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The Social Bench, or the Developer's Understanding

Abstract

"The Social Bench" was carried into seven municipalities, and representatives of both the social and the technical staff sat down beside the developers. The developers also sat on the bench with each other and looked for common insights. These sittings form the basis for this report.

The project promoted the change in the service structure of Social Affairs and Health by making visible the demands to the physical environment brought on by moving the emphasis to non-institutional care. The aim of the project was to develop ordinary planning projects into future forums for all parties. The work took shape according to who was participating and what methods were used.

The change in service structure was linked to more extensive cultural change. After an overview of the past and the present, a vision was created of a future where services are sensitive to the situation; where the working methods create synergy and responsibility for the consequences; where the shape of the world is holistic yet complicated; where macroeconomic viewpoints are adopted instead of rationalising or minimising; where social capital is accumulated alongside built capital; and where dynamic quality increases with static quality.

The technical worldview looks into the future; the social worldview looks to the past for answers. Co-operation between the fields is further complicated by the lack of common language. This project developed tools for overcoming these obstacles.

In the municipalities, the work progressed in very different topical projects (land-use planning, neighbourhood improvement, traffic planning, strategy for elderly care). We developed a method of co-operation that analyses the social and the physical together. It proceeds through the recognition of needs, surveying, planning of alternatives and assessment to, finally, implementation.

There are always at least three possible future scenarios: 1) what happens if nothing is done, 2) what happens if everything goes wrong, and 3) what happens if everything goes right. Fears and utopias alike became concrete in the process, and the choices made began to have actual implications. At the same time, objectives that had no bearing on real life came to life. For this demanding development process of a common future, we created the tool described in this report. The assessment involved critical examination of both quality and costs, which was helpful in getting the technical and the social to meet as equals.

The challenges went across all traditional sector boundaries, and therefore cross-over methods needed to be developed. We also developed ways to describe multisectoral potential, which brought out chains of effects that usually go unnoticed.

The final part describes problems in development work. In the end, the development project is examined in its true environment, where topical interests converge and surprises can throw the project into unforeseen situations. The skilled developer can seize the day and turn seeming disadvantages into advantages for the project.

Key words: living environment, prevention, development, budgeting and cost control, neighbourhood services, methods, multisectorality, change in service structure, crossover methods, the social and the technical, social impact assessment, alternate futures, co-operation.