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# **Can Top-Down Policy Meet Local Diversity in Urban Transformation Processes?**

**Jenny Stenberg, Maria Zwanenburg, Lasse Fryk**

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, participation has become part of mainstream policy for urban transformation in Europe and developing countries. National governments have adopted community participation as part of their urban transformation strategies, both in renovation and densification processes. Participation is high on the agenda because politicians and public administrators consider it to be of great value when citizens serve as key actors in governance processes aimed at developing the city (Swyngedouw, 2005; Faga, 2006). The aim of these participatory policies is to facilitate the direct inclusion of the voice and knowledge of citizens in public policy. The process of changing the balance of power in the relationships between governments and citizens with greater participation is often referred to as *community empowerment* (Andrews, Cowell, Downe, & Martin, 2006).

In this chapter, we will reflect on two community participation models which can unlock the transformative potential of participation in urban transformation processes. In this context, transformative refers to the potential a participatory process has to shift the existing power balance between citizens and authorities, that is, the capacity to empower. First, the *Community Driven Development* model, a large-scale, national government-led participatory development policy that is implemented by an increasing number of governments throughout the world. Second, a locally based, small-scale model being implemented in a stigmatised suburb in Gothenburg called Hammarkullen, whose objective is to develop new types of relationships between city institutions and inhabitants. Both examples have urban transformation as one of their objectives. In this chapter, we will describe the achievements and challenges of each approach and debate their pros and cons.

## TRANSFORMATIVE PARTICIPATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

There is extensive academic debate on the purposes and the outcomes of citizen and community participation. In this section, we will introduce *transformative participation* within this debate.

In her classical text *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Arnstein (1969) ranked the different degrees of citizen participation in a ladder to show when and by who decisions in planning processes are made. The lowest level is *manipulation*; the highest, *citizen control*. At the lowest level, power and decision-making remain with the authorities, while at the highest level a power shift between citizens and authorities takes place in favour of the citizen.

Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002) developed a similar classification where *interactive participation* is seen as the second highest level of

participation and *self-mobilisation* is the highest. Interactive participation takes place when:

People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation or strengthening of local groups or institutions that determine how available resources are used. Learning methods are used to seek multiple viewpoints. (Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002, p. 180)

Finally, White (1996) classifies the forms of participation according to the interest of the initiators (authorities) in the process. She identifies four types of participation: (a) *Nominal participation* to legitimise decisions already taken, (b) *instrumental participation* to increase efficiency in project implementation, (c) *representative participation* to create sustainability and avoid dependency, and (d) *transformative participation* to promote empowerment which in turn enables people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action (White, 1996, pp. 8-9).

On comparison of the three identified classifications, we can concur that White's *transformative participation* is similar to *interactive participation* as defined by Dalal-Clayton and Bass, insofar as empowerment leads citizens to take actions, and that both would correspond to the highest level in Arnstein's ladder, that is, citizen control. Among the three, we have chosen White's transformative participation to describe the process of power shift between local government and citizens, since the term "transformative" best describes the changing relationship between citizens and government.

Another way of approaching transformative participation is to distinguish between first and second order change, as introduced by Petit and Olson (2013). First order change is suitable for ordinary and well-known problem solving situations while second order change is more appropriate for complex problems. These concepts stem from Bateson (1972) who argued that reality is a semantic and social construction and there is no neutral and objective world outside to be observed. Petit and Olson contend that when observing, describing and acting in the world we are at the same time creating it, making sense and meaning of it through our preconceived concepts, experiences and knowledge. When this social construction is undertaken collaboratively, as in a participatory process, developing and promoting trust and confidence among participants is paramount. Moreover, this construction process should encompass all participant's perspectives and should assure that these are taken into account.

In the debate about the transformative character of participation, some argue that strengthening participatory processes would be sufficient to unlock its transformative potential. Others argue that institutional change towards more responsive and accountable government institutions is a pre-condition for transformation to take place (Gaventa, 2004). Cornwall (2008) points out that the intentions of the initiators of participatory

processes do not always determine the outcomes. The activities of *informing* or *consultation* (both assigned to “tokenism” in Arnstein’s ladder) could be the spark for self-mobilisation. On the other hand, transformative participation may fail to fulfil the expectations citizens have about the obligations that the state has to them. As Cornwall contends: “When ‘empowerment’ boils down to ‘do-it-yourself’, and where the state abnegates its responsibilities, then resistance rather than enthusiastic enrolment might well be the result of efforts to engage citizens” (Cornwall, 2008, pp. 272–273).

An important agent in institutional change may be the opening of *black boxes* (Callon & Latour, 1981). A black box refers to modes of thoughts, habits, forces and objects, which are present in the relationships between institutions, organizations, social classes and states (macro-actors) and the individuals and groups (micro-actors) that interact with them. The difference between macro-actors and micro-actors lies in the capacity each one has to build power relations. A macro-actor operating under the premises contained in a black box does not need to renegotiate its content with the micro-actors, rather it takes for granted the assumptions hidden in it. Callon and Latour (1981, p. 286) conclude then that “macro-actors are micro-actors seated on top of many (leaky) black boxes.”

If institutions (macro-actors) follow a strategy of openness and transparency, that is, of opening the black boxes, this can be an important step in enabling the citizens (micro-actors) to change usual procedures, for example in planning, and thus make a real contribution in the search for solutions to serious contemporary social problems.

In the following comparison between the top-down, national government-led *Community Driven Development* and the locally initiated participatory experience in Hammarkullen, we will discuss the extent to which each approach contributes to the opening of black boxes.

#### COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT: A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT-LED APPROACH

For decades now, community participation has figured in development policies and studies. For a long time, it was propagated and implemented by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as an alternative to the common state-led centralised policies. During the 1990s, the neoliberal development paradigm moved from a market-oriented towards a more people-centred philosophy. The *World Development Report of 2000/2001* (World Bank, 2001) mentioned community participation and empowerment for the first time, besides the usual call for economic growth. The most recent development in this line is *Community Driven Development* (CDD), promoted by the World Bank and several other donor organisations and adopted by the national government of several countries. CDD is described by Dongier et al. (2002) in the following terms:

CDD gives control of decisions and resources to community groups. These groups often work in partnership with demand-responsive support organizations and service providers, including elected local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and central government agencies. CDD is a way to provide social and infrastructure services, organize economic activity and resource management, empower poor people, improve governance, and enhance security of the poorest.

CDD supports transformative participatory process through the transfer of financial resources and decision-making power to community organisations in low-income settlements. Bennett and D’Onofrio (2014, p. 29) state that “Community-driven development aims to bring about change at the individual, group, institutional and systemic levels”. Dongier et al. (2002, p. 303) further note that “Community-driven development (CDD) gives control of decisions and resources to community groups”. These groups often work in partnership with demand-responsive support organisations and service providers, including elected local governments, the private sector, NGOs and central government agencies.

CDD projects are expected to lead to the empowerment of the poor and to increase their social capital. The question is whether returning to these population segments the decision-making power and control over public resources leads to a transformation in the power relation between authorities and less favoured urban citizens. Moreover, there is no evidence that the support organisations that Dongier et al. (2002) refer to (NGOs or the private sector) in their definition of CDD as *demand-responsive*. We will further address this question in the following discussion about institutional change and the notion of community.

### Institutional Change

The issue of power differences in participatory processes is complex. Power differences occur not only between government institutions and communities, but also within each of them. Community development projects have often been criticised for this neglect, however addressing this issue in policy design proves to be difficult. For a long time, the debate on community participation has very much focused on methodology, that is to say, on how to implement participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Guidelines and sourcebooks are important instruments in the implementation of participation policies. Guidelines exist on a national level but international organisations also produce manuals and recommendations. *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook* (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 1996) is one example. However, by focusing on the “how to”, the “what for” is often neglected. Cleaver (2001, pp. 38–39), referring to Biggs (1995), observes that traditional participatory methods fail “to address issues of power and control

of information and other resources and provides an inadequate framework for developing a critical reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of technical and social change.”

Once they have experience with CDD, communities themselves demand a more responsive government (Bennett & D’Onofrio, 2014). Gaventa (2004) is of the opinion that waiting for community exigency to occur is not sufficient. Direct intervention in institutional change is also required in order to reach a stage of transformative participation. Given this, the earlier mentioned black boxes (Callon & Latour, 1981) have now to be reconsidered.

A signal of the opening of a black box could be a change in position of those government officials that actually work at the interface with local communities. Their role is crucial, since they inform and interact with citizens and facilitate the participatory process. For local communities, they are the face of the government. When institutional change takes place within governments, favouring interaction with local communities, it is then reflected in the position and authority of these facilitators. In general, little attention has been paid to what happens at the interface between community and government institutions or to the civil servants that operate at this interface. As Vasan (2002, p. 4125) observes “development literature has surprisingly neglected the characteristics, social conditions, perceptions and attitudes of field-level implementers of policy.”

According to Mansuri and Rao (2004, p. 24), this neglect is also apparent in the implementation of CDD projects:

Frontline staff who work directly with beneficiary groups are especially critical actors in building participatory processes. They are expected to mobilize communities, build the capacity for collective action, ensure adequate representation and participation, and, where necessary, break through elite domination. They must be culturally and politically sensitive, charismatic leaders, trainers, anthropologists, engineers, economists, and accountants. Despite their centrality, however, there is virtually no generalizable evidence on their role.

### The Notion of Community

Many participatory development projects see the community as a homogeneous, egalitarian group, whose members make use of their social capital to collectively express their views and needs. This concept of a community is one that has much been criticised on frequent occasions. Cleaver shows how this assumption of commonality of interest among individuals obscures the complex reality of a community “as the site of both solidarity and conflict, shifting alliances, power and social structures” (Cleaver, 2001, p. 45). In another study, Cleaver (2005) also shows that the assumption that poor families have equal stocks of social capital might be erroneous. Power differences between individuals and households often create relations of

dependency. Similarly, Mansuri and Rao (2004) note that dependency on powerful groups prevent people from genuine participation. They may consider that the insecure outcome of a participatory process is not worth the cost of losing a proven beneficial relationship.

In their study on *Community Driven Development* in Indonesia, Dasgupta and Beard (2007) show that the internal dynamics of communities lead to very diverse outcomes. In situations of unequal distribution of power, decisions may be dominated by elites. This can lead to elite capture, where elites use their position to benefit their own interests. An alternative is elite control, whereby elites decide on projects that benefit a majority, or even the poorest. However, these authors additionally note that more democratic decision-making does not always lead to inclusion of the poorest.

Community participation is often associated with decentralised decision-making and with the elicitation of local knowledge. In theory, local knowledge is rooted in a specific social, cultural and historical milieu. As circumstances are diverse, so is the local knowledge and the ways in which it may contribute to decision-making. However, when the CDD programme was implemented in Indonesia, we saw that the community organisational structure—a structure that each community should be able to benefit from—had to be elected following rather uniform guidelines. One could ask to what extent a uniform organisational structure that has to be applied in a similar way in all communities can actually reflect the existing local variations in culture and knowledge. The reason for approaching communities in a uniform way may rest with the practical capacity of a national government to deal with diversity. There is a trade-off between the efficient implementation of a nation-wide participatory programme and the inclusion of local diversity in this programme. The difference in organisational culture between community and government bureaucracy may also play a role. Establishing “community structures that most clearly mirror bureaucratic structures” (Cleaver, 2001, p. 40) is therefore the best solution. Finally, one could also question how the community can contribute to innovative development, when it cannot take advantage of its own potential because the prevailing power structures end up determining their local needs and corresponding actions.

### Conclusion and Points for Discussion

The analysis undertaken in the previous sections is based on a limited review of texts on community participation and particularly on CDD. Is CDD a form of transformative participation? If indeed this were the case, we could have expected to know more about the opening of the black box. Thus, the question remains: What happens at the interface between government and communities and within communities in the process of CDD implementation. In fact, we could contend that the dynamics at

the interface between government and communities are unknown in a government initiated participatory programme, like CDD.

On the other hand, we know more about the effect that more democracy and empowerment have on communities. CDD programmes, as described by Dasgupta and Beard (2007), present a variety of outcomes, not all of which have a transformative character. On the contrary, given the heterogeneous nature of communities and the power differences that exist within them, often—although not always—the poorest and most vulnerable among the population become excluded. Elite dominance and elite capture is a recurrent phenomenon in community participation. Therefore, we can say that CDD approach does not necessarily imply transformative participation, nor does it necessarily lead to a second order change. This brings us to the following point for discussion: How can government and institutions that deal with community participation actually take in consideration local needs and circumstances.

In the next section, we will describe a planning experience in Sweden—*Urban Empowerment in Hammarkullen*—which turns the issue of community participation in planning upside down: What if citizen participation is the starting point instead of the end point?

#### URBAN EMPOWERMENT IN HAMMARKULLEN: A BOTTOM-UP, EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH

Contrary to CDD approaches, the experiences in Hammarkullen represent a bottom-up approach to community participation and empowerment. This is not a drawing table prescription, like CDD, but an organically grown action research project.

The Hammarkullen initiative started as a response to the need to change renovation practices in Sweden, most specifically, those concerning the existing housing stock built in the 1960s and 70s. Currently, in Sweden, the work to renovate the 800,000 apartments which date back to this period is pending and will commence soon. At the outset, neglected maintenance has led to the need for renovation. There is also a considerable need to improve energy performance in order to meeting the climate objectives set up in global agreements. However, there are no resources set aside in renovation funds to upgrade the apartments. Whether this is because profits have been either incorrectly distributed or misspent because of bad administration is a matter which is still debated among scholars.

The renovation of these apartments is often also exposed to other problems. There are many areas like Hammarkullen, which suffer from a general lack of democracy and therefore pose a risk for gentrification and may even accentuate existing levels of social exclusion. Neglected maintenance has led to these areas being inhabited by socially excluded

segments of the population. Consequently, these neighbourhoods often carry a stigma, significantly undermining the potential of the inhabitants to become community builders. With these issues in mind, the following considerations are needed to move forward: What must be put in place in order to adapt planning procedures to this reality; and how planning can include these people in a dialogue about how the city should be developed. These are some of the challenges our society faces today.

In response to this situation, in 2010 the University of Gothenburg together with Chalmers University of Technology established a centre<sup>1</sup> in the suburb of Hammarkullen (8,100 inhabitants) with the purpose of facilitating access to higher education to residents with a foreign background and less economic resources. By intertwining research, education and civil society through community outreach,<sup>2</sup> the centre wanted to enable inhabitants to become knowledge producers in academic work. Simultaneously, their activities aimed at helping involved teachers develop higher education to better adapt it to the needs of the local society (Stenberg & Fryk, 2015). This focus at the local level and the discussion of how local work can influence norms, laws and regulations is particularly relevant. Top-down structures give rise to a society with a serious lack of democracy and this does not encourage citizens to act or take responsibility. Systemic change driven by co-creation and co-planning can be a clear indication that the authorities involved really have been responsive to the dialogue they invited citizens to (Stenberg, 2013). A changed balance of power namely implies new relationships between local stakeholders. It is not self-evident that municipal representatives really want to be part of this change of relationships, even if they may be obliged to do so in the policy documents. Then, they may choose to keep black boxes sealed (first order change), as it is faster and easier (not to forget that if all tasks were seen as challenges to power, it would too much of a waste of energy and financial resources). However, as research projects fundamentally exist to foster the development of society, we found it appropriate to investigate the circumstances which facilitate this kind of learning process, in which the balance of power between inhabitants and professionals develops in the direction of changing the balance of power.

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1. See [urban.gu.se](http://urban.gu.se), [chalmers.se/urban](http://chalmers.se/urban)

2. See [urbanempower.se](http://urbanempower.se) for description of the first experience of such an integration since the centre started. The reason why the area of Hammarkullen was chosen for starting a common higher education centre in 2010 was that teachers and students from the department of Social Work, Gothenburg University, had been active in the area for 25 years, collaborating successfully with the local municipality. Chalmers Architecture joined with an annual place-based master course in 2008 and other disciplines from the universities carry out courses in the area on temporary basis.

## Learning Lab Hammarkullen: Codesigning Renovation

The experiences in Hammarkullen show the importance of approaching a local area with a genuine desire to share power. This does not mean that democratically elected instances should be dispensed of, but rather the opposite: the dialogue with citizens can help to strengthen democratic policy making. This is important as the problems cities face are really complex—most of the actors are practically paralysed after decades of searching for solutions for these stigmatised suburbs, such as Hammarkullen. There is a clear need for a renewed approach in the case of housing and the regeneration of housing areas—such as an awareness of the importance of developing the democracy behind renovation policies. In current research, we investigate how this may be carried out. The purpose of the programme *Sustainable Integrated Renovation*, funded by the Swedish research programme Formas (2014–2018), is to help the community developing knowledge about how to radically change building renovation practice at the national level through collaboration and participation, in a sustainable way. The programme involves researchers from different fields and its final aim is to propose innovative renovation models that can be widely used on a large scale.

One of the Living Labs in the programme—*Learning Lab Hammarkullen: Codesigning Renovation*—is carried out in the suburb of Hammarkullen where buildings with 900 rented apartments will soon be renovated.<sup>3</sup> The goals of this Learning Lab are: (a) Developing methods for integration of knowledge from the tenants early in the renovation process; (b) discussing the different lifestyles involved in the context of sustainable renovation with all the actors; and (c) finding forms for tenants to participate in the decision-making process in renovation. Subsequently, the programme aims at bringing about a power shift through a collaborative learning process. The involved actors are academics, property owners (Bostadsbolaget, a municipal housing company) and The Swedish Union of Tenants. All actors meet on a regular basis to plan, implement and to learn one from another through these experiences.

One obvious way forward for a transdisciplinary<sup>4</sup> research project like the *Learning Lab Hammarkullen*, is gathering participants in a room managed by the local actors, taking advantage of the experience accumulated by several of the participants in previous area-based development projects. Still, these activities have to be financed and scheduled in a shared time plan. A partnership between the local community and higher education institutions has made it possible that every year, approximately 25 full-time master students participate in the Learning Lab over

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3. See [learninglabhammarkullen.se](http://learninglabhammarkullen.se)

4. In short, this means to develop academic knowledge in collaboration with actors from different disciplines and from various stakeholders in society. See Hadorn et al. (2008).

a three-month period. Their assigned task is to create design proposals for the area, based on dialogues with the inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> The tasks for these students have been collaboratively devised by teachers, researchers, and local actors so that their outcomes could be useful both for the community and for academic purposes. In the context of these learning processes, every year students dedicate time to communicating with inhabitants in a structured way, with supervision, and on themes which are valuable for ongoing research projects.

### Transformative Participation and Systemic Change

A learning process in which employees from the local housing company and the tenant organisation participate together with academics, empowers inhabitants to understand and to challenge the content of the black boxes. An example of such a black box is the dialogue between tenants and property owners in the course of a building renovation process. When that black box is opened it reveals what happens when tenants are ignored (which happens very often) despite the legal protection. Rent prices have increased by as much as 65% due to the renovations of the apartments, even though most of the tenants do not want them. Furthermore, as part of the research project, tenants are empowered to reconsider other black boxes. For example, the rent negotiation process is not as transparent as tenants would like it to be. It is also based on a utility value system, a system which compares nearby rent levels, which is a black box in itself. Additionally, it is a black box that measures which levels are considered to raise the living standard and subsequently the rent. There are some factors which always influence the rent (e.g., security door to the stairwell) while other amenities do not (e.g., replacement of pipes). On many occasions, the owner does not acknowledge this black box and keeps it sealed in order to make as much money as possible.

With help from these learning processes, the actors involved in the research project are then able to access a second order change transformation. This involves identifying the institutions or organisations and the systems with which they operate, in the building renovation process. In Hammarkullen, we have discovered three systems:

1. **THE MODEL FOR LEGAL TENANT DIALOGUE.** This national model has been developed by The Swedish Union of Tenants which signs contracts with property owners before each renovation. We have had such a dialogue model for a long time and it has recently been updated. After the last changes, it delegates significantly more power to the tenants. Even so, there is still considerable room for improvement. As an active participant of the research project, The Swedish Union of Tenants

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5. See [suburbsdesign.wordpress.com](http://suburbsdesign.wordpress.com)

participates in the learning process and drives the development of the new model at the same time as they are applying it.

2. **THE PROCESS OF LEGAL TENANT DIALOGUE IN HAMMARKULLEN.** The Swedish Union of Tenants and the property owner Bostadsbolaget will soon start a dialogue with the tenants of the 900 apartments to be renovated, using the above mentioned dialogue model. As both are partners in the research project, they have the possibility to bring about a second order change while carrying out this process (developing the process while working on it). Thus, we await the future outcomes of the project to assess the results.
3. **SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT.** Public organisations in Sweden are obliged to make market oriented procurements when building. As Bostadsbolaget is a partner of the research project, they have the possibility to contribute to a second order change while designing the new procurement conditions for the renovation in Hammarkullen (e.g., including the obligation to employ people from the area). Again, we are waiting for the results of this project to learn from them.

Hence, these are three examples that show that second order change can take place thanks to the transformative participation of the actors involved in community planning. It is important to note that this kind of participation requires learning processes which include the relevant local actors (civil servants, professionals, employees). In order to carry out a true transformative process, interaction between local inhabitants is not enough. They also need to have clear communication channels and proactive dialogues with relevant local actors so that the knowledge they possess contributes to transforming the existing systems.

Additionally, there is a fourth system amenable to be changed which was revealed as a result of the activities in the *Learning Lab*, thanks to transformative participation:

4. **INNOVATIVE RENOVATION MODELS.** The research programme will result in renovation models covering all aspects of sustainability. The actors in the *Learning Lab Hammarkullen* will contribute to second order change in the research programme: researchers from various disciplines will help to bring the experience of the actors involved into a renovation model, and will facilitate its implementation in society.

Therefore, the *Learning Lab Hammarkullen*, with its transdisciplinary approach, will contribute to the creation of a new national policy for building renovation projects. Without a transformative participation, the research project would probably have concluded with the renovation of these housing areas built during the 1960s and 70s, without addressing the importance of how the consequent rent increases contributed to the social exclusion of vulnerable people. The strategy of opening up black

boxes to give rise to second order changes includes a real transfer of power from authorities to inhabitants while it places the emphasis on shared learning. Altogether, the outcomes of the research project will propitiate a systemic change in the existing power relations governing the building renovation processes.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have discussed the relevance of CDD, the concept of black boxes and their importance for CDD, the use of transformative participation in transdisciplinary research and how all of these factors may lead to a systemic change—at both local and national levels—in the existing building renovation processes. CDD is usually presented as an obvious best solution, without offering the inhabitants or other local actors the opportunity to question it. This is because the design of the policy has not been open for reconsideration. Therefore, CDD programmes may actually be described as a type of black box.

One reflection considering the lack of interface between government and community, also noticeable in CDD programmes, is that government institutions have to be prepared to change their structures and working procedures. More emphasis needs to be given to government employees who actually work at this interface. As already stated by Mansuri and Rao (2004, p. 24), this task requires considerable skills and creativity. Giving more attention to these frontline workers, helping them to improve their skills, labour conditions and authority, would be a first step towards opening the CDD black box.

A consequent application of the principles of transformative participation could lead to systemic changes in national policies aimed at supporting participation in urban transformation. However, we still do not know if a widely accepted national policy, for example, about renovation, would actually favour sustainable renovation everywhere, as intended. In this regard, some questions remain to be answered, such as: Can detailed top-down policies really meet local diversity in urban transformation processes? Is it not in the very nature of top-down policies and strategies to be challenged and changed for the sake of diversity? Additionally, we pose this question: Can governments produce a set of guidelines that will facilitate a collaborative learning process in urban transformation instead of designing an explicit and detailed participatory policy?

We believe that with this way of thinking it may be possible for governments to formulate top-down policies and, at the same time, initiate fruitful strategies which will lead to increased citizen participation in urban transformation processes, for example, in the renovation and densification of housing areas. A greater engagement of citizens will help to face current serious societal problems, and to continue developing new

top-down policies and strategies on urban transformation. With this said, there is a great need for a similar approach in other European countries where there are areas in need of investment and renovation, which suffer from a general lack of democracy, a risk of gentrification and increased social exclusion, like the case of Hammarkullen.

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