Chapter I
Knowledge Creation in Urban and Knowledge Environment

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ABSTRACT

Today, knowledge is addressed as a key driver in urban development. From an urban planner’s perspective, however, it seems that the knowledge we talk about is out there in so-called knowledge industries. Knowledge-based urban development refers to development of city regions that are more or less driven by the knowledge economy, or to opportunities to attract knowledge workers in order to fuel economic growth in specific areas. The aim of this chapter is conceptualizing what knowledge and learning mean to, and in, contemporary planning praxis. The chapter discusses the key concepts of knowing and their relation to doing. By mooting a theory of assemblages, the chapter further provides a foundation for the analysis and the enforcement of learning in urban development praxis. Drawing on research on learning organizations, this chapter provides a basis for the contribution of urban planning to knowledge-based urban development.

INTRODUCTION

There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively we can ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving them we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern in which it has a place (Douglas, 1966, Purity and Danger).

The world is changing in ways that happen rarely (Landry, 2000). Knowledge is said to play a key role in these changes both as a driver of change (as in the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1993) or in the form of ICT-based expert systems) and as an answer to them. However, knowledge as a term or a concept also is in danger of becoming an unproblematic theoretical passe-partout (Ibert,
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2007), which is uncritically taken for granted and theoretically underdetermined. As Law and Urry (2004) argue, social and physical changes in the world need to be paralleled by changes in the methods of social enquiry, which means by the ways we know (epistemology) and by our concepts of reality (ontology). Whereas the linear categories of social science—often referred to as Euclidian—in general, and in urban sciences in particular, were more or less productive in the 19th and early 20th century, they are less productive of global realities at the beginning of the 21st century, a world that enacts itself to produce unpredictable and non-linear flows and more mobile subjectivities (Urry, 2003). A world that renders unstable what accounts for proper knowledge in an increasingly high pace, and that calls for more adaptive and generative organizations in both economy and administration. The experience of insufficient concepts also is echoed from practice, where a linear or modernist worldview is faced with a variety of anomalies: identical interventions in allegedly similar situations produce very different results. The application of traditional tools in urban planning does not meet up with the increasing complexity in urban development. It becomes clear that in order to address knowledge in 21st century urban development we must be able to deal with social complexity. Before the background of severe insufficiencies, urban development was confronted basically with two strategies: (1) systems reforms, and (2) calls for creativity and experimentation.

1. It seems wherever you turn in the world, governments are reviewing the performance of their planning systems and in many cases introducing substantial packages of reforms (Campbell, 2003) on the national level, but also on lower scales. However, as evaluative analysis shows, mere structural reforms may miss the problem and produce dissatisfying situations (Campbell, 2003; Crawford, 2003; Harrison, 2003; Hillier, 2006; Suh, 2003; Van Wezemaal, 2006c). Rather, the lack of knowledge creation in spatial planning practice has been found the reason that spatial planning is conceived not as a force for positive transformation but rather as an inhibitor of change and constraint on innovation (Campbell, 2003). Thus, as Suh (2003) points out, the success of reforms depends on “planners rapidly scaling a considerable learning curve,” and, therefore, “the main task for the planning community is to develop new skills” (Campbell, 2003).

2. The widely acknowledged failure of modernist decision-making (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002) is met with a call for creativity. Recent developments in planning theory reflect the changing conditions for decision-making and emphasize the importance of experimentation (Forester, 2004; Healey, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2006a; Innes & Booher, 2004). Healey (2004a) suggests that some modes of governance may restrict creativity in evolutions and of the management of collective problems of urban existence; others may help to release creative energy. She thus indicates different qualities of learning environments in the organization of urban development praxis. Although these authors suggest that there is a lack of performative knowledge, there are hardly any contributions to the question what kind of knowledge is needed, how it is produced, where the locus of its production is, and how planning as an organization can manage and improve its generation.

Thus, both strategies lead to the bottom line that traditional approaches to knowledge are inadequate and call for a learning curve of planners and for the creation of new (performative) skills. However, the given picture of spatial planning as an inhibitor of change and constraint on innova-
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