

Vibeke Nenseth: Planning for Urban Sustainability **- Knowledge Hegemony and Dilemmas**

Abstract

Urban planning has a long history of mainly being preoccupied with the physical aspects of the urban development – with land use and the built urban environment. As a concept and activity ‘planning’ is content-neutral, in lexical terms, as an ‘act or process of making a plan to achieve or do something’. Yet, urban planning has conventionally been dominated by - or reduced to - land use planning, both when it comes to urban planner’s education and profession and in the institutional and legislative framework. Even if this duplicity has long historical roots and (some) reasonable explanations, a certain knowledge hegemony in urban planning of physically trained planners, architects and engineers, still seems to have a strong hold. That is even more questionable since the policy field of urban sustainability has changed considerably, not least after the multidimensional sustainability concept was launched three decades ago. New perspectives and methods coping with the urban complexity have thus increasingly been in demand.

By approaching urban planners and professionals in the Norwegian context we investigate the prevailing views and considerations on urbanization, knowledge claims and policy instrument for urban sustainability. We find a strong beneficial view on urbanization more as a solution than a problem, and a strong support of planning as a policy instrument, both land use and societal planning. The urban policy arena is diversely populated, particularly by many social scientists, especially by the younger, and across sectors - public administration, business, NGOs and in research. There are strong views on a too dominant physical technical knowledge hegemony in the field. At the same time, main sustainability perspectives such as a claim for more integrative knowledge and policy approaches are also strong. This increased and accepted diversity among urban professionals along with the strong hold for knowledge and policy integration seems to be a bit in contrast to the still dominant physical planning tradition in the planning institutional and legislative framework. Or maybe this tension introduces a certain urban policy and planning paradigm shift – and that the since long claimed “argumentative turn in planning and policy analysis” finally has come to implementation.

