

# **Are Business Improvement Districts a Common Pool Resource Management? The Challenges and Potentials for Spatial Planning of Self-organisation in Urban Development**

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Although a rather common phenomenon within the USA, the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) is very recent within European legislation. During the 2000s the concept has spread among others in the United Kingdom (2004) and the Netherlands (2009), while being met with both great enthusiasm among policymakers, entrepreneurs, and planners for its potential for planning and urban regeneration (Lloyd et al. 2003), but also watched with great distrust concerning its elitist and exclusive character (Cook 2009). This paper aims to overcome this opposition between advocates and critics, by considering BIDs as form of self-organization, additional to – rather than opposing – existing institutions. In order to understand both the potentials of BIDs for planning as the way they challenge (especially European) spatial planning, BIDs are understood as polycentric systems of governance, in which participants make rules that affect the sustainability of the resource system and its use (Ostrom 2008).

When one compares the design principles for Common Pool Resource Management (CPRM) as developed by Ostrom (1990, 2001, 2008) with BIDs in the European legislation, the similarities are striking. However, when comparing the two, one instantly runs into the problem of translating what exactly the ‘common pool resource’ is that BIDs manage. Common pool resources are defined as goods that are un-excludable but subtractable, which differs from public (unexcludable and unsubtractable) and private goods (excludable and subtractable) (Ostrom 1990, 2001). These resources are available to a group of people who benefit individually from increased personal access while their use of the resource potentially reduces its availability to other users (Berkes 1989, Berkes et al. 1989, Feeney et al. 1990). Related to BIDs this is not a single commodity like ‘fish’ in relation to ‘fishery’, but stretches from elements the BID manages (quality of public space, branding, business support), via accessibility and attractability, to elements the BID benefits of (increased quantity and quality of footfall). In the case of BIDs the motivation for CPRM seems ‘under-care’ rather than ‘over-use’.

This paper explores the analogy between CPRM and BIDs using Actor-network theory (ANT). This analytical approach is chosen since ANT focuses on involvement of both human actors (actors and institutions) and non-human actors (physical objects and spatial characteristics), and on formations of networks among these actors (instead of considering them as static). Empirically the paper uses case studies derived from BIDs in Birmingham, UK, because of their active approach towards planning issues.

Last, I explore the question how this challenges spatial planning practice, especially in Europe a primarily governmental practice (Flyvbjerg 1996), if BIDs are indeed a form of CPRM. What does the polycentricity and multiplicity of institutional arrangements of CPRM imply for spatial planning practice? What will spatial planning look like when structured more along the concept of the commons? Can one use a concept like CPRM in spatial planning dilemmas such as overcoming problematic encounters between planning and society and achieving the often advocated shared responsibility between governments

and citizenry for spatial qualities (Boonstra/Boelens 2011)? Some preliminary insights are given.

#### Key References

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