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## **”Over and over again”: iterative method and ancient resource management shaping new collaborative sustain-ability.**

### **Introduction**

Intro A: Can Urban Planning Be Sustainable?

“Sustainable Urban Development” has on the one hand been described as an “empty signifier” (Gunder & Hillier 2011) with multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings. On the other hand, it has to be taken seriously, to respect all projects, processes and points of departure, that have tried to realize the concept. To a large extent, the problems have been put in the lap of ‘urban planning’; maybe without either evidence or hypotheses for that this is reasonable and founded enough. Environmental historians (Warde 2011, Mukherjee 2013, Pisari 2007, Jørgensen 2012) have shown forestry, agriculture and urban management as other relevant genres; for ages practicing what recently has been called “aiming for sustainability”.

What do they mean? Neither agriculture (nutrient leakage, fertilizers and pesticides) nor forestry (pesticides and diminishing biodiversity) have so far found sustainable enough methods; thus it is not as contemporary land use alternatives these are claimed as raw models for development of human habitats. Nevertheless, some valuable aspects can be brought from pre-industrial ways of property management; partly deriving from ancient times; referring to a cyclical resource management within spatial limitations and the ethical implications for carrying this through, e. g. the virtue of thrift and “to eat within thy tecture” (Warde 2011, quoting John Fitzherbert in Boke of Husbandry from 1523).

Environmental economist Michael Redclift claims two currents to characterise the interface between human aspiration and the mastery of nature; “the economisation of society and the socialisation of nature”; and that these two currents raise ethical, distributive and ‘rights’

issues. “The discussion of both processes leads us towards a redefinition of citizenship itself.” (Redclift 2002:3).

Urban planning, although different in different countries, with different laws and history, seems to have some basics in common; on the one hand a ‘holistic’ (usually following the borders of a municipality, but not always legally binding) ‘zoning -’ or land use policy, within the activities of a more or less continual comprehensive planning, and on the other hand the development planning, followed by a building permit, as a more technical procedure, with legally binding decisions. There are regulations from national and regional levels, executed on the municipal level. Taking Sweden as an example, the plan- and building law states that the purpose of planning is to get land use decisions with the best long term resource management, and that in a deliberation between public and private interests, the public good should have precedence (SFS 2010:900, chapter 2 §2). “Sustainability” could from this statement be said to underline the Swedish planning and building legislation. However, what and how to conceive of “best long term resource management” and “the public good” has differed historically, according to leading political paradigm. Currently, “new public management” tries to level out all differences between private enterprise and public administration (of which urban planning is a part). Therefore, it is even harder now, to see the differences between public and private interests. No one, except from the politicians, is supposed to take responsibility for (e.g. spread knowledge about) anything but their specifically ordered tasks. The politicians, also at local level, are, on the other hand, not structurally entitled to achieve long term plans, policies and decisions. This must be claimed from law and authorities but also carried through by confident leaders and engaged citizens. In times with big changes and global threats, it is hard for anyone to keep track of a journey, let alone to decide the destination. “Sustainability” as a concept (and “empty signifier”) risks to be hi-jacked by populist politics with agendas far from the Brundtland commission’s statement in 1987, and

certainly light years from the ethical resource management stated all through historic times. Professional planners are not and will not be able to change this structural order.

Intro B: Can Public Administration Be Sustainable?

In spite of all efforts; more than anything else we have stayed in our silos of thinking (e. g. the practices of urban planning, transport infrastructure, social care, economic development and the academic disciplines) figuring out how to contribute to (and how to gain from...) the “new” paradigm of sustainability. Lists of criteria have been formulated, useful only to check that the already known has been included; they do not help to reveal new aspects, the not-yet-discovered and possible new tracks for action.

The lists of criteria are not even in common. Just as private companies have their own lists; public administrations, separated in different tasks and areas of responsibility, have their different lists and according ideas of how to work for increased sustainability, not as a common challenge (in e. g. a municipality), but as different challenges within urban planning, social services, park management, traffic administration, sports administration, environmental protection, municipal finances, property management etc. Until recently, it has been more or less a common agreement, or belief, that the division of labour, despite its shortages, is the most effective way to organise a society. Referring back to Redclift 2002 (see above) we have however also, without discussion (and perhaps subconscious) supported the two currents “the economisation of society and the socialisation of nature”. Division of labour is rational and effective in manufacturing, but maybe not in performing public services? The “solution” to turn public services into private or private-public companies is frequently tested today, but they tend to miss the goal, to perform *public services*.

Public services are partly about to provide welfare to citizens, but also to accumulate knowledge and methods as well as implementing them, about the common urban landscapes, the new human habitat; to localize buildings, infra structure, services and green areas in

accurate ways, to accomplish sustainable cities. These basic issues cannot be solved solely by planning departments with the first duty to smooth the way for new building projects. Ways of cooperation between the silos within public administrations have to be encouraged, discovered and strengthened, if the urban landscape should ever be a more liveable human habitat and contain a sustainable way of living. It may be that in this case it is sensible to take a look at the *smaller* public administrations, such as in small municipalities, villages or small towns. The likelihood for collaboration between societal sectors is inversely proportional to the size of the administration. In a small administration there is a common interest to find effective ways to solve the site specific issues, not always according to general best practice models or economical administration research, but related to existing resources, motivation and capability of performers and directed to both actual challenges and future goals (Mellqvist 2013). From this perspective, it is strange and even contra productive, to keep full focus only on metropolis, to find sustainable modus operandi. The fact that migration flows show an increased concentration to the already overheated urban regions, does not mean that the answers to the increased challenges lie within the same spatial borderlines. Methods and organisational models can be transferred, but this will need a capacity for abstractions; to think between, around and above existing spatio-materialities and seek for innovations in more unforeseen places.

Intro C: How to Merge the General and the Specific?

“Site specific”, being a concept used not only in architecture, design and planning, but also a common ground for “case studies” in several disciplines, it bears the potential to bridge over widest thinkable distances between disciplines and sectors; also between “the two cultures” (Snow 1959), elaborated on in e. g. “cultural planning” and “performance arts”. In site specific work, it might be possible to “switch cognitive gears” (Louis & Sutton 1991), from automatic processing (“habits-of-mind”) to active engagement and back again.

While nobody would deny the importance of being site specific in a case study, it is also true that quite some seminal works on case studies (Flyvbjerg 1998, Flyvbjerg 2007) focus on disciplinary methodology and power relations. Being indisputably necessary, such a focus can however also wipe away other aspects from sight; in this text it is assumed that some of these aspects can be crucial and contribute to collaboration and co-creativity<sup>1</sup>.

To be able to have “site specific spatialities and materialities” as a point of departure for enhancing research and innovation for sustainable urban development, it is certainly just as necessary to use techniques of “meta-levelling”, as well as a habit of “up-and-down-scaling”, not just in space, but also in time (much of this thinking is founded in the works of Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, see e. g. Hägerstrand 2009). In short, this means to search for means to assemblage differences (in knowledge cultures, opinions or ambitions etc.) into entities, as well as being able to deconstruct complexes (such as inert municipal organization or planning procedure) in need to be understood by its (possibly more potent) parts. As an example, we can use the very concept of sustainability (S). If we use S in conversation, as if we have the same meanings in mind (which very rarely is the case) we have little ability to reach creative results. If we create a meta-level (e. g. problematize our uses and agree on using *other* words or on *how* to talk about S) we will (hypothetically) be more in reach of each other’s knowledge and experience.

Projects/experiments are certainly needed, as test beds for co-creative methodology, common language and representation development, common problematisation, analysis and synthesis. The localisation of test bed projects will be crucial, the communisation plausibly built not only on common idea production and conceptualization, but also, and maybe even more important, on common experiences (e. g. site walks, site reading, site

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<sup>1</sup> When Bruno Latour claims a shift (or rather a widening) in thinking from “matters of fact” to “matters of concern” (Latour 2005:19) it is not just about shifting from the general to the contextual, but also a reminder of that what matters is different in different situations, not only due to context, but also to different subjects as well as things with different meanings.

mapping) and a site related contextualization. It is to be understood that collaboration implies willingness of innovations to appear during the work, not just as wrapped-up parcels of new “best practice”, but also as new insights, critique and ideas (which need time for further investigation and development). The ideal experiment will also help to spread not only risks but also responsibilities, between sectors and professions, the public and the private, the elected and the citizens, experts and users. The ideal case would also weave together urban zones and districts and consider resource allocation.

Intro concluded

Three questions have been used, to show some examples of how our habits-of-mind tend to take things (be it organisational paradigms, research methods or the everyday) for granted. In curiosity driven science, this is most often all for good and saves energy and thinking capacity for the new discoveries. In research and innovation work concerning sustainable development however, this is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to take anything for granted, in a situation calling for doing things differently. In this situation we know that we need to do things differently, but we do not know what to change and we have a hardship with prioritising. To reveal needs-for-change of significant aspects, processes, routines, resource management and allocation, we have to question the supposed familiar; to see what we use to frame out, to discover turning points, to create alternatives; and we have to do this in *collaboration*, not to create only new side- and sub-categories of disciplines and sectors. (To change existing knowledge practices, related to sustainable urban development, cannot be accomplished only by adding new specialists, but also by paradigm shifts within existing knowledge practices.)

This paper suggests *conceptualization and contextualization of site specific social, spatial and material properties* as common ground for building new, appropriate knowledge conglomerates, in a co-creative mode, linking both to own well known and to new ground, shaping new research and innovation cultures. Chemetoff’s “plan guide d’Ile de Nantes” (see

below and Diedrich & Dahl 2016) and a follow-up site specific project (Diedrich, Kahn & Lindholm 2016) have been used as spring boards for shaping a co-creative argument, by using the spatial conglomerates, “the landscape”, as ground for the becoming, by means of singularities as well as infra structures and contextual change, zooming between scales and between temporal imaginations.

### **Base camp: First-hand experience to challenge internalized disciplinary and sectorial ideas**

When Warde (2011) relates the origins of sustainability to 17<sup>th</sup> century German handbooks in property management, this is certainly not only a matter of etymological roots. It is near to ridiculously self-evident that every property owner – as long as he/she should live on the production of that same property – would try to manage for sustainability, including import-export-accounts of resources of most different kind; water, manure, materials, crops etc. To point to this reference is not to suggest that we all go farming again. But it wants to point to an “attitude of sustainability” that might be necessary to instate in new ways when the human habitat has become urban. *Why* we do things, be it in local or global scale, is today most often a matter of internalized disciplinary ideas, formed within special academic or professional cultures, and not founded in well-trying (own) experience. This is maybe where current urban experiments meet with old-time property management – *first-hand experience* is needed, both for the feeling of responsibility, for the urge to take part, but most of all, for the distribution of first-hand knowledge as a base for collaboration.

A wise use of land, in a dense city, is essential for sustainable development. The property rights are divided between public authorities and private land owners, a simple fact with consequences. *Planning* is not enough to ensure good localizations and the best conditions for public space. The continuous *management* (with maintenance, small adjustments, and ongoing dialogue with inhabitants) is as important for urban development as is the planning

processes behind new buildings and districts. *Design* is needed, not as formal “style”, but as a mode of synthesizing and to get sensible (in all meanings) results from playing together.

### **Points of departure 1: Learning from integrative thinking**

Disciplinary, analytical thinking is maybe the one factor contributing most to humankind’s technical development and increased individual lifetime, and is still extremely successful in both science and business. This had apparently only positive effects, as long as we did not conceptualize the limits of resources on a global level and it has fostered our understanding of rationality and effectiveness, to an extent where we have obvious difficulties to think in other directions. Synthetic thinking is – so far – mostly connected to the arts and humanities, which nowadays have few connection points to science and technology. There are however both ancient and current ways of integrative thinking worth trying, to boost recent trends of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary work. The idea behind is that collaboration tied only to relatively short, resource-limited and solution-oriented projects (the state-of-the-art for most sustainability work as I understand it), will have difficulties to sustain and develop, without some more sustainable (sigh!) theoretical generalities, possible to take further in other projects. For the purpose of integrative thinking, I want to present some scholars, whose advice could be useful: Charles Saunders Peirce, (American philosopher, logician, mathematician, and scientist, 1839-1914, who is sometimes known as "the father of pragmatism"), Robin George Collingwood (British philosopher, 1889-1943, a classic within history of ideas) and Torsten Hägerstrand (Swedish geographer, 1916-2002, most famous for his diagrammatic works on time-geography)<sup>2</sup>.

#### **C. S. Peirce**

Peirce’s triadic “theory of signs” helps to put significances as media between materialities and their representations (signs). He recognizes that before something gets its representation (sign,

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<sup>2</sup> I consider it a pity that it is much easier to find men than women on “the scene of integrative thinking”; particularly since women frequently (to my experience) think in integrative ways; but this is another story!

symbol, map or visualization) it has to be a concept in someone's mind (fig 1 a). Furthermore, Peirce recognizes our ability and tendency to 'materialize' representations, (so that the sign becomes a new object, which is conceptualized and signified, a new "first", see fig 1 b). In striving for co-creativity, Peirce's thinking is a reminder of the difference between object, concept and representation, in order to clarify the meanings in e. g. a group conversation on sustainable urban development.

#### R. G. Collingwood

In one of his most influential books, "The Idea of Nature" (1945), he reminds us, in an eloquent way, that no idea of nature, based on (natural) science, can be fully understood without also be looked upon as an event in history (the idea always being connected to a sequence of observations specified in time and space). In striving for co-creativity, it might be useful to bridge between single observations and broad interpretations, instead of the more common avoidance of 'contagious thoughts', while drilling deeper and deeper into holes of the unknown, just to connect them to individual/disciplinary contained bodies of thought.

#### T. Hägerstrand

Hägerstrand was early taking the raising awareness of the global threats into the geographical discourses (in the 1960ies and -70ies). (He resentfully had to experience the dividing of his subject into 'natural geography' and 'social geography', a situation wherein no adequate overview of the conditions for human life could ever appear, to his understanding.) Even if his diagrams with trajectories (movements in space and time) became Hägerstrand's most famous legacy, his way of labelling his discoveries with new words are equally valuable; for what they reveal about the matter of things and relationships in time and space<sup>3</sup>, but also for their characteristic everyday way of synthesizing matter and meaning. He describes how the term "environment" is inadequate, since it excludes people from themselves. He aspires for an "all-

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, most of his texts are in Swedish, although he was part of many international research societies.

ecology”, without a distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’, or between ‘biological’ and ‘artificial’. The “all-ecology” as an integrative thinking mode is probably useful when elaborating on sustainable urban development. It is all too obvious that we fail in understanding e.g. water flows as a connected system (not as pipe-structure technology within and hydrology outside the urban realm) or mobility as something much more complex than infrastructural affordances.

### **Point of departure 2: Alexandre Chemetoff and the development of Ile de Nantes – a seminal case to take further**

The year 2000 French landscape architect Alexandre Chemetoff got the assignment from the city of Nantes (in Northern France) to suggest how to transform industrialized harbour island, Ile de Nantes, in the middle of river Loire, which in turn divides the city of Nantes in two parts<sup>4</sup>. Along with the de-industrialization and the re-location of the harbour the island had been abandoned and deteriorated. Between 2000 and 2010 Chemetoff worked on proposals for re-designing and re-use of buildings and areas on the island – with a method he labelled “plan-guide”. Instead of a usual masterplan (a fixed picture of a future vision) the plan-guide shows an urban landscape development process, being sometimes to enhance public space, sometimes to shift uses of old buildings, sometimes to connect parts with new structure, sometimes (and somewhere) just to keep up maintenance. The work was carried out both future-oriented (with visionary sketches) and as careful studies of the existing, both as particularities and as a whole. “The whole” was surveyed over and over again, quarterly, to observe new qualities, to find ideas for new uses, new connections and new developments. He worked as a designer but not with “a final design”, he worked in connection with planning authorities, but independently with the site, building knowledge, making liveable space, designing for the future (see figure 2).

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<sup>4</sup> Much more thorough descriptions of the preconditions, context and agreements around this case can be read in Aguera 2014 and Diedrich&Dahl 2016.

### **Point of departure 3: The recognition of “landscape” as common ground; everyday experience as base for sustainable urban development**

The “everyday” perspective is not unusual in planning related research literature, mostly as a way of understanding what the surroundings, the physical, spatial and social conditions mean to individuals and groups. Here is raised another angle – the landscape as resource. Every one of us makes a synthesis of the surroundings within reach for the senses, at every step, in every fraction of a second. We are just occasionally aware of it. On the contrary (as pointed out in Hägerstrand 2009:38), we filter out most of what we are used to experience on an everyday basis<sup>5</sup>, ready to observe changes.

The environment is necessarily different for each and one of us. What if this ability was taken more seriously and the experienced landscape was made use of? Not only should a myriad of observations be available for analyses and synthesis, the individual experience could also act as foundation for transdisciplinary research. Liberated from professional cultures, observations of urban landscape might actuate new questions, new arguments, new coalitions and new visions. Actually, this possibility is (even if not accentuated) imbued in the European Landscape Convention<sup>6</sup> (Council of Europe 2002), stating that “the landscape is a common asset and a common responsibility...//...we often have to negotiate how resources in the landscape should be used and developed...//...a close collaboration between authorities, organisations, companies and individuals is needed, for the multiplicity of values in the landscape to be handled in a sustainable way”<sup>7</sup>. An obvious problem, when it comes to making reality of these aims, is to communicate in clear and reasonable ways around all the different experiences and values related to each one’s biography, partly not conceptualized and linked to what is at stake in actual landscape change (be it a new development, infra-

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<sup>5</sup> Hägerstrand calls this phenomenon ”avfjärande” in Swedish, a word not easy to translate, I will here use ”framing out” as synonymous, as it is far from alienation; on the contrary, it is the most well-known that “disappear”.

<sup>6</sup> The ELC has since 2002 been ratified by 38 (80%) of the European nations (meaning that their governments have signed a contract to implement the convention according to appropriate national laws and regulations).

<sup>7</sup> From the Swedish National Board of Heritage’s program for implementation of the ELC, 2016.

structural change or plantation of new trees). The ELC does not state that nothing can be done which is not accepted by everyone, but it states that all and everyone's arguments should be considered. From an organisational point of view, this is interesting since it competes (or complements) the claims for citizens' participation in urban planning processes.

### **What could this triangulated departure provide - a way to instate co-creative acting in urban development?**

I have suggested a combination of learning from integrative thinking, using a seminal case and recognize the landscape as common ground. While the two first are rather self-evident, if yet insufficiently used, the landscape as common ground is more difficult. Is it not impossible to "catch" a landscape, scenery continuously changing, a territory only visible from distant elevation or a sequence of spaces, possible to experience just one at a time? This question is wrongly posed. It is not possible to catch a landscape, to give it a definition, boundaries and a general set of characteristics. But – it is possible to act as if the landscape is a reality and that it matters. In fact – it does. "My" urban landscape (understood as my everyday surroundings) matters to me. My neighbours' urban landscapes matters to them. Our conceptions of our surroundings overlap to such an extent that we can talk about our "common" landscape. We share a reality. It is possible to stop acting as if the human habitat is something built up by what has been seen as important in academic disciplines and professional cultures, but to use a Humboldtian curiosity and accuracy of site studies (Diedrich et al 2016), to understand the conditions, the constraints and the potential for urban development at a certain site.

### **Conclusive suggestions**

Some new opportunities for co-creativity in sustainable urban development might appear, starting with meticulous site- and landscape studies, taking on Chemetoffs site-specific method while testing opportunities for integrative thinking. This is, however, not possible in every context. The limited transparency of early planning phases and the unquestioned rights connected with private ownership (so far also the owning of urban land is included), make

necessary specific time-and-space-regulation for the urban laboratories where these ideas can be tested (figure 3 visualizes the legal conditions for urban development in Sweden). During the period 2000-2010, Chemetoff had sufficiently free hands to develop the landscape of Ile de Nantes; which sometimes included proposals for new use of old structures, sometimes new building projects, sometimes maintenance activities or occasional events. This was not done in isolation from either authorities or locals, but it was not regulated together with an ordinary planning process.

What is the difference?

One clue, it is suggested here, is to see the existing (the landscape as common ground, context and history included) and the urban vision as equally important and interrelated. Another clue is to see the urban vision as something basically cross-sectorial, trans-disciplinary and participative. A vision is not realized all at once, but through a number of actions and projects over a period of time, within which the preconditions might change more than once. Thus, there are good reasons for to continuously imagine, make knowledgeable and elaborate on at least *three levels of urban landscape representations*; now, then and in the meantime (Diedrich & Dahl 2016). The “meantime landscape” can certainly include different ideas, elaborations and struggling interests. Its representations can consist of sketchy ideas for use of abandoned areas (e. g. industrial sites), proposals/alternatives for new urban districts, (at a ‘pre-vision-stage’) but also of the site as part of much larger regional or even national or international infrastructures. The meantime landscape is a testbed, between the existing and the vision.

To start in the landscape can appear like to be stuck in the material or to see the physical built-up urban structure, (city as architecture) as the only important. This is far from the meaning in this text. A sustainable urban development will require social changes, changes in resource allocation, changes in public administration and services, changes in business conditions and

changes in lifestyle and social behaviour. But – these changes will not take place only in an un-changed physical structure, but will require also sensible changes in the urban landscape. It is likely however, that urban change (and all civic participation needed to make it happen) in the future will mean less urban planning processes and more property management processes.

As trust and communication will be essential for sustainable development and especially for developing transdisciplinary knowledge building; it is important to start with what we share on a daily basis. Discovery and communication of existing urban landscape can work as a base for continuous discussions of governance, better routines for transparency, dialogues and participation, as the common ground for a broader and more diverse urban sustainable development; such as small daily differences in behaviour, and such as stewardship of public space (maintenance, adjustments and additions); as points of departure for long term co-creative activities; as the well-founded base for new visions as well as suggestions for the meantime.

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**Figures:**

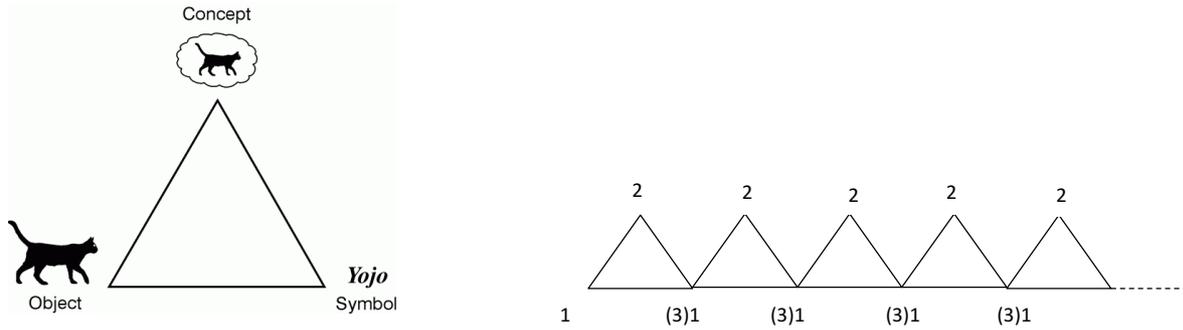


Fig 1. Peirce’s triadic theory of signs: First (object), second (concept) and third (symbol, which easily can be turned into a new object or “first”). *To the editor: Fig 1 should if possible be put in at (current) page 9, immediately before the headline “R G Collingwood”.*

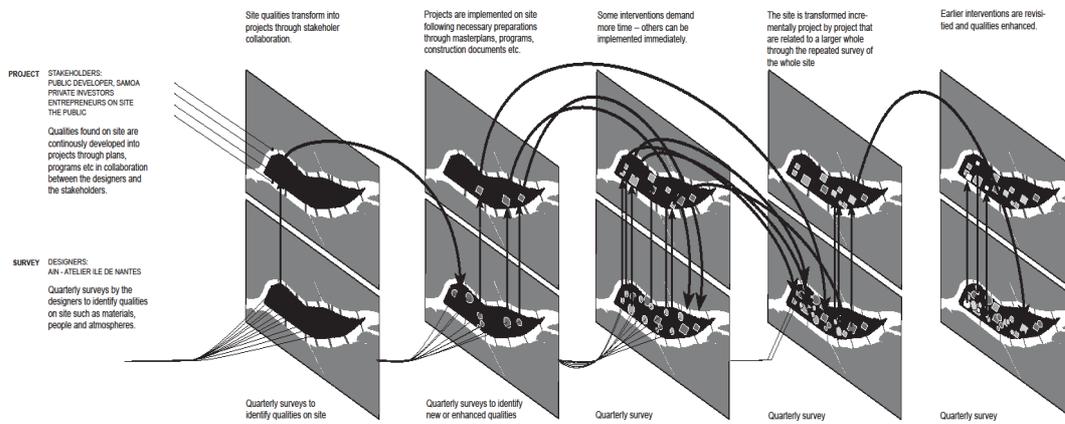


Fig 2. Chemetoff’s method graphically interpreted by Caroline Dahl (from Diedrich & Dahl 2016). *To the editor: Fig 2 should if possible be put at the bottom of (current) page 11, immediately before the headline “Point of departure 3: ...”.*

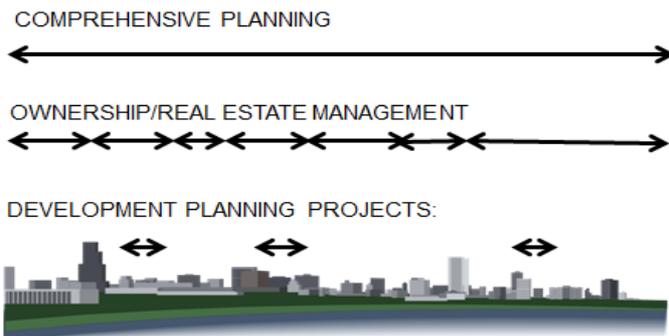


Fig 3. The legalized “overviews” of the urban landscape: Superficially, by the comprehensive planning, project-wise (fragmented) by development planning and (potentially, but not existing) at a cooperative ownership level. Actual development of the urban landscape is hereby more a result of “the tyranny of small steps”, than something deliberately planned.

*To the editor: Fig 3 should if possible be put on (current) page 14, immediately before the headline “What is the difference?”.*