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## Sustainable Cities – Objects of Urban Development Projects

Georg, Susse; Garza De Linde, Gabriela

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**SUSTAINABLE CITIES –  
OBJECTS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

**SUSSE GEORG**

**Aalborg University Copenhagen  
Department of Planning and Development  
A.C. Meyers Vænge 15,  
DK-2450 Copenhagen SV, Denmark  
Phone: +45 30 24 64 96  
E-mail: [sgeorg@plan.aau.dk](mailto:sgeorg@plan.aau.dk)**

**GABRIELA GARZA DE LINDE**

**Copenhagen Business School  
Department of Organization  
Kilevej 14A, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
Frederiksberg, Denmark  
Tel: +45 30117509  
E-mail: [ggl.ioa@cbs.dk](mailto:ggl.ioa@cbs.dk)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Judging from the number of communities and cities striving or claiming to be sustainable and how often eco-development is invoked as the means for urban regeneration, it appears that sustainable and eco-development have become “the leading paradigm within urban development” (Whitehead 2003). But what is it that is driving these urban transformations? Clearly, there are many probable answers to this complex question and in what follows we will focus on one particular catalyst of change – urban design competitions.

Considered as field changing events (Lampel and Meyer 2008, Anand and Jones 2008), urban design competitions are understudied mechanisms for bringing about field level changes. Drawing on actor network theory, this paper examines how urban design competitions may bring about changes within the professional field through the use of intermediaries such as a sustainable planning/assessment tool. The context for our study is urban regeneration in one Danish city, which had been suffering from industrial decline and which is currently investing in establishing a “sustainable city”. Based on this case study we explore how the insights and inspiration evoked in working with the tool influenced the design and planning practices.

## **BACKGROUND AND THEORY**

Urban design competitions exhibit many of the characteristic features of field changing events identified by Lampel and Meyer – they draw actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds, are temporary organizations that allow for interaction and collective sense-making and they have a certain ceremonialism to them (2008:1027). They provide the participants with an opportunity for developing new and innovative approaches to a particular design issue.

Recent work within institutional theory on field configuring events consider them both as the products and drivers of field evolution and, hence, a mechanism for institutional change (Lampel and Meyer 2008:1027-1028). Although there is a growing body of literature dedicated to analyzing field-configuring dynamics (Glynn 2008) and the institutional entrepreneurship involved (McInerney 2008), relatively little attention has been given to how experimentation in connection design competitions can challenge existing beliefs and practices, and to how planning tools work in aligning ideas and interests.

Drawing on institutional theory (Wooten and Hoffman 2008, Glynn 2008, Lawrence and Suddaby 2008), design theory (Hatchuel et al. 2010, Michlewski 2008) and the sociology of associations (Callon 1986, Latour 2005), we explore how experimental approaches to urban design competitions can create disruptive, but creative interactional spaces that allow for the development of design and construction practices that, in turn, may impact not only the cities but also the field of urban development; practices that can help ‘substantiate’ what the rationalized myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977) of sustainable and eco-development might entail.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on how fields develop and change (see the special issue of *Journal of Management Studies* edited by Lampel and Meyer 2008). However, rather than solely emphasizing the role and work of the individual institutional entrepreneur (McInerney 2008), emphasis is given to the associations, assemblages or entanglement of events, actors, material artifacts that can lead to field changes (Garud 2008).

In what follows, we seek to unpack what field configuring events (FCEs) entail by considering each part of the acronym in more detail, but doing so in reverse. Thus, we take our point of departure in a characterization of the events – urban design competitions – normally associated with the field of urban development. Competitions are considered as a vehicle for experimentation and, hence, innovation. Then, following a brief description of our methodology, we attend to the empirical details of the ways in which these events have configured the field. Although this is largely exploratory, we identify how a series of mechanisms associated with experimenting with a well-known ‘standard’ – design competitions – has led to changes in existing beliefs and practices. Following this account of our empirical findings we discuss what effect competitions may have on shaping the field. We also discuss the wider implications of our findings, and point to the limitations of our studies.

### **Urban design competitions – Events that can spur innovation**

Field configuring events have been considered important mechanisms for constituting new technologies, industries, and markets (Lampel and Meyer 2008). Continuing in this vein, we consider how FCEs can help foster technological and organizational innovations in architectural and engineering design that, in turn, can shape the ways in which sustainable cities are conceived and developed.

## **The event: urban design competitions**

Urban design competitions are like film, theater, television and music awards one of the more established award ceremonies associated with the “creative industries” (Caves 2000). Dating back to the building of Acropolis (Lehrer 2011), they have, however, an extremely long history compared to the other award ceremonies. As a field of cultural and social production (Lipstadt 2010), urban design is, comparatively speaking, a rather mature field.

Urban design competitions are, as the name indicates, about designing the spatial lay-out of an urban area, i.e. designating land-use for housing, transport, cultural facilities, recreational use, etc. Hence, urban design competitions differ from architectural competitions in terms of scale and scope: Rather than attending to the design and construction of singular buildings, urban design competitions focus on place-making on a grander territorial and longer temporal scale. They literally cover more ground and the time frame for most urban development projects is usually much longer than that of building construction.

Following from this, the design processes involve attending to many more things – concerns and activities – than what’s normally associated with designing a building. Moreover, given the long-termism of urban design, one could also say that the competition bids are also more speculative. They are about projecting something into the future that is not yet fixed and, therefore, likely to morph as the design and implementation processes proceed.

As competitions they are contests of whom or what ideas are the best and are a battlefield in which different teams seek to realize their ambitions and develop interesting solutions to the design problem at hand. It is also a tournament subject to public scrutiny and an event that bears semblance to a carnival “where exceptions to the rule is the rule and excess is the norm....Competitions are occasions where youthful talents triumph not only over their seniors but also over conventional ideas and traditional solutions. This makes the competition a ‘world upside down’” (Lipstadt 2010:49). It is from this ‘world upside down’ that the creative and innovative solutions emerge. In keeping with Appadurai’s notion of “tournaments of value” (1986), urban design and architectural competitions are about creating aesthetic and user value in urban settings, and convincing the juries that this is, indeed, the case.

Urban design competitions involve a number of stages or phases, some of which are more open to public scrutiny than others. They involve, like in many other rituals, a script codification stage and a performance stage (Anand and Jones 2008:1038). The script codification stage is associated with the creation of the competition program/brief, in which the sponsor describes the overarching design ambition and sets the terms of the competition, e.g. it defines the terms of eligibility and selection. This is usually solely the sponsor's prerogative, and not something that can be changed during the competition. The brief is supposed to guide the contestants in developing their bids and help reduce the sponsor's risk of receiving proposals that are too far 'off the mark'. The performance stage consists of at least three sub-stages; each with their particular ritualistic aspects.

First, there is the competition process itself, the duration of which is set in the competition rules and during which the competing teams work to develop their entries. Usually subject to tough time constraints, this is a period of intense collaboration within the teams and in the more conventional competitions there is no collaboration across the teams. Also, there is little or no communication between the sponsor and the contestants.

Second, there is a selection process, in which a jury picks the winning design(s). Jury composition is variable, but generally they are comprised of a number of architects and the sponsor or body organizing the competition. Their task is to select the proposal that 'fits' best with the competition's objective, i.e. best meets the sponsor's design ambitions as described in the brief. Usually the jurors' task is described as a rational decision-making process involving a description, ranking and sorting of the various proposals (Rönn 2010), but in practice the selection criteria are more likely to be fluid rather than fixed; subject to change as the jurors see and learn more about the proposals, and in which case the winning proposal is likely to be the one that is more convincing than the others (Kreiner 2010). Jury deliberations are not public, but they usually justify their choice in a jury report.

Following this phase, there may or may not be an implementation phase in which the winning design is realized (in a number of stages). The duration of this phase is directly related to the design ambition, the amount of public participation/hearings, and the financial grounding of the development project.

Urban design competitions come in many forms and they vary in terms of their concrete procedures and format, e.g. whether they are open, limited or invited competitions, idea/concept or project/implementation competitions, or whether the winner, indeed, does take all. Regardless of

form and format, competitions usually command quite a bit of media and public attention. This allows for two things. People are given the opportunity to air their different opinions, which may influence the contestants and/or jurors. Moreover, the competition can function as marketing devices for not only the sponsors but also the competing teams (Lehrer 2011).

### **Urban design competitions: experimentation fostering creativity and innovation**

Competitions have the bearings of a standard – they are rule-based events with relatively fixed formats that shape the contestants' behavior. They are, however, also thought of as experiments (Lipstadt 2010) and as “development laboratories” (Danielsen 2010), both of which are sites associated with promoting innovation. They not only stimulate creativity amongst the contestants, they also provide a variety of solutions to the same ‘problem’, thus giving whoever set up the competition many possible solutions from which to choose. Given that there can only be one winner, then there will be a number of ‘redundant’ solutions that may be (re-)introduce at another time and/or circulate to other settings. Whether or not it is possible to transfer these (or the winning) design solutions from one site to another depends upon how persuasive and convincing the solutions are to others, including how appropriate these solutions are deemed in other settings. The interesting question then becomes what is it that makes one solution – and the practices that it implicates – more appealing and convincing than others, and hence more likely to spread and trigger changes in the field? Some cast the answers to this question as a matter of efficiency, legitimacy, or both, whilst others emphasize the technological, cultural, and political “fit” between the diffusing and existing practices (Ansari, Fiss, and Zajac 2010), or the ability to build associations (Akrich et al. 2002).

In what follows we argue that innovation is an effect of **the process of translation** in which competition participants – sponsors and contestants – build associations by enrolling and mobilizing others in an appreciation and support of their ideas (Callon 1986, Akrich et al. 2002). The teams involved in urban design competitions are often interdisciplinary ones, usually involving architects, engineers, and other professional groups, e.g. landscape architects, ethnographers, economists and sociologists. Competition participation calls upon the use of various forms of ‘craftsmanship,’ based on various forms of codified knowledge as well as creative and combinatorial skills that have not yet been codified. The experimentation involved in urban design competition is closely linked to participants' work process and their “design attitude” (Michlewski 2008). Generically speaking, the former involves on-site observations and investigations, brainstorming to generate ideas, using

various forms of visualizations to develop their ideas/models, and subsequent iterations of these processes so as to stabilize their ideas/plans/design. Design attitude refers to the contestants' abilities to explore, synthesize, pull things together and consolidate multidimensional meanings (Michlewski 2008: 377-379) as well as their abilities to draw and visualize their ideas in other ways so as to bring them to life and give them form (Yoo et al. 2006:217). In general, the participants' design attitude entails the mobilization of analytical skills and aesthetic sensibilities in exploring possible solutions. Regarding the professional architects, Michlewski notes that: "*designers take great pride in breaking rules, subverting accepted norms and refusing to align with something that has already been tested and tried*" (2008:386). Within the profession there is a strong emphasis on search, creativity and on pushing the boundaries of the known solution spaces.

Clearly, this is a broad sweeping characterization which may not fit entirely with what the contestant actually do when working on competitions, because given the time and economic constraints associated with most competitions, there are likely to be limits as to how experimental and innovative the participants will/can be. More likely than not, they will have to strike a balance between the known and unknown in making their design proposals – between what has worked well for them on previous occasions and ideas that they haven't yet pursued; between relying on existing skills and insights and developing new ones; balancing between what March (1991) has labeled exploitation and exploration. As in many other games, there is also evidence of competitions leading to a certain amount of 'gaming' or strategic behavior in the sense that participants seek to minimize their risks by second-guessing what the jurors (including the sponsors) want, and design their solution accordingly (Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris 1990).

Moreover, the extent to which the "design attitude" is invoked is also a matter of how the contestants' identity and values influence the ways in which they choose to read or interpret the competition brief. This can obviously be done in any number of ways. As Kreiner (2010) points out the way in which it is read has implications for the work that follows: If it is read as an instruction, then "*the challenge is to honor the brief without sacrificing other design criteria too much. When read as indications, the challenge is to collect additional information about the client and/or jury to be able to interpret the brief richly and adequately. When read as illustrations, the challenge is to make the brief a resource and a foundation for the creative exploration of design options*" (Kreiner 2010:116).



In the latter instance, the contestants will be more likely to challenge the (implicit or explicit) premises of the design brief, i.e. break the rules and create something unexpected. Whether or not this will lead to their winning the competition is, however, an empirical question. Regardless of what strategies that the contestants choose to pursue, competitions offer room for experimenting with existing ideas, routines, and practices, e.g. either by combining them in new ways, and/or developing new ideas that encompass not previously considered.

What happens to these ideas once they are visualized and documented? The winning ideas are often implemented – they materialize in situ – and if this gets sufficient (media) attention, then it might induce “urban policy tourism” (Gonzales and Gonzales 2011), i.e. where policy makers visit the site to learn how things were done. But what about the other ideas? Some are shelved, but others circulate. Public exhibitions; newspaper articles, photos, and other forms of media coverage; websites and reference lists are important means by which design knowledge can be shared. As inscriptions they circulate and ‘act at a distance’ (Latour 1987), making the ideas visible to others and allowing field constituents to interact and inspire each other, thus, working to shape beliefs/practices in the field. Whether the ideas, methods or materials can be adjusted, refined and translated so as to be applicable in other settings is an empirical question and one that we will pursue in what follows.

## **METHOD**

### **Cities as a site**

Although there are a few notable exceptions (Tolbert and Zucker 1983, Czarniawska 2002, Kornberger, 2010, Glynn 2008), cities are not common objects of inquiry within organizational research; and sustainable cities even less so. This is somewhat surprising, given the overwhelming evidence from our daily lives of the importance of cities – more than 60% of the world’s population is expected to live in cities by 2030 (United Nations, 2006). Moreover, the twenty first century is expected to be one of renewed urbanism as cities seek to address the challenges associated with industrial decline, adapt to climate change and other environmental problems, and are implicated in place-based competition for attention, labor, and investments. In light of these grand challenges and the organizational complexity of urban development, cities are a particular interesting research object and an excellent site in which to explore the effect of FCEs.

## **The case study**

Ensuring sustainable development is considered one of society's grand challenges (Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, 2010) and calls for numerous institutional, technological, and organizational changes. This paper studies the competition phase of a sustainable urban development project in Denmark, destined to transform around 25 hectares in a city - Christianhagen<sup>1</sup> - that has gone through a period of industrial decline, which has left parts of the city as barren „wasteland“.

## **Data collection and analysis**

Our ambition has been to trace the development of the sustainable city, and to this end we have collected data primarily through interviews and document analysis of archival material such as press accounts, project reports, and materials from the official project web-site. We conducted our fieldwork in Denmark from 2010-2011; including 14 semi-structured interviews in with architects, engineers, public authorities and developers. The duration of these interviews was typically two hours, and the questions asked focused on identifying who had been involved, what their roles were, how the development activities and design competitions were organized. We also focused on the use and role of a “sustainability tool,” developed specifically for the purpose of improving urban development. All interviews were taped and transcribed. It is important to note that we were able to follow the urban design competition in real-time. As a consequence, we were also able to augment our interview and archival data with notes from our observations of numerous public meetings regarding project development and evaluation.

Following a grounded research approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990), the authors read and re-read the transcripts to identify how and why things developed as they did. The data was sorted chronologically and thematically so as to identify: (a) the prime developmental agenda or vision; (b) how the activities were organized and by whom, including the nature of their relationships, e.g. contractual relations; (c) the challenges identified by the various actors; and (d) the different artifacts used to support the development of the project.

Our analysis has been iterative as to what are the distinctive features of the development process, and following from this we have focused on the urban design competition as the prime mechanism

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<sup>1</sup> All the names in the case are fictitious as the development project is on-going and the parties involved have stipulated that they want to be treated anonymously in order to protect their various interests.

for change. However, as we looked more into how the competition was organized we were able to discern a number of distinctive and innovative features associated with the competition that, in turn, have led to the development of innovative solutions to the urban regeneration of the city in question. Hence, experimentation with what it is generally considered an experiment – the competition – has provided tools and techniques that have changed the professional practices.

## **ANALYSIS**

Christianhagen (a pseudonym) is located by the sea and has a large harbor area that once housed several heavy, polluting industries. Over the course of the last 15 years many of these industries have either ceased to exist or re-located their production facilities to other places, leaving the city with some large areas close to the sea that, unfortunately, are cut off from the city center by a railway line. The empty lots – the industrial wastelands – called for action; for developing a way to “tie the city together and bring the city to the sea”. Although Christianhagen had been trying to develop its commercial harbor facilities for a number of years, this had not sufficiently re-infused the harbor with activity. And there were other areas close to the city’s train station that were vacant lots, and like the harbor areas of little economic or aesthetic value. By initiating an urban renewal process, Christianhagen’s hope was to improve the quality of their city. The question was, how?

The answer: Christianhagen municipality joined forces with a commercial developer, Urban Renewal and Development (URD, a pseudonym), in a public-private partnership, Coastal Development (CD, also a pseudonym). The two partners jointly own the land that is to be developed on a 50-50 basis. For Christianhagen the obvious advantage is that it allows them to consolidate and speed up their development plans. As for URD, their interest lie in the demonstration effect of such – in a Danish context – a large-scale development project and the prospects of a fair economic return on their investments. CD’s goal over the next 20 years is to develop the land for other purposes so as to improve urban quality and provide the city with a vehicle for future growth. To get things underway CD commissioned an urban design competition. From our interviews we can see that the way in which the competition was organized had a number of innovative and provocative features, which are discussed below.

### **Experimenting with competition format**

For one, the competition format differed from most Danish design competitions. According to CD, it was entirely new. It was a two-phased competition that combined the format of a conventional competition, where the teams work individually and do not communicate with one another, with that of a parallel or dialogue-based competition that entails a number of workshops where the teams openly present and discuss their ideas. Parallel competitions were something relatively new in DK at the time the CD competition took place. The purpose of the workshops is to enable the competing team to not only get a stronger feel for the citizens' concerns and priorities but also for the sponsor's design ambition, while at the same time being able to mutually inspire each other. Another, and for all teams surprising, implication of the competition format was that because it was a parallel competition there would be no winners in the conventional sense. Instead the sponsor reserved the right to be able to 'pick and choose' from the proposed solutions as they saw fit. This meant that the winning team would not – as is customary – be guaranteed a contract. This was not well-received, because as one team explained: by mixing the solutions, not only is it dubious whether the end result will be sustainable, but *"the genuine will disappear"* (Interview).

Second, the remuneration and reward structure differed from most competitions. The fees for participating in the two phases were substantially higher than in most conventional competitions, thus, compensating the teams more for their efforts than in other competitions. Although the teams clearly appreciated this, they nevertheless claimed that the fees came nowhere near covering their costs. This was, however, something that they were willing to accept because of the prestigious nature of the project. As one architect said: *"In this project there is a chance that your ideas will be developed into something"* (Interview).

A third important factor was the emphasis given to interdisciplinarity and to the way that the teams organized their work. According to CD, the complexity of the development issue called for involving people with many different competencies. So as to ensure that this would be the case and that *"the architects wouldn't monopolize the task"* (Interview), CD required the teams (as part of the prequalification process) to fully disclose how the fee would be divided amongst the team members. This allowed CD to check whether the teams' espoused interdisciplinarity matched their financial dispositions. If they didn't, then the teams were disqualified from participating in the competition. For the teams that did participate, this not only made the (formal) level of engagement and the division of labor visible, several mention that it also enhanced their level of inter-disciplinary collaboration.

A fourth feature was that the teams were required to use a specific sustainability planning tool that URD had developed.<sup>2</sup> Each team had to use the tool to assess the sustainability of their respective suggestions and develop a “sustainability profile” for the entire project. From the detailed competition brief and the level of detail commanded by tool it was clear to all that the sponsor wanted more than “*fluffy, utopian ideas*” (Interview). The plans had to be realistic and “*implementable*” (Interview). The level of detail was taken as an indicator of CD’s but particularly URD’s design ambitions, and these were as one of the contestants mentioned: “*their ambitions were contagious. They really affected all the teams in a positive manner, but this is also because of who the sponsor is*” (Interview). CD had an additional requirement that ties in with the issue of implementability – the teams’ proposals had to have a positive cash-flow from day one and throughout the entire development process. These two requirements were really quite unique – it was certainly not something that the teams were accustomed to from other competitions. They really made them bring things “*down to earth*” (Interview).

### **The competition’s vision and process**

The CD-competition was a vision driven competition with the overall vision being to: create a unique, attractive and sustainable town district, strengthening the role of the city in the urban hierarchy of cities in DK (Jury report 2010). This vision was further specified into 6 vision points that CD wanted the proposals to address – they had to enhance the city’s cultural activities, support commercial development, improve traffic conditions, ensure a vibrant urban community and urban lifestyles, be based on citizen engagement, and last but not least ensure sustainable development economically, socially and environmentally. Fifty-four Danish, international and mixed teams submitted prequalification applications, and of the seven that made it through this process, five teams were selected to continue in phase 2. In phase 1 the teams were – much to many of the architects’ regrets – ‘only’ asked to provide text-based descriptions of how their plans for the city could live up to CD’s vision points and of the economic viability of their (respective) projects. Phase 1 ended with a workshop where the teams presented their tentative ideas/plans and received feedback from the sponsor and their experts and had limited interaction with the local stakeholders.

Relative to the stakeholder engagement normally associated with parallel competitions, the one in this competition was rather limited and controlled; which was something all the teams criticized at

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<sup>2</sup> The tool seeks to operationalize the Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development as constituted by environmental, social, economic development into a number of indicators. The tool consists of more than fifty indicators within a number of overarching domains, e.g. energy and water usage in buildings, citizen behavior, social diversity and economic costs.

an evaluation meeting held shortly after the competition. The teams' final proposals had to include a strategic action plan, detailed descriptions of their suggestions/solutions, including sketches and other visualizations, and an economic feasibility study.

According to the jury, all the teams had produced clear proposals for the design concept and they had suggested strategies that could serve as guidelines for drawing up the final development plan (Jury Report 2010). The sustainability tool was also mobilized in the jurors' final selection process. It was used to benchmark and rank the teams' proposals; the results of which figured prominently in the jury's justifications of what they liked and disliked in the various projects and the solutions they contained. Despite claims of not picking a winner, the size of the awards presented to the teams signals that one team was more of a winner than the others – the winning team's prize was 7000 euro greater than the prize given to four 'runner ups'.

### **The sustainability process tool – an intermediary**

The sustainability tool had been designed with “the purpose of ensuring that the teams work systematically with sustainability and enabling them assess their ideas from a sustainability perspective. But what effect did the tool have? According to our interviews, it appears have had little direct effect on the teams' design practices where primacy is given to developing the overarching design concept/idea/metaphor. As one team member explained: *“you have to have a design, you have to put a complete [picture]... make something coherent. So, it is not just about adding the parts. The tool is good to have, to identify solutions, and identify tasks and ambitions. So it's a typical programming or evaluation tool. That's how you can use it. You can't design with it. The tool helps us to develop ideas and solutions, but it doesn't give the solution as such”* (Interview).

However, the tool had other effects: Some said that it gave them a sense of direction, a sense of the sponsors' priorities, and that it had had a unifying function, because the tool literally *“brought people with different competencies to the same table”* (Interview). The tool was, however, also subject to a great deal of critique, e.g. for being too generic and not sufficiently site specific (to be relevant), and for being too technically oriented with too narrow a definition of sustainability, e.g. one that excluded biodiversity. It was also criticized for quantifying things – or attempting to do so – that are not easily or meaningfully quantifiable. As one team member warned: *“simply adding the points, and then saying that the one [entry] that has the most points is the best, this could lead you to make some really wrong decisions”* (Interview).

Several of the persons interviewed argued that it was too detailed and complicated to work with at this stage in the development process. One person characterized it as an example of “*misunderstood tidiness*” (Interview). Several questioned “*the meaning of having to calculate something to such a level of detail, given that things are likely to change over the course of the next 15-20 years*”. Many felt that making many detailed calculations for things that might not come to pass was a waste of their time; time that could otherwise have been spent on developing their ideas.

From the interviews we can see that the teams had two strategies in working with the sustainability tool: one taking the tool literally and a much more pragmatic approach. Whilst the former attends to all indicators, the latter is more strategic and selective. Following Kreiner (2010), you could say that they used the tool as a source of information that they could build upon. One of the teams described it in this fashion: “*My feeling is that we have had a bit more strategic way of using the tool...We had like a screening of the different parameters in the first place. We had a look at which parameters are going to be the most important for us to determine and we started out with a discussion related to the social part of it [the tool] How do you actually create something that is attractive and that could attract people from a wider area...*” (Interview) The choice of strategy is, however, probably less about the tool and more a matter of the team identity and culture.

Just because the teams said that the tool had little direct effect on their design practices, does not mean that it didn't have other effects. Working with the tool appears to have been particularly inspirational for the engineering consultancies. It not only provided them with an opportunity for working together across departments in-house, but working with the tool also inspired them to further develop some of their own planning tools. In addition to improving their planning tools, some of the engineering companies have developed particular design solutions that they will introduce in other settings, e.g. parking space design to accommodate electric vehicles. The architectural companies appear to be generally less inclined to consider their experience with working with the tool as a ‘product’ that they would be able to use and/or sell in the future, but there was one participant that considered it as very worthwhile: “*I am absolutely a fan of it, because I mean it [the tool] opens up the process. It makes it possible for a much more detailed evaluation of different proposals than you normally have. It resulted in some untraditional ways of focusing more on process, more on other aspects than traditional architect competitions normally do...We're working with it [in other settings] as a sustainability impact assessment tool. So I mean, that might be one reason why we are thinking it was natural to look at it*” (Interview). It is, of course, too early

to tell if and how the ideas generated within this competition will spread, but if they do, then they could at least potentially have a field configuring effect.

It can be argued that the sustainability tool's level of detail and the reification of particular aspects pertaining to sustainable development enabled the sponsors – presumably unwittingly – to not only give particular content to the notion of sustainability but also to 'act at distance'. In this respect, the tool – in structure and content – draws strongly on the dominant, eco-modernist discourse on sustainability, which is highly expert-based and casts sustainability as a matter of energy efficiency and resource management that has a tendency to preclude other concerns. As for acting at a distance, the sustainability tool along with the competition format and 'rules' regarding financial disclosure ensured the sponsors' presence in the teams' mindsets; not as a conscious form of mind-control, but as an eidolon that can inspire or provoke some and discipline others. There are, of course, limits to extent to which this control-at-a-distance can be exercised, as exemplified by the teams that chose to 'break the rules' and not use the tool as prescribed. The sponsors, however, wanted the tool to discipline the teams so as to ensure that they would get "*implementable solutions*" (Interview).

The tool was developed to be context-free, so that it could be used in other urban development projects, and as some of our interviews have indicated this meant that the teams had to put a lot of effort into contextualizing the tool. This may not necessarily be a bad thing, but it has to be seen in relation to the time frame of the competition as well as the development process – many felt that they were 'shooting sparrows with canons' using such a detailed project assessment tool on a project likely to change substantially over the next 20 years. Although this may be stretching it a bit, it appears that the overall approach to urban development Christianhagen can be characterized as context-free (Moore and Karvonen 2008). It is also our observation that some of the actors are seeking to extend their ideas, methods, and other practices to other places, contributing – at least – potentially to field re-configuration.

## DISCUSSION



In this study of an experimental approach to urban development we explore the dynamics of urban development in the context of an urban design competition. Our initial analysis of this urban development projects reveals that there are numerous innovations: Some of these innovations are managerial or organizational, e.g. the development of private-public partnerships in urban planning, and the development of a new competition format. Others are socio-technical innovations such as the sustainability tool, and the various construction and engineering ideas/solutions fostered. Although many of these things, with the exception of the sustainability tool and the competition format, were developed with a particular place in mind, this does not necessarily mean that they will stay in place. Many of these innovations are being spread thanks to various actors and numerous artifacts. E.g. Danish engineering consultancies are now using a planning tool that has incorporated aspects of the sustainability in their consultancy services. The engineering consultancies have also refined some of the specific technologies and technological ideas developed for Christianhagen, and started marketing them internationally. Admittedly, this is hardly surprising – the various actors are just trying to capitalize on their investments, but they are also spreading particular ideas, methods, etc.

From the theoretical vantage point of the sociology of associations, these endeavors are supported by numerous artifacts that allow for their ideas to travel (Czarniawska and Sevón 1986). So, when references are made to ‘the sustainability tool’, what is normally left out are the associations of people, things, competing beliefs and design attitudes that have gone into making the model and the tool what they are. Moreover, they, too, have become artifacts that can allow ideas, methods, and technologies to travel. When URD puts the tool on their home-page “*so that people or municipalities could use it when discussing urban development with part of their municipalities or their city*” (Interview), it is as an invitation to others. Publicized as a “showcase” Christianhagen becomes an artifact that circulates in the popular media, policy briefs, and scientific papers, and demonstrates to others what sustainable cities are. And as a result, Christianhagen may well become a site for urban policy tourism.

Artifacts are, however, often more than a medium. They are performative – they do things. Take, for instance, the tool. Some teams were captured by it and it shaped their bids and their way of working. Ours is not to say whether this was good or bad, but simply to say that it happened. Others were not caught up by it. It is, however, not an innocent tool, because it gives meaning to sustainable development in a particular way – in the way in which the indicators are established – and it commensurates often complex concerns by translating them into numbers. Another example

would be the drawings and visualizations that have been created in the course of CD's urban design competition. There are, of course, a multitude of drawings and visualizations ranging from very specific and technical drawings to 3D photo-visualizations where it is difficult to see whether it is a drawing or a photo. They are, albeit in very different ways, narratives of a future, i.e. projecting a future and giving something not yet existing 'form'. Needless to say, such narratives can require particular skills from the reader(s), and they can be more or less convincing.

In sum, artifacts have to be factored in when considering field configuration. However, rather than considering humans and artifact as distinct carriers, to use Scott's notion of how ideas spread, or consider them in terms of relational systems and symbolic systems (Glynn 2008), the argument suggested here is to see them as one, as an association, a complex interweaving of 'allies' that – together – 'perform'. From this perspective field stability is an on-going accomplishment, hinged on the coordinated efforts of many actors and things. Field stability may, however, also be vulnerable in the sense that a field can be destabilized and changed if new ideas, issues, technologies, and/or different stakeholders are sufficiently successful in problematizing the existing and in enrolling and mobilizing others so as to persuade them of the relevance, importance, superiority, etc. of making changes. Field configuring events are, then, about the making and breaking of associations – breaking the existing and making new ones; the durability of which will be subject to "trials of strength" amongst the actors in the field.

Following from this, how do urban development competitions perform as field configuring events? They do at least five things. One, they focus attention on a particular issue – in our case sustainability – and a particular place, and in doing so they speak to professionals as well as local communities. When sustainability is formulated as a goal, this provides the various actors within these fields with a common concern that is likely to be subject to many different interpretations. This generates some ambiguity, with which professionals and local actors will have to contend.

Second, they are vehicles for experimentation, where professionals, perhaps in collaboration with local stakeholders, seek to develop something that is desirable and/or remarkable. It is about being able to read the local, acknowledging the history and the feel of the place, infusing it with something that does not exist, and developing a narrative, e.g. through the use of visualizations, to convince others, notably the jury.

The latter highlights a third role – competitions are also vehicles for expression that allow for enactments of style, which may be important for convincing not only a jury but also future customers. The criteria for what counts as a winning bid, i.e. one that fits with the brief, may be set from the outset of the competition, but even so it is unlikely that there will be commonly agreed criteria for how to measure the “fit”. In the case of Christianhagen, where the judges had to assess the bids vis-à-vis six vision points, there were no publically available documents specifying how to weigh these vision points against each other in the selection process – is social diversity more or less important than energy use, waste water treatment, etc.? It is not our impression that this lack of selection criteria can be ascribed to strategic considerations on the part of the sponsors/jurors, but rather that these 6 vision points are indicative of 6 “matters of concern” (Latour) that can induce different and perhaps even contradictory forms of behavior/evaluation. There are no simple answers to the question of how to weigh such different concerns. Attending to them in connection with having to choose a winning bid is a “trial of strength” between the bids as to which one is the most persuasive. These “trials of strength” are usually hidden from view in the jury’s meetings and deliberations. The jury report is an ex post justification of their choices.

Four, they facilitate communication and interaction that is important precursor for experimentation. Even though our findings suggest that the interaction and learning across teams, often associated with parallel competitions (Danielsen 2010), was not that prevalent, this does not mean that it doesn’t happen. Certainly, it happens within the teams as they struggle to develop their ideas.

Five, the remuneration and reward structure associated with urban design competitions confer a certain visibility and status to the competition as well as to the participants. The reputational effects of this can lead to new competitions and new customers, thus, providing those that participate in urban design competitions with economic gains that can be used to justify participation. Moreover, all the activities that take place in the course of a competition – press releases, press meetings, workshops, and exhibitions – are all supportive in making urban design competitions important events.

Urban design competitions are about the “enactment of possibilities” (Garud 2008), and these five features are important for introducing new ideas to the field be it in professional fields or in local geographical field. The experimentation that competitions invoke have the potential to reconfigure a field, if the results of these experiments convinces others to adopt (and adapt) the results. In the case of Christianhagen, the institutionalization of these results appears to be occurring

“horizontally” through informal contacts and partnerships forged prior, during and after the competitions as the ideas about how to develop a sustainable city gradually spread through the professional field, and as the city literally takes form, these physical manifestations change the local geographical field.

## CONCLUSION

We have studied how urban design competitions can be thought of as field configuring events. They are both contests and experiments in which the participants strive to give particular visions form and enact a future. It is the up-take of these ideas that have the potential to reconfigure fields and, in turn, become standardized into new design templates. It is, however, too early to tell whether and how this reconfiguration will take place. In this respect, we have set up a longitudinal study that will explore the spread of ideas across time and place as part of a PhD project<sup>3</sup>. In the meantime, our analysis speaks to how it can take place. In our account we emphasize the role urban design competitions, paying particular attention to the complex intertwining of actors and artifacts. In doing so, we draw on the sociology of associations as a complement to the institutional perspective, because this perspective offers an alternative to the more commonplace diffusion model associated with field changes, i.e. fields change as innovations spread either due to their own intrinsic properties or to some external force. The alternative suggested in the paper is that the fate of an innovation – be it an architectural design or an energy efficient technology – is in the hands of those who develop it and those who may or may not decide to use it.

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<sup>3</sup> This project will be carried out from 2013-2015 by one of the authors of this paper, Gabriela Garza De Linde. The current working title of the project is “Building the City: The performativity of sustainability process tools and methods”, where Christianhagen will continue to be in focus.

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