

Synergy from cooperation – ensuring legitimacy?

Recently a public opinion poll about the preparedness of its residents to participate in the renewal of their living environment was conducted in one of the newer housing estates in Ljubljana. The research involved quality of the housing itself, traffic arrangements and open spaces. One of the important goals was to strengthen confidence between the actors: the people, local authority and experts. It should have been followed by an agreeable and realistic socially and technically legitimate development proposal acceptable to all, which should meet fruition by comprehensive renewal. A sociological poll was undertaken and planning solutions proposed.

After two workshops were organised with the residents, the immediate outcome was that the potential partners in such renewal didn't really trust each other. The expert group recognised the residents as property owners that are should be good caretakers of their property. The residents perceived the experts as unnecessary meddlers that are bringing unrest to their peaceful community. Both groups of course worked on idealised and experiential hypotheses. The outcome was that the property owners (most of the residents also own the property), except for the better off, who would actually move (if they had where to move at an acceptable price), still couldn't really be bothered about their property or even its comprehensive renewal. The offered hand wasn't understood as an honest incentive, but sophisticated pressure. The experts, including present representatives of the local authority, maybe even idealistically, respected the residents as partners and believed that they would disclose and articulate their grievances and desires about the place. They did, but just barely. Confidence building takes a long time, but hasn't been attempted for ages.

Verbal incentives and theoretical models must be followed by real actions. Maybe at first softly with small interventions and later, when confidence has been achieved, heavy construction machinery can take over.