



## **Planning in Interplace: On Transformation of Stigmatized and Ethnically Segregated Suburban Metropolitan Housing Areas**

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LIFE IN THE  
URBAN LANDSCAPE

## Title of paper

Planning in Interplace: On Transformation of Stigmatized and Ethnically Segregated Suburban Metropolitan Housing Areas

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## **Planning in Interplace: On Transformation of Stigmatized and Ethnically Segregated Suburban Metropolitan Housing Areas**

Suburban metropolitan areas in Sweden built in the fifties, sixties and seventies are often considered exposed areas and consequently involved in interventions aimed at dealing with problems such as unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. This paper, which is built on the results from a thesis within the field of planning and sustainable development (Stenberg 2004b), focuses on how urban planning is related to this social problem.

### **Background**

The serious and extensive problems with unemployment and poverty that are now visible in many stigmatized suburban areas in Sweden are relatively recent ones. During the period from 1945 to the end of 1970, about one million immigrants – when emigration is not considered – came to Sweden (Lund and Ohlsson 1999), most of them as labourers, sought after by industry and commerce. Many of these immigrants settled, together with Swedish workers from the city centre or the countryside, in suburban areas surrounding the three mayor metropolitan cities, which were built in the fifties, sixties and seventies to solve the widespread housing shortage in the country.

In the fifties, the planning procedure, and the architecture, was still quite reasonable if related to the speed of construction, which resulted in a physical environment that most people seemed to appreciate. However, in the sixties and seventies, the situation, for different reasons, turned into a frenetic rush. In a country with a total of about four million flats in apartment buildings and detached houses, the Swedish Government, in 1965, decided to build one million flats within ten years (Hall 1999). This vision was also fulfilled – the number of flats built yearly was as high as 110 000 during a certain phase – resulting in a physical environment that has been criticized as monotonous architecture thrown out onto a desolated landscape, although these areas are also appreciated, certainly now when they have become established, for being functional and pleasant to live in.

Before the eighties, the inhabitants in these areas, although ethnically segregated, did not suffer from unemployment – the number of gainfully employed was high, and consequently, the social allowance was low. Immigration increased during the period from 1980 to 1997 and approximately 700 000 immigrants – when emigration is not considered – came to Sweden. At this point in time, however, the immigrant movements had changed, entailing that most of the immigrants were now political refugees or relatives of refugees.

At the same time, during 1990-1993, Sweden suffered from a severe economic crisis and the country, which in the beginning of the eighties was considered one of the most equal

countries in the world with regard to income, in the end of the nineties, had ended up with an income differentiation equivalent to that at the beginning of the seventies. Additionally, and as a probable consequence of this development, Sweden has shifted, as has e.g. Britain, to policies stressing selective methods rather than general measures to solve social problems (Lindberg 1999).

Sweden in fact, during the latter part of the nineties, had ended up in a position as the most segregated OECD country, insofar as the most exposed housing areas in Sweden had the highest share of immigrants in comparison to all other OECD countries (Swedish Government 1998). Also the UN Association of Sweden highlighted the problematic situation. In one report, they criticized the Swedish Government for depicting the situation in Sweden in idealized terms when reporting to the UN Human Rights Committees, and concluded in their alternative report that there existed serious problems with racism due to hidden structural and institutional discrimination within the Swedish systems (UN Association of Sweden 2004).

During the same time period as described above, there was another kind of change taking place that is closely related to the field of planning – the vision of sustainable development. This movement was initiated with the UN environmental conference in Sweden in 1972, however, the well-known definition of the concept was later formulated by the so-called Brundtland Commission (WCED 1987). From an overall perspective, the aim of the notion may be considered as quite clear and it was, therefore, easy for all countries to share the vision. It was the present environmental threats, on the one hand, and material and social poverty, on the other, that constituted the need for a vision of a better world for all people – thus, it once started out as a marriage between two large societal movements: the economic development movement and the environmental protection movement (Meadowcroft 1999). Representatives of these two movements gathered at the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro 1992 and agreed upon a vision of planning for sustainable development entailing a communicative turn with local partnerships that should include not only the local professionals but also the citizens (UNCED 1992).

In Sweden the effort to implement Agenda 21 at the Municipal level progressed at full speed soon after the Rio conference. Ten years later the Johannesburg conference resulted in twelve propositions for further work on sustainable development. The Swedish Government proposed, e.g., the establishment of an independent national forum for Agenda 21 and Habitat as well as the broadening of physical planning procedures to also include issues of ethnic and economic integration (SOU 2003).

For the thesis on which this paper has been built, the proposition described above – to broaden physical planning procedures to also include issues of ethnic and economic integration in order to promote sustainable development – actually highlights the kind of interest I have in this complex of problems: *How can architects and planners, in their professional roles, contribute to such a development and what are the prerequisites for this development to take place?*

## Purpose and Research Questions

With such a broad perspective for planning, it is obvious that the two extensive research fields of segregation and social exclusion, on the one hand, and planning and sustainable development, on the other, need to be amalgamated. Summing up the conclusions from such a literature review (Stenberg 2004b), there are some points of particular interest:

- even if communicative planning has been approved of from the national policy level, very few research projects seem to have investigated the implications of such a development at the local level in mass housing areas from the fifties, sixties and seventies;
- research focusing on the local level seems to have difficulties relating to the broad definition of sustainable development, which may have resulted in a lack of further development of its definition;
- there seems to be a general lack of including power aspects in research on planning and sustainable development, and it certainly seem essential to also include the expert role of the planner in such studies;
- there is a lack of deep-going analyses of temporal aspects and the relationship to the social problems of the housing areas in focus;
- there may be a lack of explicit knowledge of how to understand theories and approaches concerning organizational learning in the context of stigmatized suburban areas of metropolitan areas;
- there is far more research knowledge about how society thinks about the suburban area than the contrary, i.e. how the inhabitants think about the society, including their suburban area;
- the results from research on segregation and social exclusion do not seem to self-evidently diffuse into the fields of planning;
- those studies including the role of those locally employed at the municipal or city district level often find reason to criticize how they have understood their assignments – in terms of relating them to national policies;
- consequently, if we are to take an interest in how research on social exclusion and planning for sustainable development make sense in suburban areas from the fifties, sixties and seventies, it would seem very important to focus on the group of locally employed individuals.

Altogether, this has been my reason for taking a special interest in the professionals, i.e. civil servants, local politicians and employed in public and private housing companies, who are active at the local level where people live their everyday lives. As a consequence of this choice, the research question was formulated as follows: *What are the roles of the locally employed in stigmatized suburban metropolitan areas; how do their roles relate to national policies on social inclusion and sustainable development; and how do their roles relate to the needs and opinions of the citizens?*

The purpose of the research is manifold and concerns different fields. For the field of planning, i.e. experts at city planning offices or local Agenda 21 offices, the research

project may lead to further understanding of how to include inhabitants from stigmatized suburban areas in planning procedures aimed at sustainable development.

## Research Methodology

Research within the realm of architecture and planning is not characterized by a coherent research tradition wherein there is an obvious choice of research methodology and methods, which is a natural consequence of the realm being cross disciplinary and including aesthetic aspects as well as, e.g., technical, social, institutional and economic aspects. As a result, research in the realm of architecture and planning has a tradition of approaching problems both from a natural science and social science perspective, though to what degree one dominates over the other depends on the research problem. With sustainable development the emphasis on the need for a broad perspective has been highlighted even more, additionally underscoring the importance of focusing not only on products and projects but also on processes, and has accentuated the value of including institutional aspects. This research project has been designed inspired by ›critical realism‹ (Bhaskar 1978; Danermark et al. 2002), an approach, or metatheory, that highlights reality as being composed of three ›ontological domains‹ – the empirical domain containing what we encounter, directly or indirectly; the actual domain being what actually happens independent of our observations; and the real domain consisting of the mechanisms that are producing the events. In short, ›critical realism‹ may be considered to be built on realism in the way it brings into play ›transfactual argumentation‹ – which corresponds to the experiment in natural sciences (senses and reason) – and built on relativism in the way it is of special concern to the ›ontological gap‹ – highlighting theory and language (interpretation and social understanding) to constitute indirect relations between the domains.

## The Case Study

The empirical material used in the thesis comprises part of an evaluation of a national funding programme in Sweden called Local Development Agreements (Swedish Government 1998), aiming at social inclusion and sustainable development. I was involved in commissioned research on a half-time basis with the evaluation of the intervention for a period of two and a half years – involved in two different research groups in Göteborg, evaluating the theme of safety, on the one hand, and the theme of democracy, on the other hand (Stenberg 2004a; Schulz et al. 2004; Andersson et al. 2004). Other research groups were also involved to evaluate other themes such as employment and school results.

The evaluation was for my part designed as a regular ›case study‹ (Yin 1994; 2000) and implied encompassing the local activities in one of the assigned city districts – an area in Göteborg built in the fifties and sixties with 4 500 inhabitants born in about hundred different countries – where the Local Development Agreements amounted to SEK 45,8 million during four years. The empirical material in the case study consists of information from multiple sources such as documents, archival files, direct observation, participant-observation and qualitative interviews – with equal focus on the realm of the inhabitants

and the realm of the employees. Apart from following projects in which inhabitants and employees were participating, the local process of decision-making concerning the funding programme was covered. The results from the two evaluations are unfortunately too extensive to present here, although in an overall perspective – and related to the main aim of the funding programme – there is reason to be alarmed about the poor results (Stenberg 2004b: 73-84).

## **Theoretical Framework and Empirical Findings**

The empirical material was analysed using a theoretical framework based on three themes: time, power and learning. The reason to why these three themes in particular have been chosen for the analysis is mainly based on considerations expressed in the literature review on previous research, although the impression of these three themes as being essential has also been reinforced throughout the evaluation of the national funding programme. A number of concepts related to each of the three theoretical themes were found, defined and applied when analysing the empirical material. The analysis procedure implied a systematic examination of every statement coupled to each concept, within one of the theoretical themes at a time, comparing them to the descriptions in the theoretical review. What did the informants say about, e.g., >theory-in-use< and how did this relate to the theoretical discussions on >theory-in-use<? Thus the analysis moved back and forth, from data to theory, aiming at a better understanding of similarities and dissimilarities. The analysis resulted in a story, or actually three stories that follow each of the theoretical chapters, concerning how the concepts of time, power and learning, respectively, were perceived in practice by the inhabitants and the locally employed.

Analysing the empirical material from the point of view of TIME resulted in three major conclusions. First, there was a discussion on fragmentation of time implying that time ceases to exist as duration (Hylland Eriksen 2001). In practice fragmentation of time was found to occur not only as a result of the extremely fast increase in the release of information in society, but there were also problems with slowness – laws, rules, traditions, thoughts, biases, and procedures in society changing too slowly to meet the needs of the inhabitants. Thus, slowness, not only fastness, may cause fragmentation of time. The second aspect discussed was the apparent emphasis on the economic-technical system at the expense of time rhythms in biologic, mental and social systems (Heintel 1999; Haunschild 2001), which seems to have resulted in difficulties in endorsing solutions to problems such as ethnic housing segregation – the local employees, e.g., focusing only on unemployment and not on housing segregation when discussing social exclusion in society. Third, the apparent function of time used for exercising power (Andersson 1985) was highlighted and criticized – expressed by local employees distressed over governmental and municipal use of time for control and by inhabitants suffering from time abuse perpetrated by the locally employed.

The analysis on POWER aspects resulted in an awareness of the ›rationalities‹ (Flyvbjerg 1998; Lapintie 2002; Lapintie 2003; Foucault 1982) of the local employees when implementing the funding programme – most often quite explicable activities from the point of view of the context of a given actor. Additionally, the analysis resulted in the exposure of ›black boxes‹ (Callon and Latour 1981), which were found to be under reconsideration due to ›micro-actors‹ finding reason to oppose them. Further discussed was the question of whether such a result – ›micro-actors‹ opposing ›black boxes‹ – would actually be a reasonable objective for a national funding programme stressing the bottom-up perspective, hence, helping ›micro-actors‹ to reconsider certain ›black boxes‹ used by ›macro-actors‹ such as the City District Administration and the City District Committee as prerequisite for their accomplishments. This would seem to be a fairly reasonable bottom-up perspective, as the thoughts, habits, forces and objects that are sealed in ›black boxes‹ must be made to contribute to a better life for the inhabitants in the so-called exposed suburban housing areas – it was, after all, for them, and not the local employees, that the national funding programme actually came into being. In relation to these findings, it was also discussed how the analysis of power aspects actually kindled an awareness of the call for inhabitants to take the role of ›micro-actor‹ in reconsidering ›black boxes‹, as the inhabitants seemed to be the only people who could understand when a ›black box‹ impeded their progress – whereas local employees such as civil servants, politicians and housing company employees seemed to be prisoners in their own contexts.

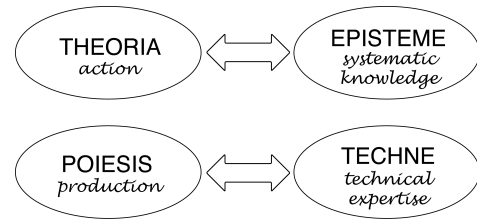
Analysing the empirical material from the perspective of LEARNING (Easterby-Smith, Burgoyne and Araujo 1999; Easterby-Smith and Lyles 2003) highlighted the potential of focusing on situations in which a ›rationality‹ within a ›black box‹ was being attacked by a ›micro-actor‹, or in which an actor seemed eager to keep a ›black box‹ sealed. This is because, in such situations, when power was exercised by an action upon an action (Argyris and Schön 1995), there followed an opportunity to reveal ›triggers for learning‹ (Krogstrup 1997 drawing on; Ranson and Stewart 1994) that could facilitate ›double-loop learning‹ (Argyris and Schön 1995). As a consequence of employing such a focus when analysing the empirical material, it became obvious that civil servants and politicians found it difficult to make use of the funding programme in such a way. Reactions from non-governmental organizations and from inhabitants' projects, which had the potential of being developed into ›triggers for learning‹, were not made use of – accordingly, ›theories-in-use‹ (Argyris and Schön 1995; Schein 1996) such as ›immigrants will always benefit from adapting to other cultures and particularly to the Swedish culture‹ and ›housing segregation should be upheld because of the expected hostility of people born in Sweden‹ were not really challenged as a result of the Local Development Agreements. Therefore discussed in the chapter on learning was the question of whether responsibility for the funding programme should actually have been placed upon another actor.

The analysis on learning gave reason to discuss a so-called third world – in different approaches labelled e.g. ›aesthetic of locus‹ (Bech-Danielsen 1998); ›phronetic organization research‹ (Flyvbjerg 2003); or ›interplace‹ (Forsén and Fryk 1999) – a world which has





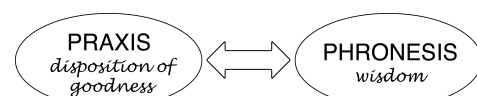
often been highlighted in theoretical framework on planning and urban development as improving the potential to bridge over, or to achieve an understanding between, two worlds named e.g. ›space and place‹; ›abstract and concrete‹; ›scientific knowledge and technical know how‹. A difficulty, however, was the lack of stringency concerning the definitions of the concepts when discussed in different approaches, e.g. human activity and knowledge were often intertwined in a way that complicated the understanding. Still, except for some differences, it seems to be possible to understand the two worlds presented in many of these approaches by using the Aristotelian terminology on learning: ›action‹ (theoria) being related to ›systematic knowledge‹ (episteme), and ›production‹ (poiesis) relating to ›technical expertise‹ (techne).



Aristotelian concepts of human activities and knowledge (Aristotle 2002: p. 178-179, Book VI, 1139b20-1140a15).

As is obvious in Aristotelian quotations, the distinction between ›systematic knowledge‹ (episteme) and ›technical expertise‹ (techne) has nothing to do with the difference between theory and practice. It is instead apparent that also the concept of ›technical expertise‹ (techne) is the result of thinking and theorizing, only it aims at being prepared to produce something, rather than at being ready to act. With this in mind it may be better not to use the concept ›scientific knowledge‹ for episteme, as does Flyvbjerg (drawing on another translation of the Nicomachean Ethics), as it may result in the erroneous conclusion that episteme is produced only in the realm of academic research. To clarify, the significant difference between the notions is that ›action‹ (theoria) relates to ›systematic knowledge‹ (episteme), which is eternal and we know cannot be otherwise; while ›production‹ (poiesis) relates to ›technical expertise‹ (techne), which is knowledge only in an incidental sense.

Further, the question is whether the earlier mentioned third world may also be understood by using the Aristotelian terminology of learning: ›disposition of goodness‹ (praxis) relating to ›wisdom‹ (phronesis). This situation, however, turns out to be more complicated. Even if it seems obvious that all of the approaches are discussing learning as a self-evident strategy for achieving understanding between the two worlds of ›space and place‹; ›abstract and concrete‹; etc., not all of them discuss what sort of human activity precedes the learning process, or the kind of knowledge resulting from the learning process. The activities and the knowledge may of course be considered to be present anyway, however, these are not often explicitly discussed and examined. Actually, this third world is instead often discussed in spatial terms. Maybe this last-mentioned deficiency – not discussing the kind of action that precedes the learning process – is the most problematic, as it is quite complicated to understand what kind of activity the Aristotelian notion of praxis implies in reality.



Aristotelian concepts of human activities and knowledge (Aristotle 2002: p. 179-180, Book VI, 1140a25-1140b20).

What Aristotle stressed was that ›wisdom‹ (phronesis) is neither ›systematic knowledge‹ (episteme) nor ›technical expertise‹ (techne) – ›wisdom‹ (phronesis) is closely related to ›a capability of human beings to form a clear view of what is good for themselves and what is good for human beings in general‹. Consequently, the notion of ›praxis‹ must be equivalent to this ›capability or disposition of goodness‹. Still, ›wisdom‹ (phronesis) may also be considered an amalgamation of ›systematic knowledge‹ (episteme) and ›technical expertise‹ (techne) (Aristotle 2002: p. 180, Book VI, 1140b20). What is important, though, is that ›wisdom‹ (phronesis) must not be considered to be related *only* to this amalgamation – as ›wisdom‹ (phronesis) is actually primarily interconnected with the third human activity: ›disposition of goodness‹ (praxis).

To sum up, the analysis on learning ended with a discussion about this so-called third world, which was found to be perceptible in the empirical material when focusing on ›triggers for learning‹, possibly prevalent when an organization is new or when an existing organization does something they not usually accomplished, and, additionally, when there is a conflict. What this brought to light was that funding programmes may actually benefit from any project, what ever its objective may be, as long as the people responsible for the programme make sure they attend to the ›triggers for learning‹ that are to be found thanks to these new situations – accordingly, using the ›triggers for learning‹ to expose ›theories-in-use‹, primarily by revealing any ›espoused theories‹, and in an open debate examining whether or not the ›theories-in-use‹ are counterproductive to the objectives of the funding programme, in particular, and the mission of the City District Committee and its administration, in general. Thereafter, they may be ready to make decisions about measures for changing the ›theories-in-use‹ that obstruct a desired development.

Awareness of such a third world when implementing funding programmes as e.g. the Local Development Agreements aiming at social inclusion and sustainable development seem to be fruitful. In the concluding chapter, this experience will be discussed in relation to the possible benefit of the analysis for the field of planning.

## Discussion

In metropolitan cities in Sweden, the Town Planning Department is in general locally involved only if there is a specific reason, i.e., if a new area is to be built, roads are to be changed or the like. There is also another organization in which architects and planners may be employed, the City Real Estate Office. This is where the Municipality of Göteborg normally directs its assignments related to housing politics. Other municipal departments with architects and planners that may be involved in local development work concerning the physical environment are, e.g., the departments of traffic, parks and public localities. What can this extensive group of experts and related politicians learn from the research project?

When studying the physical environment in the case study area, it is not possible to tell that the people living there were born in about hundred different countries. Even if



Swedish architects and planners most often travel all over the world for inspiration, in the outdoor environment of the case study area, there does not exist a single visible element from, e.g., Turkish, Iranian, Somalian or Ethiopian architecture. The reason for this absence of foreign influence is obviously not a widespread satisfaction with the architecture, as certain parts of the environment are constantly criticized for being ugly, dysfunctional and scary. Consequently, there has been a need for improvements in the physical environment and many improvements have also been made since the area was built. However, why has the inhabitants' understanding of architecture not influenced at all the development that has taken place?

One reason is how urban design and planning is carried out in Sweden. The planning procedures are not organized so as to allow the inhabitants' understanding of reality to influence them. The planning procedures are just arranged to inform the citizens of certain plans and give them the possibility to object, although the experts are not obliged to take the objections seriously if the citizen is not considered, by the society, to be affected. The same pertains to the City District Committee – they are thus only allowed to make objections on themes for which they are formally responsible, i.e. soft questions like schools and elderly care. This means that the inhabitants may not make objections through their local politicians and civil servants to plans in their neighbourhood concerning, e.g., construction of flats. This procedure is relevant to the Town Planning Department. The procedure of the City Real Estate Office and most of the other municipal offices entails that they are only obliged to follow the normal procedure in the Municipality, thus, their plans are to be decided upon in their respective municipal committees.

Thinking of the physical environment as embodying praxis, as did e.g. Andersson in the chapter on time, may perhaps influence the fundamental values upon which the above-mentioned procedures are based. Andersson maintained that if people conform to such praxis, it is the material, and not human beings, that exercises power over a person, and therefore it is important to conduct a psychoanalysis of things if we are to visualize this often-concealed materialistic discipline of people (Andersson 1985). Also Callon and Latour thought of physical material in this way: an artefact makes it possible to act from a distance, thus the artefact may be considered as supporting the exercising of power (Callon and Latour 1981). Being interested in how to avoid conforming to such a praxis brings to light the potential of an impact in planning procedures from the so-called third world – which I have labelled a procedure implying ›an interplace-divided understanding of reality‹, or in brief: ›planning in interplace‹. Perhaps such an approach is particularly important now, as communicative planning, in the shape of local partnerships, is often considered to be a proper substitute for traditional planning procedures, even if they are obviously formed to fulfil a specific mission of the partners and often lack the voice of the citizens.

Contemporary planning presumably implies relating the experts' ›space-divided understanding of the environment‹ to the inhabitants' ›place-divided understanding of the envi-



ronment«. It is, however, more complicated than that: The expert of course may also have a ›place-divided understanding of the environment« when he or she is there experiencing what happens; and the inhabitant may have a ›space-divided understanding of the environment« when thinking of it as a system of e.g. social actors. As was discussed when presenting the results from the analysis of the empirical material from the point of view of time, power and learning, it should be more adequate to discuss contemporary planning as intentionally relating, bridge over, or reach understanding between the world of ›action« and ›systematic knowledge«, on the one hand, and the world of ›production« and ›technical expertise«, on the other hand. ›Planning in interplace« may possibly be a strategy with potential to reach such an understanding, thus implying, with the pompous words of Aristotle, human activities labelled ›disposition of goodness« and knowledge designated ›wisdom«.

Such a strategy would facilitate the development of a learning process enhancing ›double-loop learning« on themes focused on in an assignment. This, however, is of course not accomplished without efforts. In practice, ›planning in interplace« would most certainly imply more time in the local environment – investigating what may be affected by the plan; facilitating the development of an ›interplace« out of the interface between existing formal and informal institutions; visiting potential ›interplaces« that have developed naturally, such as new non-profit associations, organizations with new assignments or realms where there exist conflicts. Planning would then also include an assignment to seek out ›triggers for learning« in these environments; reveal ›theories-in-use« counterproductive to ›double-loop learning« concerning the themes in focus; and be responsible for the development of learning processes – at all levels of society – challenging such theories. As is obvious, this would not be a task for a single person, but an assignment for a whole team of planners and other professionals.

One prerequisite, however, for this vision to make a favourable contribution in planning, must be that the process discussed above be made in a democratic way. ›Planning in interplace« could actually be described as a ›traditional« local partnership, if it was not for these precautions about democracy. Subsequently, it would seem to be important to position the responsibility for ›planning in interplace«, including the subsequent development of learning processes, to an organization already responsible for planning procedures. Such an organization most likely operates within a democratic structure and is therefore probably better suited than is a private company – not leaving out any concerned parties. Consequently, ›planning in interplace« must not be considered as a substitute for traditional planning procedures, but rather as a complement.

Still, as the individuals working within the institutions of society are largely prisoners in their contexts, i.e. strongly influenced by their organizations' ›theories-in-use« that may be counterproductive to ›double-loop learning« concerning these issues, such a vision may not be easy to implement just by assigning existing organizations a new task. One should perhaps rather think of such a development in two steps: How would it be possible

to initiate a learning process within the field of planning – why not with focus on transformation of stigmatized and ethnically segregated suburban metropolitan housing areas – aimed at changing ordinary procedure such that it would include learning processes based not only on, with the Aristotelian definitions, ›systematic knowledge‹ and ›technical expertise‹, but also on ›wisdom‹? If ›planning in interplace‹ may be a potential for such a development will hopefully be challenged in future research – in close cooperation between the academic realm and planners at e.g. Town Planning Departments and City Real Estate Offices.

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