



Voters' acceptance of land use policy measures: A two-level analysis



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ABSTRACT

Sustainable spatial planning has become increasingly important during the last decades. Politics tries to counter land use related challenges such as urban sprawl by the implementation of policy measures. In a direct democracy, the implementation of policy measures requires citizens' acceptance. This paper examines determinants of voters' policy measure acceptance in the area of spatial planning. The study analyses 18 popular votes on spatial planning measures between 1984 and 2008 in Switzerland. A Bayesian multilevel modelling method is used to estimate both determinants at the individual level as well as the contextual level. Results show that the main individual factor for voters in Switzerland to accept spatial planning measures, in a broad sense, are the party affiliations of voters. Another important factor for the voting decision is being a homeowner. In contrast, whether voters live in urban or rural areas does not influence such voting decisions. At the contextual level, policy measures which contain incentive and market-based instruments have a higher probability to be accepted than bans and rules. Moreover, the degree of organisational capacity and conflict capability of interests concerned seem to influence democratic acceptance of spatial planning measures.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable use of land is one of the current global challenges which also became a topic of relevance in the public and in politics (Carsjens and Ligtenberg, 2007; Daniels, 1999; Johnson, 2001). Sustainable spatial planning aims to counter negative developments of inefficient land use and its causes. One problematic aspect of land use is urban sprawl. Increasing urban sprawl and its negative consequences led to its high attention in research concerning its causes and implications (see Johnson, 2001 for a literature overview). One reason why sustainable spatial planning became such a phenomenon of interest is because it is deemed to support countering segregated land uses. Literature argues that “[g]rowth management and sustainable development are widely considered essential to maintain the quality of life in metropolitan landscapes” (Carsjens and Ligtenberg, 2007, p. 72; see also Daniels, 1999; van der Valk, 2002). Sustainable spatial planning and its causes such as sprawl have been investigated in research from several perspectives (Carrion-Flores and Irwin, 2004; Groot, 2006; Johnson, 2001). These perspectives usually focus on spatial planning consequences such as its outcome for the environment or from an economic efficiency perspective. In recent years, research developed several

policy measures and instruments for sustainable spatial planning to address the question of how land should be used. These instruments serve as a theoretical basis for a policy. In practice, a policy needs to be implemented successfully to affect its intended outcome. A successful implementation, in turn, crucially depends upon its democratic support and in direct-democracies, the implementation of policy measures even requires citizens' acceptance. Similarly, the inclusion of voters' preferences in spatial planning processes can lead to several benefits (Bedford et al., 2002; Conrad et al., 2011; Gerber and Phillips, 2004). However, conditions for a successful implementation of spatial planning policy measures with regards to their potential to be accepted by citizens have received little attention in research so far (see e.g. Baldassare and Wilson, 1996; Connerly and Frank, 1986; Gale and Hart, 1992; Wassmer and Lascher, 2006).

The aim of this paper therefore is to examine conditions that foster the policy implementation of spatial planning measures in terms of voters' acceptance. This paper goes beyond the question of whether a spatial planning measure itself is efficient but steps back by estimating what fosters voter acceptance of policy implementation. To do so, this study focuses on a prospective view on voters' acceptance of spatial planning measures before a measure is implemented and therefore before its efficiency can be estimated.

To be more precise, this paper seeks to identify acceptance determinants of spatial planning measures in Switzerland at the individual level (voters) and at the contextual level (context of pop-

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ular votes). This paper analyses a new data set consisting of 18 direct-democratic votes in Switzerland between 1984 and 2008 in the area of spatial planning. The advantage of a direct-democratic system such as in Switzerland is that it facilitates the possibility to analyse voters' decisions on a specific issue instead of a bundle of parties' intentions. The multilevel modelling method is applied to cover both contextual factors as well as individual determinants with the use of a Bayesian approach.

The paper is structured in the following way: First, the theoretical framework for the concept of acceptance will be stated and the theoretical relationship between individual and contextual characteristics and citizens' acceptance of measures in the area of spatial planning will be clarified. Based on the theoretical framework, hypotheses will be derived before describing the data, applied method and models. Subsequently, the findings will be presented and the hypotheses will be tested. The paper closes with a discussion of the results and their implications in the form of conclusions.

2. The theoretical framework

In order to make assessments about factors which influence the voters' acceptance of policy instruments in the area of spatial planning, a concept of the term 'acceptance' is required. Following Schade and Schlag (2003, p. 47), the construct of acceptance can be "described by questioning acceptance of what, through whom and under which conditions and circumstances". This acceptance concept can be applied as a theoretical foundation and can be converted to an empirical research design for this paper, which is presented in Fig. 1. Accordingly, the acceptance component of *what* is given by the object of research, namely spatial planning measures. In order to capture all components of the acceptance concept, a further distinction can be made between individual (*through whom*) and contextual (*under which conditions*) acceptance determinants of policy instruments. In a direct-democratic system, citizens vote on specific issues. Hence, the acceptance of a policy measure can be captured by the citizen's acceptance of a popular vote. The conditions of success which are determinants to vote 'yes' to ballot measures in the area of spatial planning therefore represent the citizens' acceptance of policy instruments under contextual characteristics.

The theoretical foundation of this paper also ties in the fact that acceptance of policy instruments has received little attention and was approached more indirectly in the area of spatial planning (Baldassare and Wilson, 1996; Connerly and Frank, 1986; Wassmer and Lascher, 2006). However, there is a relatively large body of literature addressing acceptance determinants in the area of environmental policies (see e.g. Im Groot et al., 2013; Kallbekken and Sælen, 2011; Nadai, 2007; Steg et al., 2006). Hence, the questions arise as to whether spatial planning policy can be compared with environmental policy and which differences exist between these two policy fields. It is assumed that spatial planning and environmental policies are similar as they both address the economic use of the natural resource land (Knoepfel and Narath, 2006, p. 76). At the same time, it can also be argued that spatial planning is characterised by particularities. The aim of this paper therefore is not only to explore the acceptance of spatial planning policy measures by combining different voting behaviour theories but also to answer the underlying question of how spatial planning differs from environmental policies by applying a theory on policy proximity.

Soss and Schram (2007, p. 121) propose the policy dimension *proximity*, which captures the "direct-versus-distant form in which a policy encountered the extent to which it exists as a tangible presence affecting people's lives in immediate, concrete ways versus existing as a distant object appraised for its effects elsewhere." In

this regard, they specify "distant" not only concerning "geography" but also regarding aspects as "social relations" and "time". The proximity dimension ranges from "distant" to "proximate" and the more proximate a policy is, the more directly it is experienced by the public which also leads to a greater ability of the public to individually evaluate that policy (see also Campbell, 2012; Soss and Schram, 2007, p. 121). Transferring this proximity theory to spatial planning policy and environmental policy, a main difference between these policy fields might exist regarding their degree of proximity. Spatial planning policy measures often directly affect people (e.g. building regulations) and therefore often are proximate for many people, whereas environmental policies often affect people in a much more indirect manner (e.g. nuclear phase-out) and therefore are distant for many people. Accordingly, the underlying theoretical argument of this paper is that spatial planning and environmental policy differ regarding their degree of proximity which, in turn, reduces the transferability of theoretical considerations for environmental policy measure contextual determinants. In addition, proximity theory provides guidance regarding the factor selection for integrating in the analysis. At the individual level, factors were included in the analysis which are assumed to be of particular importance when considering spatial planning and their degree of proximity (*location type* and *homeownership*) or which have repeatedly been shown empirically to influence voting behaviour (*party affiliation* and control variables). Theoretical considerations for contextual determinants are mainly taken from environmental policies in order to examine whether they can be applied for spatial planning. Results may help to put spatial planning into perspective regarding its comparability with environmental policies.

In the following, theoretical considerations will be given which link different voting behaviour theories and empirical findings from previous research to acceptance of spatial planning instruments to each of the individual characteristics separately and to features of the context.

2.1. Individual determinants

Individual determinants capture voters' characteristics that might influence their decision to accept a measure in the area of spatial planning. The theoretical basis of each hypothesis for the individual determinants is described in the following paragraphs.

2.1.1. Location type

The factor *location type* reflects one of the cleavages introduced by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and refers to a *centre* versus *periphery* split. It is assumed that people who live in the periphery try to preserve their own identity and way of life and therefore seek to dispose themselves from state intervention as far as possible. For this reason, people from the periphery seek to keep up independence and autonomy from the central state (Bolliger, 2007; p. 65). With regard to spatial planning, citizens in urban areas might also tend to favour policy measures because they experience more negative consequences of non-sustainable land use than citizens in rural areas (Thalmann, 2004, p. 206). In this vein, Bornstein and Thalmann (2008, p. 1342) maintain that "[u]rban voters might be more favorable to environmental policy because they are more exposed to nuisances and they value the leisure value of open spaces more than its productive value."

2.1.2. Party affiliation

Another central factor for citizens' voting decisions is political ideology, and can be measured by voters' party affiliation or party ties (Bühlmann and Freitag, 2006; Campbell et al., 1960; Lachat, 2008). Regarding party affiliation, classical political theory and empirical evidence suggest that left-wing parties support government intervention whereas right-wing parties refuse state

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