

Abstract

Different way of City Making

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Five years ago, the Dutch king and government officially introduced the participation society as the successor of the welfare society: people should take responsibility for their own lives and living environment without support of the government. As a result, interesting citizen initiatives emerged that are challenging the traditional ways of urban planning and city making (defined as changing the city (partly) from its current state to its future state), especially in Rotterdam. The (local) government is encouraging these novel and innovative initiatives but also puzzling how to cope with these initiatives and share responsibility and control with citizens.

Building on the knowledge gained from the Rotterdam Open Data projects, a design approach was developed to involve a quadruple helix of stakeholders in the process of city making: representatives of the government, industry, university and civic society were brought together in projects, events and labs, to collaboratively work hands-on on prototypes of future city applications. As a design approach it helped the participants in getting a mind-set for exploring opportunities in the city rather than solving problems in the city, to feel comfortable with unforeseen developments and open-ended outcomes, and in getting mutual understanding of each other's concerns and interests.

Essential rules that were applied in collaboration sessions are:

- Everyone is an expert and can bring in new insights and perspectives into the collaboration process;
- A non-hierarchical setting: everyone is evenly important;
- Visualising and prototyping bring other results than talking and writing

In the current research project Participatory City Making (PCM), it was discovered that most frictions between citizens and the municipality are related to issues of transparency, influence and exchange. The PCM project is conducted as Research-through-Design (RtD): designing, visualising and making artefacts are applied as means of getting insights and creating knowledge. A goal of the project was to develop different tools to support the stakeholders in city making.

One important insight in the issue of transparency is that the success of city making initiatives is dependent from transparency between citizens and civil servants (municipality) as well as transparency within citizen groups and within the municipality. Not only for a citizen it's unclear who to contact in the municipality to get support for his initiative, also a civil servant has difficulties to find appropriate colleagues in the municipal organisation to support citizens initiatives.

Another insight in the issue of exchange (collaboration) is that within the municipality some 'front-runner' civil servants might enthusiastically support a citizen's initiative that are really innovative or changing the status quo but at the same time other civil servants strictly apply current regulations that frustrate those initiatives and subdue their innovation.

One conclusion of PCM (that was also informed by research on transition management) is that city making demands bottom-up experimentation (citizen initiatives) as well as top-down legitimation to strengthen the innovative power of city making initiatives. Another result was the insight of how the complexity of the city making process can be unravelled by distinguishing tools on different 'meta-levels of design': the result of the work of one is the tool for the work of someone else.