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Generating spatial quality through co-creation: experiences from the Blankenburgverbinding (the Netherlands)

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Abstract

Transport infrastructure not only makes areas accessible, it also influences the spatial quality. Areas in turn affect the functioning of networks. Transport infrastructure and adjoining areas are thus symbiotically linked. Yet in practice it appears a challenge to effectively integrate infrastructure and area in planning and management. In policy-making and the planning science, joint planning or co-creation between public planning authorities and stakeholders is regularly mentioned as the key for integral development. But how to shape the process and instruments of co-creation, when the interests of the stakeholders vary and project frames (such as time and budget) are tight. The case study of the Blankenburgverbinding, as presented in this paper, addresses these questions. The Blankenburgverbinding is a new infrastructure project to the west of Rotterdam in The Netherlands, crossing a densely populated area including valuable ecological zones. A complex challenge that requires an integral solution. Through so-called design tables and counselling groups, various stakeholders are actively involved in the planning and design process. The search for integrated spatial quality is thereby the base.

This paper describes the method of involvement, in particular the tensions between project management and participation. The aim of the paper is to give practical lessons and recommendations for co-creation at the interface between infrastructure and area, where the search for an optimal balance between mobility and spatial quality is the driver.

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1. Introduction

In the planning of transport infrastructure there is a growing awareness of the interaction between infrastructure on the surrounding area (Banister, 2011; Heeres et al, 2012; Busscher et al, 2014) and therefore the need for integration of infrastructure and spatial planning. Transport infrastructure networks connect areas. By stimulating the socio-economic development of an area it creates mobility demand affecting the functioning of infrastructure networks. However, infrastructure not only makes areas accessible it also influences the spatial quality by cutting through it. Transport infrastructure and adjoining areas are thus symbiotically linked (Neal, 2013; Witte, 2014). Yet in practice it appears a challenge to effectively integrate infrastructure and area in planning and management. In the policy-making and planning science joint planning or co-creation between public planning authorities and stakeholders is regularly mentioned as the key for integral development (Forester, 1999; Heeres et al., 2012; Van den Boomen & Venhoeven, 2012; Arts et al., 2014). Co-creation opens the opportunity to create "more with less", through synergy between infrastructure and spatial development (Peek, 2006; Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2014).

Besides the current pressure on governments to achieve policy more effectively and efficiently ("new public management"), society becomes more emancipated. People take responsibility to design their own environment. Citizens' initiatives are becoming more common (Hajer, 2011). The power of interest groups, NGO's and individual stakeholders is increasing. These developments involve a shift in the traditional balance of power (De Roo, 2007). Powerful public organizations such as Rijkswaterstaat¹, responsible for infrastructure networks, can no longer work autonomously and have to work together with local governments, citizens, landowners, entrepreneurs, the market and civil society organizations (Boelens, 2010). Public organizations thereby have to change from an internal to an external orientation focused on co-creation (Van den Brink, 2009; Gebauer et al., 2010; Rijkswaterstaat, 2011; Ryan, 2012; Heeres et al., 2012).

The issue of participation and co-creation is broadly discussed in literature. However, literature on actual implementation and experiences in a project context is very scarce. How to shape the process and instruments of co-creation, when the interests of the stakeholders vary and project frames (such as time and budget) are tight?

The aim of this paper is to give practical lessons and recommendations to project managers on how to cooperate at the interface between infrastructure and its surrounding area. The paper describes methods of involvement, both from a theoretical perspective and from practical experience, through the case Blankenburgverbinding, a new infrastructure project to the west of Rotterdam in The Netherlands. The project is a complex challenge that requires an integral solution. Through so-called design tables and counselling groups, various stakeholders are actively involved in the planning and design process. The search for (additional) integrated spatial quality is thereby the base. *Spatial quality* is regarded in this paper as the outcome of an interaction process which brings stakeholders together, instead of a pre-defined value. In particular the tension between project progress (project management driven by time, budget and scope) and participation of stakeholders and environment (stakeholder management driven by involvement, trust and relations) is described and analyzed. Knowing how to deal with this tension is crucial for successful implementation of co-creation in a project.

2. Fundamentals of co-creation

According to the Oxford English Dictionary cooperation means that two or more parties undertake activities together with the aim to serve the interests of all. Camarinha-Matos and Afsarmanesh (2006) define cooperation on a scale of alignment between parties. The basic form is communication and information exchange between parties

¹ Rijkswaterstaat is the executive department of the Dutch ministry of Infrastructure and Environment responsible for the realization and exploitation of the main road and waterways network.

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