Oikonet position paper—Chalmers

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Interspace thinking, capacity-building and codesign

This text is directed to participants in Oikonet, to briefly describe research themes we believe have the potential to be developed by relating to you all in one way or the other. The research themes have a close relationship to these permanent structures:

- **Centre for Urban Studies Hammarkullen**
  www.urban.gu.se || www.chalmers.se/urban
- **Department of Social work, University of Gothenburg, Hammarkullen**
  www.socwork.gu.se
- **Design and planning for social inclusion, Chalmers Architecture, Hammarkullen**
  suburbsdesign.wordpress.com

Three concepts are presented to shed light on some of the knowledge being developed and in connection with each concept there is presented ongoing and recently completed research projects.[1] Finally, potential issues or questions we may be interested in developing in collaboration with Oikonet participants are listed.

1. Capacity-building

In the right-to-the-city movements (Harvey 2006) the lack of citizens' rights has been highlighted, claiming inhabitants are generally not being taken advantage of in governance processes (Stewart and Taylor 1995). In research it has been stressed that inhabitants are key actors in governance processes aimed at developing the city (see e.g. Swyngedouw 2005) and »empowerment« is therefore considered to be of great value in planning (Andrews et al. 2006). The concept of empowerment, however, may be used to describe very different kind of processes. In one type, the focus is on the change of individuals and the possible benefit if a person be empowered to develop his or her knowledge, attitude and skills to fit what is requested in society. In another type, the focus is at process, culture, collective and team building. How may empowerment processes be facilitated that develop the cultures (the way we do things together) in different kinds of organisations and institutions, to better adapt their activities to the local and global challenges we face? This was the focus in a transdisciplinary research project in a stigmatized suburb in Gothenburg:

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[1] For more information about the research projects, see the paper *Oikonet – our research focus in Gothenburg* (2014-02-09).

»We have regarded empowerment as a process where the inhabitants of the city become co-actors in urban governance and development, i.e. that they become producers rather than only consumers of the urban fabric. Empowerment thus releases and redirects energy, and to a certain extent it can also be considered as a source of new energy. Our main challenge has been *how to release, redirect and create* such energy in reality and further *how to learn* from these processes we have been initiated and involved in« (Stenberg et al. 2012: 3).

The capacity-building processes we developed implied empowerment actions that helped involved actors (all actors but our focus was to include inhabitants) to increase their common ability to contribute to change – both social and physical. What we learned from these actions was that empowerment is actually to develop *capacity-building cultures*, as the concept of culture (as used here) imply that empowerment is about raising awareness about, reflect upon, transform and possibly consolidate a common behaviour – i.e. empowerment (as we have made use of it) imply system change.

Research projects

- Urban Empowerment: Cultures of Participation and Learning, 2010-2011, www.urbanempower.se
- Reflections on culture-building, leadership and outreach in pedagogic in an urban school-context, 2013-2014

2. Interplace

When discussing urban development, there are plenty of concepts being developed to describe the problem of bridging over between different worlds, e.g. bridging between »abstract and concrete«, or »space and place«, or »system and lifeworld« (Habermas 1984), or »the world of control and the world of susceptibility« (Læssøe 1995). Planning researcher Ole Michael Jensen from Denmark used several expressions to capture this interspace: the »locality« (Jensen 1994: 355), the »face« (Jensen 2001: 3) or the »site« (Jensen 1995), while architecture researcher Claus Bech-Danielsen referred to it as the »locus« (Bech-Danielsen 1998: 19). Most likely, many of these concepts have been inspired by Aristotelian terminology of learning, arguing that »phronesis« (wisdom) presupposes amalgamation of systematic knowledge (make you ready to *act*) and technical expertise (prepare you to *produce*) (Aristotle 2002 [350 B.C.E]).

Also the concept of »interplace« (Stenberg 2004) (www.interplace.se) has Aristotelian roots. The concept of »interplace« was developed as a result of a collaboration between the Department of Architecture at Chalmers University of Technology and the department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. At the University, two teachers with premises in a stigmatized suburb had developed a locally based »interspace thinking« education concerning first social work and then teaching (Forsén and Fryk 1999). The aim with the locally based education was to prepare the students for the global challenges and growing migration into the Swedish society. The idea was to facilitate for social workers and teachers to develop knowledge of how to open their professions for

the position of »not knowing«, which is *when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.* The English poet John Keats called that ability »negative capability« in a letter to his brother in 1817 (Dewey 1934). The idea with the locally based education was inspired by Keats and wanted to leave the safe »rooms« of the profession to meet inhabitants and other locally based professionals in rooms inbetween – in interspaces. In such rooms inbetween the traditional professional »rooms« their power hierarchy is not predetermined – nobody owns the room – which means that there is potential to set the agenda together and start developing something new. This opens for new possibilities regarding mutual knowledge production.

In 2008, design students from Chalmers Architecture came to this suburb to learn new design skills, through a pedagogics based on the same »interspace thinking«. The design students were to learn not only renovation of large scale buildings from the 1960s and 70s in stigmatized environments, which was in focus in the master course, but also how to base the design proposals on wishes and needs of the inhabitants in the area – knowledge developed in dialogue – hence they sought tools for developing the dream of the *inhabitants* and not the designer. In this way, they were to become skilled »interspace workers« but with focus on changing the *physical* environment – the place. The concept of »interplace« was thus the result of an amalgamation of social and physical aspects.

One of the social aspects that has been highlighted strongly when design students learned these new skills, was power aspects. Even if architects had already discussed quite a lot how to handle problems related to »who owns the city« in the commercialized society being developed, they were not really skilled in handling the problems and moreover not aware of how the actual appearance of a room for dialogue affected communication. Actually, a quite severe lack of knowledge for »making discipline« designers such as architects, engineers, planners, etc, aimed at shaping and reshaping the physical environment. When designers become skilled »interplace« planners and designers, they learn how to analyse the physical environment also in the design process due to power aspects, asking themselves questions like »gives the room power advantage to anyone?«, »who sits where?«, «can the furnishing be changed?«, etc. Hence becoming an »interplace« designer is not just to develop collaboration between actors – to prioritize gutters for downpipes – but to develop the competence you need to really act in interspaces, but without loosing the ability to also operate within your traditional professional »room«. Developing these skill is not possible without personal development. You need an inner security to be able to stay open and susceptible to other ideas and concepts, letting them challenge the very base of your preconceptions. This is what »interplace« planning and design is about.

Research projects

- The interplay between citizen initiatives and invited participation in urban planning: An interaction research project, 2011-2013, www.mellanplats.se
- Compact Cities? Exploring qualities, drivers and strategies for promoting mixed-use urban development, 2014-2016

3. Codesign

The concept of »codesign« has been inspired by architect Christopher Alexander and his colleagues who in the 1970s developed a »pattern language« to facilitate for communication between designers and users (Alexander et al. 1977). Codesign is also closely related to other concepts applied in the 1960s and 70s, e.g. the concepts of »cohousing« (the homeowners movement) and »collective building« (the sharing of household movement) (Vestbro 2000). The relationship to »baugemeinschaften« which is common in Germany nowadays is also obvious. Baugemeinschaften is when a group of inhabitants together act as commissioner of a building project where they then will settle down (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012). What maybe distinguish the contemporary concept of codesign from these other concepts is the strong focus on aesthetics (Faga 2006) and »place-making« (Hamdi 2011) which is linked to culture (Sandercock 2003), not-for-profit-issues (Brenner et al. 2011) and a focus at public space and citizen power (Madanipour 2010).

When further developing the concept of codesign in a Swedish context in a stigmatized suburb in Gothenburg, we reinforced one central theme from the 1960s – »advocacy planning« (Davidoff 1965) – and by intertwining research, education and community outreach at a university centre in the suburb, we investigated the possibilities of using codesign of local public space as an engine for developing *professional roles* (Stenberg 2012; Stenberg and Fryk 2012) and potential of *system change* (Stenberg 2013). The approach was based on the idea that all actors – also citizens/inhabitants/tenants – are knowledge producers in academic research (Stenberg et al. 2012).

One concrete result of the process was a stage with locally designed mosaics. The construction company was tendered with the condition of employing local youth and interact with local artists. Photos: José Romero and Jenny Stenberg.

The research on this process showed that there is a great potential in such an approach. If implementation research in collaboration between academia, local government and civil society continue being developed, there are great opportunities for an interesting knowledge production to take place with potential to in the long run having an impact on local and municipal planning and administration systems. Perhaps a totally new role for planners and other community workers will evolve, really integrating social and physical aspects and being place-based?

The concept of »codesign« in this context thus implied not only when architects and users collaborate in designing certain physical objects or urban space, but it also meant to facilitate for inhabitants and local professionals to become community builders. Hence, they were given power not just to change the city appearance at place, but also to modify the social structure and procedure of how to plan and change the city in the future.

Research projects

- The interplay between citizen initiatives and invited participation in urban planning: An interaction research project, 2011-2013, www.mellanplats.se
- Codesign in urban planning in Cuba, 2014-2015
- Bridging the Gap: Children and Planners Co-Creating the Urban Space, 2014
- National Transdisciplinary Centre of Excellence for Integrated Sustainable Renovation, 2014-2018

Potential issues or questions

What these research projects have in common is:
- Focusing the local area level (the local community) in these cities, and furthermore taking an interest in social inclusion and integration issues in the city as a whole.
- Having an »outreach ambition«, thus to encourage and learn from adding outreach to professional roles, e.g. the role of the teacher, the social worker, the designer, the planner.
- Considering research being a knowledge building process where all actors produce knowledge, not only academics.
- As collective knowledge building imply shared power, follows an interest in managing power aspects in planning and management of cities.
- An interest in »community building« as it may imply systemic changes, e.g. changing planning procedures, ways of teaching and ways of thinking about the role of higher education, which is a prerequisite for changes to be lasting independent of enthusiasts.
- Relating the community focus and the »outreach ambition« also to citizenship, puts the balance of power between citizens and systemic representatives high up on the agenda and opens an arena for community building to reflect and learn from.
- Recognizing the need for focusing on community building might change the way of thinking about and approaching social problems that exist in metropolitan urban areas.
- The outreach approach might also be a way to rebuild institutional as well as neighbourhood trust in areas where this sometimes is scarce.

Potential issues or questions interesting to developing in collaboration with Oikonet participants:
- Have Oikonet participants' experiences from outreach activities, related to research and/or education, that can be discussed?

- Is there experiences in Oikonet concerning power sharing through collective knowledge building processes (inhabitants, researchers, lecturers, local employees) that can be discussed and learnt from?
- Is community building a concept in use for Oikonet participants, and may these experiences be discussed?
- Have Oikonet participants any experiences of systemic changes coming as a result of community building processes or other kinds of local development work, and may these be compared and discussed?
- Can our studies in Barcelona and Rotterdam be compared with Oikonet participants' studies in these cities? Are there common interests also in Cuba?

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