

From Integral to Organic Development? A study of area development approaches in The Hague

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Introduction

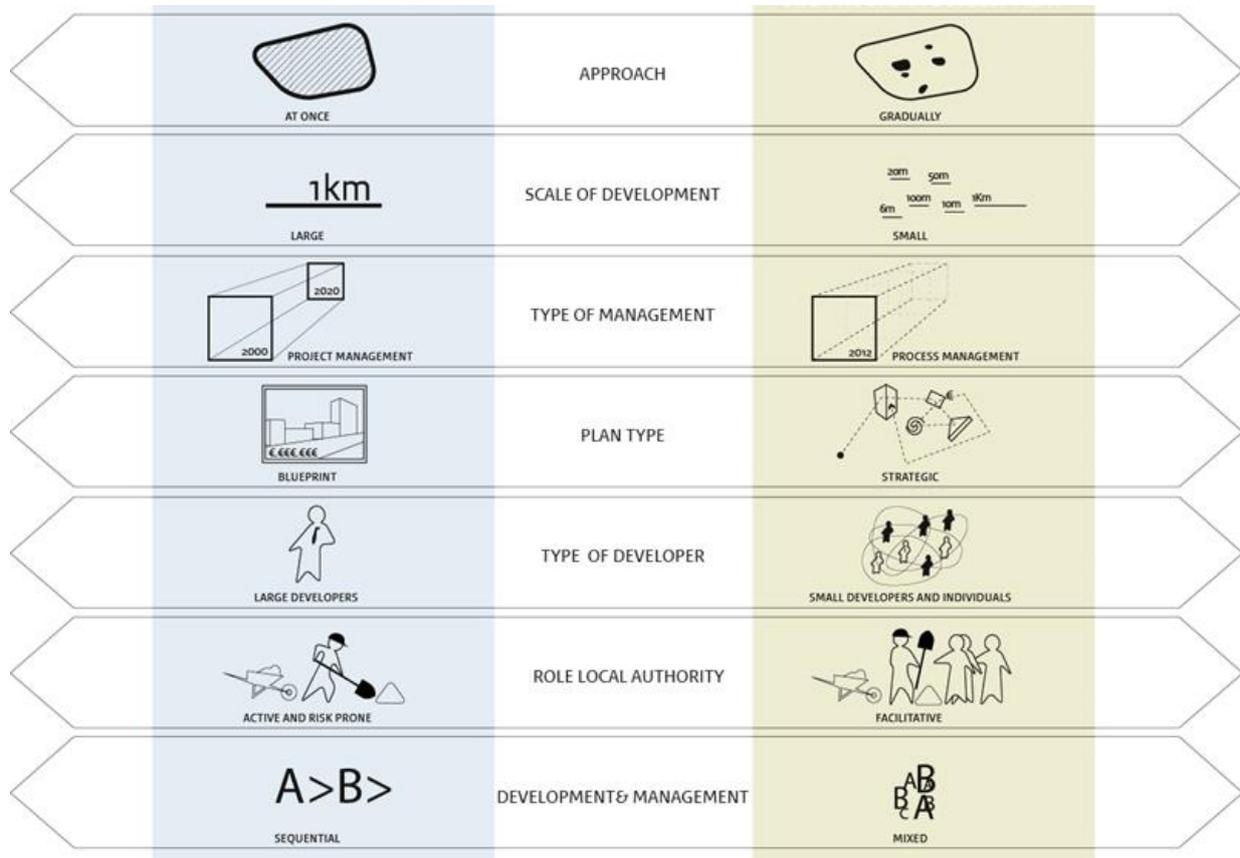
Planning practices are the result of the interplay between an economic rationale, historical trajectories, rules, beliefs, value systems and practices. During the 20th century an approach to planning that is known as integral development developed in the Netherlands. This approach to area development is typically supply-led. Large-scale plans are developed as a result of high ambitions. The business model assumes that profits can be made with land and property development. The future utilization of the developments is not taken into account but left for the future owner of the property. However, since the economic crisis large integrated area developments have halted. To cope with this, actors are searching for alternative approaches that allow for a more stepwise development. One of these approaches that is advocated in much of the recent literature on area development is organic development. Characteristic for this type of development is the stepwise, small scale transformation of an area that is guided by a rough master plan with a long time horizon. Such an approach allows for more flexibility and makes it possible to quickly respond to changing market circumstances. Crucial for organic development is the involvement of new actors and a change of roles for the local authorities. This research aims to investigate whether or not there is a transition going on within the municipality of The Hague from an integral to a more organic approach of area development. It also asks how this transition can be explained.

Theory and methodology

A transition from integral to organic development requires a whole new way of thinking and acting by all actors involved. Such a change is possible since planning processes are not static. Instead planning processes must be perceived as active and social processes. Actors have the capacity to invent new ways of doing to deal with the challenges they face. However, they are constrained by institutions; humanly devised constraints that shape interaction. Together, market forces, different ways of thinking, values within society and planning systems form an institutional framework in which area development practices are functioning. Thus to alter area development practices, the institutional framework has to change. Different institutional schools have brought up different ideas to explain institutional change. Discursive institutionalism perceives actors as critical, reasonable parties who are actively looking to improve their current situation and trying to persuade other actors of their views. This idea is central to this theses as in planning and development practices, cooperation and communication between actors is crucial. To analyse changes in area development practices, it is thus necessary to reflect on the ideas that are developed by actors to shape and justify this change.

Changes in area development have been systematically investigated on seven dimensions on which organic and integral development are expected to change. In the image below, integral and organic development have been depicted as ideal types on these seven dimensions.

Figure 1: integral (l) vs organic (r) development¹



The scale of development, type of developer and the role of the local authority have been investigated using a longitudinal database with over 3500 records. This database has been provided by the municipality of The Hague and contains every project within the municipality taking place between 2007 and 2015. In addition, a number of interviews have been conducted with municipal employees, housing association employees, real estate developers and investors. In each interview, all dimensions have been discussed.

Results

Together, the database and the interviews clearly show that, on all dimensions, a change in area development practices is taking place within the municipality of The Hague. The change in approach towards developments, the declining scale of developments as well as the changing management and plan styles can be attributed to the actors' ability for causal thinking and for developing new practices on an interest based logic. Because of this, the role of different actors such as developers and municipality has changed as well. All in all, current practices are moving closer towards organic than towards integral development. The research shows that this should not be perceived as an ideological, but as a pragmatic shift. Therefore, as with integral development, organic development is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

¹ Source: Buitelaar, Feenstra, Galle, Lekkerkerker, Sorel & Tennekes (2012). Vormgeven aan de spontane stad. Den Haag/ Amsterdam: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency / Urhahn Urban Design.