Networks as Tools for Urban Sustainability

Due to the increasing number of networks related to sustainable development (SUD) the paper focuses on understanding in which way networks can be considered useful tools for sustainable urban development, taking particularly into consideration the networks potential of spreading innovative policies, strategies and actions. There has been little theoretically development on the subject. In practice networks for sustainable development can be seen as combining different theoretical approaches to networks, including governance, urban competition and innovation. To give a picture of the variety of sustainable networks, we present different examples of networks, operating at different geographical scales, from global to local, with different missions (organizational, political, technical), fields (lobbying, learning, branding) and its size. The potentials and challenges related to sustainable networks will be discussed through a case study of a Danish municipal network on Sustainable Development, Dogme 2000. This network has become quite successful in terms of learning and innovation, committing actors, and influencing local policies, to a larger extent than other SUD-networks the municipalities are involved in. By applying the GREMI -theories of “innovative milieux” (Aydalot, 1986; Camagni, 1991) to the case study, we will suggest some reasons for the benefits achieved by the Dogme-network, compared to other networks. This analysis will point to the existence of an “innovative milieu” on sustainability within the network, and on the political commitment in the network, where all progress is being measured and audited. From this, we find many parallels between the pre-conditions for an industrial innovative milieu, and the pre-conditions for an innovative municipally based network. Based on the analysis, we will discuss the role of networks at different scales: regional, national and local in diffusing innovative virtuous practices and in adapting it to new context.