Citizens as drivers of regenerative sustainability

Aalto Sustainability Day 18.5.2018
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Citizens as changemakers

- Discussing recent research on the topic and practical examples, we argue that an effective approach of urban sustainability research and practice is one that takes today’s active civil society seriously.

- “Origins of regenerative sustainability ... lie primarily in the social and ecological domains respectively, understanding their relationship is of importance in formulating approaches for the successful co-evolution of human and natural systems.” (Robinson & Cole, 2015)
Factors promoting citizen-initiated regenerative sustainability

● **Digitalization** has brought citizens diverse opportunities to start taking the development of cities in their own hands. With the help of social media, citizens build networks and **self-organise collective action locally and internationally**.

● With these informal networks (the fourth sector), citizens **activate and develop resources for change in multiple roles** – designers, funders, mediators, community managers...

● Public governments slowly waking up

Examples: the **rise of civic food buying networks, P2P mobility services, informal urban planning groups, alternative planning, crowd-funded projects e.g. in place-making**

(Mäenpää & Faehnle 2017, Rantanen & Faehnle 2017)
Sharing economy

Community

Urban space

Support

Technology

Innovation and mediator communities

Improving public services

P2P commerce etc.

Social support

Open events

Alternative food networks etc.

Local movements

Artivism

Squatting, opening, shaping spaces

Self-organised city

Developing Information society

Developing tools for activism

Hacktivism

Communication encouraging activism

Ecological movements

Urban planning groups

Support for activism

Green: activism types that especially can make sense for enhancing ecological sustainability

(Mäenpää et al. 2017)
Current research and developments

- Citizens, administration and business working towards regeneration in urban development: *Hiedanranta, Tampere*
  - Successful experimental urban development through including diverse stakeholders
- (Weak) signals of paradigm change towards users providing services: *peer-to-peer sharing platforms & services*
  - E.g. in mobility: citizens, housing associations, also cities sharing their fleet for more sustainable mobility
Current research and developments

- Policymakers and administration forwarding citizen initiated development: *participation and interaction model, Helsinki*

Principles of participation in binding administrative regulations:
- Utilisation of know-how and expertise of individuals and communities
- Enabling spontaneous activities
- Creation of equal opportunities for participation

Progress, what can be learned?

• By co-designing and co-creating with citizens **significant steps can be taken in implementing** practical solutions

• Managing expectations, **maintaining capacities for collaboration**
  • For example temporary use of spaces: shared understanding of that temporary right of use is indeed temporary

• **Context specific ways of acting**: sometimes administration led, sometimes citizen-originated, varying degrees of co-action (hybrid governing, Mäenpää & Faehnle 2018)
Challenges

• How to encourage, ensure and promote future engagement and cherish capacities for solving sustainability challenges together in the long run?
• Balancing between one-off participation and institutionalisation
• Diversity on how to harness citizens’ diverse scale of commitment
• Using new opportunities while not replacing democratic decision making mechanisms
In conclusion

● By making it possible for citizens to take roles in the design of sustainable solutions, technologies and cities can significantly improve their efficiency.
● This is not only by the improvement and usability of the solutions themselves, but also by the uptake and thus regenerative potential of these solutions.
● SYKE developing the use of its urban expertise and data for regenerative sustainability – ideas on collaboration warmly welcome!
Publications

Thank you!

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