with little possibilities to influence a project, but high interest in it. These stakeholders also do not need to be integrated in a mobilization strategy, but nonetheless should be monitored closely. Demanding stakeholders can become definitive, for example, if they gain the support of other influential stakeholders, or by developing some other coercive means. One only needs to think of the recent large demonstrations against urban projects, during which stakeholders with little legitimate influence in the beginning, developed means to significantly change the course of the project. Planners can try to mobilize these stakeholders by increasing their legitimacy to influence the project. Again such a mobilization of demanding stakeholders can lead to powerful allies during planning efforts.

While categorizing the stakeholders in the three groups above, it is important to recognize that the categorization can never be truly objective and that there is the possibility that different persons will come up with different categorizations. This might, in itself, lead to unintended conflicts between stakeholders that can hinder the planning process. It is also important to realize that influence and interest are categories that stakeholders may not even be conscious about or may not willfully exercise.

4. Public Process Management

Because municipal planners are part of public administrations, their work is guided by a number of principles for action. These principles prescribe that all administrative action should be guided by a clear division of labour, that is, a clear and hierarchical organisational structure that conducts actions that are bound by rules. Additionally, administrative action should be both well documented in records and economically efficient [2].

In recent years these clear-cut principles have come under pressure by a more multifaceted society with more diverse social and cultural backgrounds and, hence, changing requirements for municipal plans. At the same time, expectations regarding quality and time efficiency have increased, while there is more sensitivity for the rising number of bureaucratic rules and regulations. Therefore, existing planning processes within the municipality, between the

municipality and companies as well as between the municipality and other public parties have to be clearly understood. Additionally, new processes need to be designed to support specific tasks on a single municipal planning project.

Since planning processes are largely unstructured, understanding and designing them is difficult. Planning is project-based work where the tasks and other supporting processes are characterized by great complexity and intense communication. Often the sequence of processes or the time a specific process takes, for example, cannot be specified in absolute terms. Further, usually a large number of different parallel processes, sub-processes, and supporting processes exists that all need to be understood in detail. This all makes planning processes hard to formalize.

Nevertheless, it is important to be able to transparently communicate the existing processes and establish means to allow for the co-creation of new processes together with important stakeholders. Supporting this co-creation effort, models of existing processes and ideal anticipated processes should be established [2]. Such process models

- create transparency,
- help with identifying problems and potentials,
- create acceptance among stakehodlers,
- help with reducing and mastering the complexity of the planning tasks,
- simplify communication with all stakeholders, and
- help with comparing different possible processes that supposedly lead to the same goal.

Different methods exists to model processes, such as the IDEF0 standard [4], event-driven process chains [3], the business process notation [1], or petri-nets [10]. An in-depth description of these methods is beyond the scope of this report but many textbooks provide a much better introduction to the methods than could be applied here.

Independent of the method used, it is important that process models have a representative character. The processes to be modelled should be clearly named, created for the

purpose of laying out the process transparently to all stakeholders, abstract to an extent so that only the relevant features of a process are represented. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the subjectivity of the generated models at all times.

5. Conclusion

This report summarizes the results of work package one of the REVITAPLAN project. It is a description of the state of the art of municipal planning from the three perspectives of sketch planning, stakeholder management, and public process management – the three areas municipal planners need to concern themselves with to enable successful spatial urban transformation. In essence, there are well developed best practices available in each of these three areas that municipal planners should make use of. These best practices are briefly summarized in this report and references for more in-depth reading are provided throughout the text.

Our review of the state of the art in municipal planning also underscored the problem the REVITAPLAN project is concerned with: The lack of systematic knowledge of how to integrate the three areas of concern during municipal planning activities. Within its second work package, the REVITAPLAN project therefore is currently developing guidelines for how to integrate these areas. The report describing the outcomes of this second research task provides a logical follow-up to this report.

6. Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Terms and Definitions

- Stakeholder: parties that (a) can affect or be affected by the transformation of an urban area, (b) posess information, resources and expertise required for a transformation, or (c) have access or control over important drivers to implement a transformation.
- Objective: the interests that a specific stakeholder group has with respect to an existing or future urban area.
- Indicator: the translation of a single or a combination of multiple stakeholder objectives into tangible and comparable metrics.
- Planning Parameter: describes a specific characteristic of an urban system that can be changed to achieve certain transformation outcomes. Examples for planning parameters are types of companies that are located in a building or changes in the underlying infrastructure of an area.
- Scenario: predictions of different possible futures of a certain area. In this scenarios are generated through the variation of specific planning parameters and through the variation of specific environmental characteristics, such as changes in the economic markets or different predictions of future demographic growth patterns. In this way, scenarios can be used to both predict the effect of urban transformations on its environment and vice versa.
- Sketch Planning:the process of establishing scenarios to gain a general understanding of how to best transfer a specific urban area to a new use. The goal of sketch planning is to develop general order-of-magnitude estimates for several performance indicators for a specific transformation scenario. To this end, sketch planning is usually easier to implement and often preceeds more sophisticated planning steps and calculations. Sketch planning lends itself well to the quick and easy evaluation of a large number of different transformation scenarios in the early planning stages.

- Business Process: "A business process consists of a set of activities that is performed in an organizational and technical environment. These activities are coordinated to jointly realize a business goal. Each business process is enacted by a single organization, but it may interact with business processes performed by other organizations." Aalst Stahl p.4