5s1: Visions for circularity: critical exploration of the implementation of the concept of a circular society

Circulating ideas: The role of visual language in shaping green urban fringes

Buizer, I.M. 1), Metze-Burghouts, T. 1)

1) Wageningen University and Research

This paper explores how material representations shape involvement in debates on controversial policy themes. Pictures, plans, maps, stories, diagrams, and artist impressions are all examples of such representations. Via processes of representation, citizens, experts, public officials, and other stakeholders dwell on a troubled past, a current conflict, or a future that they share. We follow Hannah Pitkin's (1967) argument that to understand representation, we should examine the different ways in which representation is being used in policy practices. Representation, in this context, is conceptualized as the ways in which memories, stories, problems, analyses, and ideas about the future become materially represented in the interactions among stakeholders. Through our analysis we explore the ways in which memories, aspirations, options for the future and other relevant features, are rendered in tangible form: a map, an art installation, a scientific model, and so forth. By means of participatory engagement, we identify how these objects are mobilized in the conversation, and how they affect the ability of groups and individuals to engage with each other and with the problems and issues that they confront. The theoretical work is relevant for all sorts of representations through materiality that are co-productive of policy controversies, which face diverging discourses and practices. Our empirical study focusses on the emerging policy controversy in the city of Amsterdam in which the municipalities' ambition to build 50.000 houses by 2025 is possibly at odds with local initiatives of citizens, artists, NGOs to maintain green urban fringes.

On the one hand, our preliminary field explorations show that materializations are rather static designs of which the meaning is (meant to be) more or less fixed, and that what they represent is an end product. On the other hand, they can be used as an interactive heuristic to enhance the inclusive and representative character of these processes. Through our fieldwork, we distinguished dimensions such as formal/informal; slow/fast; common/marginal; dynamic/stable, etcetera. These form the elements of our 'crystal of representation'. The crystal presents a heuristic device that provides insight into how materializations communicate knowledge, values or desires. As an outcome of the project, we visualize a crystal which is itself a linguistic device to debate how materializations circulate ideas and shape interactivity.