Local niche planning and its strategic implications for implementation of energy-efficient technology - DTU Orbit (19/12/2018)

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It is widely recognised that the world is facing climate challenges that necessitate transitions towards more energy-efficient buildings. A key challenge is that visions of energy efficient buildings in policies often fail to become aligned with existing local practices. In order to overcome such a gap between policy visions and their implementation in practice specific forms of strategic work is needed, according to new transformative ideas in spatial planning. The aim of this paper is to characterize the transformative capacities of this kind of strategic work at the spatial scale of the town in order to assess how such activities engage with sustainable transitions. The theoretical contribution of the paper is to compare strategic work performed in transformative forms of spatial planning with the strategic work intended in strategic niche management, which represent a change-management process for enabling transitions. The study outlines the proactive spatial planning of a Danish local authority in order to illustrate how the strategic work performed in this kind of local development project represents a special form of niche management that is able to create room for innovation and challenge existing socio-technical regimes in the building sector, but still different to typical strategic niche management processes. Based on this empirical study, the paper challenges the narrow focus on niches around technology development processes in strategic niche management by pointing towards niche planning in local development projects as another relevant context for niche management. However, as discussed in the paper, this assumes a more strategic form of planning than is often practised today, where more emphasis is put on how planning can contribute to promoting sustainable transitions.