

Energising Peer-to-peer Urban Futures – Challenges for Urban Governance

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Why did we select this research?

The relationship between urban governance and citizens has to be revisited as citizens and their peer-to-peer networks emerge as central actors in creating the city space. Renewable energy is a key driver, since it enables citizens to produce their own energy. No more can urban governance alone define, produce, and create a liveable eco-smart city. This paper states that new perspectives are needed to help urban planners, city residents, and stakeholders anticipate and shape urban futures cooperatively.

Key findings

The paper presents findings on the transformation towards a renewable energy based future as well as towards the liveability and economic viability of city centers, based on two futures research projects (ENCORE and Neo-Carbon Energy). The horizon scanning phases of these foresight projects focused on futures images, emerging issues, and weak signals, illustrative of approaches of peer-to-peer, renewable energy and/or ecological awareness. Described then as case studies, those of ENCORE were organized around three core themes that influence the liveability of an urban environment:

- 1) meaningful environment,
- 2) grassroots approaches, and

3) hybrid spaces.

Many cases could have fitted more than one of these three intertwining themes. To conclude, a conceptual model of anticipatory hybrid governance was presented with a view to potential benefits, limitations, and outlined certain open questions.

Systemic use of holistic foresight knowledge is critical for understanding emerging urban futures. The scanning of weak signals allows a detection of early signs of possible changes that may carry even long-term impacts for urban transition. Even if future-oriented planning will always have 'unknown unknowns' as an ultimate aim to explore, it is worthy to be aware of the 'known knowns' and 'known unknowns', too. In this case, cross-fertilisation between the two different foresight efforts was needed for many reasons.

Anticipation requires future-orientation, with a capacity to act. So far, when urban governance has anticipated trends and variables, it has struggled in designing for the future to mitigate potential conflicts. The proposed model opens aspirational alternatives and aids urban governance to reinvent itself.

References

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