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(Re)Acting the City
Physical planning practices and
challenges in urban development
projects of the “Entrepreneurial City”

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to trace and discuss the practices and challenges of physical planning within an Entrepreneurial City approach to urban policy. The research aim is addressed by focusing on three questions: 1) how have the practices of physical planning been influenced by the context of an Entrepreneurial City approach to urban policy 2) how has physical planning responded to this urban policy context, and 3) which potential dilemmas for physical planning practice derive from this new context?

By an Entrepreneurial City approach to urban policy I understand an approach whereby there is an attention placed over strategies to promote local economic growth and attract investments, companies and specific types of people in to the city. Arguably urban policies focus less on welfare-related and redistribution strategies. There is an adoption of private sector discourses and tools to promote the city as a place to live, work and invest in. These discourses and tools pass through place-making strategies, marketing, engagement in speculative, risk-taking market-led projects, and seeking partners with whom to establish alliances that will serve to promote the city.

The strong emphasis of Entrepreneurial City approaches on interventions over the built environment implies a greater attention to what is happening to the practices of physical planning in municipalities that have adopted this approach. Existing studies tend to emphasize that it signifies a decrease in the scope of influence for public sector, and by extension for physical planning, in the governance and steering of these projects.

The dissertation focuses on large-scale urban development projects – Brunnshög, in Lund, and Bo01, Norra Sorgenfri and Hyllie, in Malmö. The projects were chosen due to their likelihood to illustrate physical planning practices marked by an Entrepreneurial City approach.

The main findings of this thesis refute the idea of a turn in urban policy towards entrepreneurial city approaches, and illustrate instead a process by which new practices and values coincide with previously established settings and practices. Physical planning is adopting the discourses of an urban policy approach where intercity competition for new industries (preferably in knowledge-intensive sectors) and residents (preferably the “creative classes”) guide urban development projects. The governance setting is marked by the need to establish working networks and partnerships that will create the capacity to act. Experimentation, piece-meal approaches and inter-project learning mark the adaptation strategies to an urban policy context that is still changing. Potential dilemmas lie in the fragmented character of the partnerships required to execute the projects, and in the assumption that these projects will result in the rehabilitation of the socio-economic trends of the city and promote local economic growth. Additionally the resulting built environments are prone to processes of gentrification and displacement, and spatial and socio-economic polarization.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial City; physical planning; large-scale urban development project, Malmö