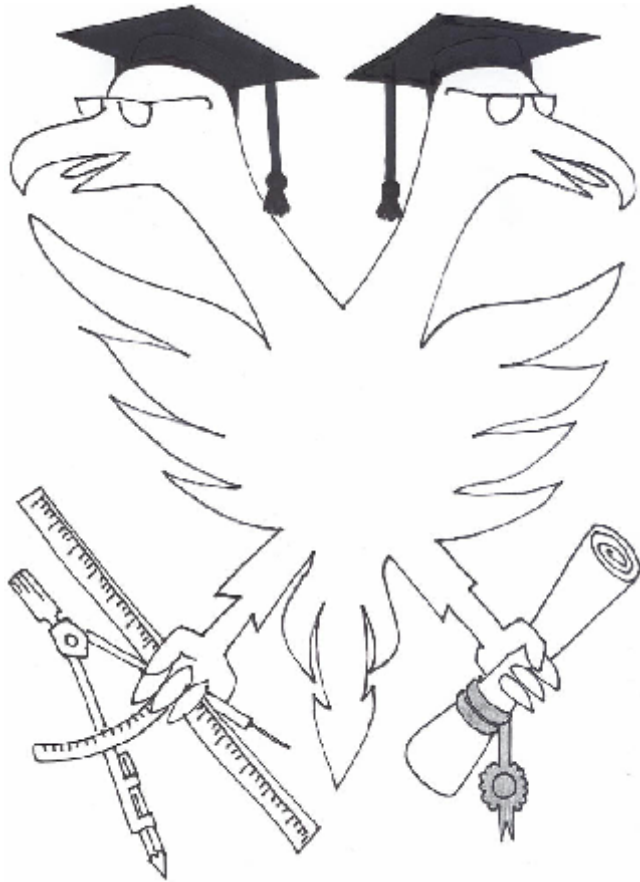


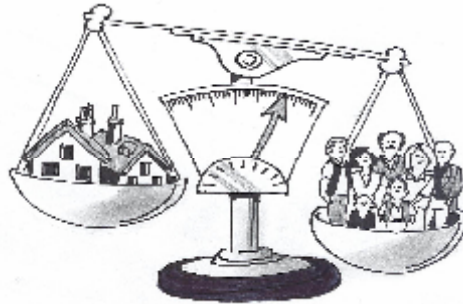
The Learning City



A New Approach to Urban Development

The book *The Learning City* is a completely new concept on urban development, based on a study that was commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Housing Planning and Environment that regularly provides subsidies for innovative projects in urban renewal. The title of this study *Not the Chicken, not the Egg, but the Nest!* implies that seemingly complicated matters, can look quite different when viewed from a different angle, or when not the issue at hand, but the picture at large is regarded.

The Learning City and its practical application, the Nest! Project, deal with urban development in the widest sense of the word. In this vision it is not 'just' realizing a good built living environment the way project developers do. It is not only an interactive process as is usual in the social sector. It is both and more. The chicken-egg question in that context reads as follows: When developing neighborhoods, where do you start, with the producers, with the products, or with the community?



The resulting process defines municipalities as learning cities, where grassroots knowledge enhances institutional decision-making and where formal and informal processes exchange freely. In the learning city the unused skills and neglected potential of civil society is entered into the development process.

The instrument suggested is the integration of temporary settlements as integral part of development projects in the time gaps when the old use has discontinued, but the new building has not started yet.

Temporary and permanent products

On the one hand the temporary settlement is a concrete product with affordable housing, good services and favorable conditions for social cohesion. This benefits not only the inhabitants of the settlement, but also of the surrounding neighborhoods and jump-starts community building in the new development.

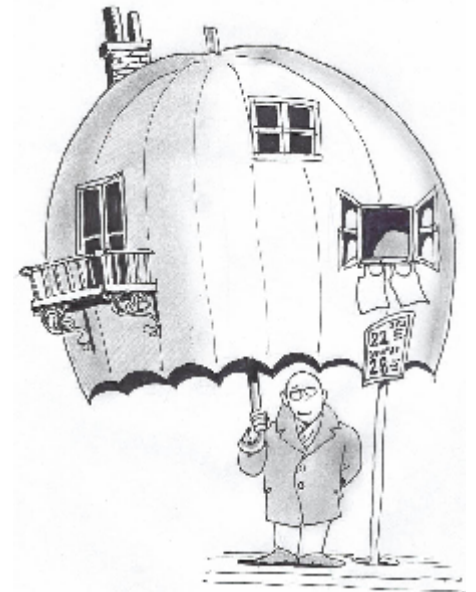
On the other hand the settlement is a learning organisation. This learning process benefits the town as a whole and creates a participatory process that feeds directly into the new development, thus creating a permanent result of the project.

Temporary settlements: the best neighborhoods are not designed, they grow.

A common criticism of newly built settlements is that they are beautiful, but dead. Their residents often spend a lot of their time outside the neighborhood. What they lack is time and presence. In order for neighborhoods to be safe and lively, they depend on people who are able and willing to invest time, energy, creativity and their social networks locally.

Pioneers, people who have time (students, starter families, artists, refugees) need to be attracted. The solution described in the book is to integrate temporary settlements as an additional part of urban development. This is done by offering cheap accommodation and experimental space in development locations where the old use has ended, but building has not yet started. This is a way to attract and mobilize the pioneer energy of groups whose potential is unused or underused in current society.

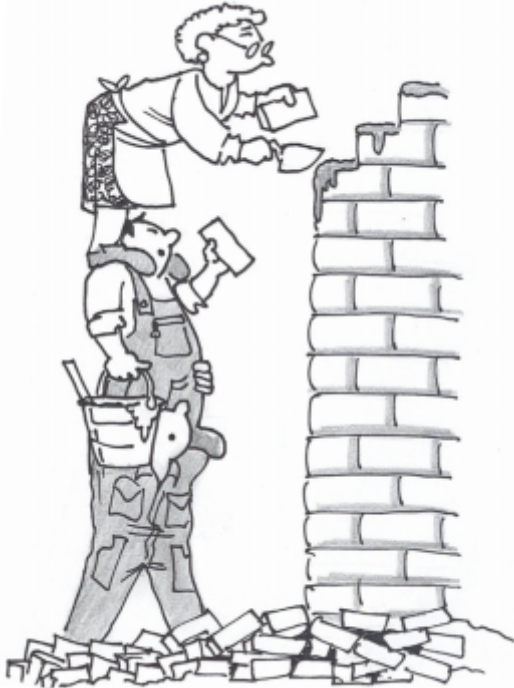
The temporary housing functions as "folding chairs of the housing market" providing a temporary solution for the current shortage in housing, without disturbing the market of the future, which needs to find a structural solution for the stagnation in housing production in the upper end of the market.



The Nest! demonstrates an integrated community approach versus sectorial approaches that dominate Western Europe welfare and planning systems. It also tackles time bottlenecks and support needs, created by the fact that the bulk of economic activity in the Netherlands is carried by a quarter of the population. This is intensified by the fact that family and local networks are no longer readily available to pick up the load. The Nest! project offers a modern version of social structures that are disappearing, that bring solutions back to new settings.

At the same time this contributes to creating a diverse living environment, which is described in current literature as one of the requirements to attract the 'creative class', giving municipalities a major competitive advantage.

The Learning City explores the middle ground, spells out solutions beyond an either/or dichotomy. It does so by applying lessons learned and solutions practiced in other parts of the world to the context of Northern countries and by accessing and entering unused skills and resources and neglected potential into the development process.



Towards a respectful collaboration in urban development

A core element of the Nest! approach is the Neighborhood Academy that organizes the social process in the settlement as a knowledge building process and the development of a new housing project as a process of establishing new respectful partnerships with the inhabitants.

The Nest! offers a base to establish a form of network governance that includes the sharing of both responsibility and authority.

The Nest! is a hothouse of creativity. During its existence it harbors a vision and planning process for the permanent development. This includes new housing concepts and an innovative form of collective private commissioning. In addition to the development product that comes out of this process, what also stays is the learning process that has come out of the many challenges for all involved.

For whom is the learning city?

The idea of the learning city is fit into existing organizational and legal structures. It is developed not as an alternative, but as an enrichment and additional element to on-going developments. It lays out how temporary settlements, as an integral part of urban planning can be profitable for the forces that at present steer urban development processes. It explores where the win-win situations are, and what is in it for all sides.

Although the Nest! idea has been developed as a case study targeted towards the municipality of Arnhem, the Netherlands, it can be implemented in any municipality anywhere, that is interested in innovative urban development and in profiling itself internationally. Different scenarios illustrate the application scope of the methodology, in which temporality is introduced as a valuable additional instrument for urban development.

The complete text of the feasibility study will soon be published on www.nest.cc
More information can be obtained at info@nest.cc

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Who we are

mine (www.mine.cc) is the international network of Mother Centers. Mother Centers are a grassroots self help movement originating in Germany that has spread into 15 countries. mine is a networking structure consolidating and applying the lessons learned from this world-wide movement.

In 2002 mine has been awarded the UN-Habitat Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment. This prize was given to mine for strengthening the capacity of civil society to revitalize local neighborhoods.

mine board members have received numerous awards for their efforts to spread the Mother Center movement, including the prestigious German Bundesverdienstkreuz and the Woman of Europe award.

