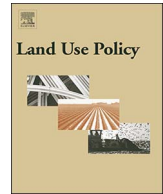




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Governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in current practices of strategic spatial plan implementation

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ABSTRACT

Implementing strategic spatial plans is a complex task. The process involves strategy formation, institutional capacity building, funding mechanism establishment and governance arrangements, which take shape within complex power configurations. Based on empirical evidence gathered by interviewing regional planning experts, this paper focuses on the role of governance arrangements and funding mechanisms in current practices of strategic plan implementation in 14 European urban regions. This investigation was completed bearing in mind power configurations, which shape and frame governance arrangements and funding mechanism in planning practice. A cross-case comparison provides evidence that, among the governance arrangements influencing plan implementation, negotiation and interest groups involvement are pivotal. Negotiation involves private interest groups, such as real estate agencies and environmental non-governmental organizations. The paper shows that in some case studies private interest groups have a substantial bargaining power to negotiate, for example, the development of a new housing settlement or a retail facility, while other groups struggle to safeguard natural areas. It is also during negotiations that plan implementation intentions are prioritized, strategic urban projects are formulated and funding mechanisms are established. The paper demonstrates that to truly grasp plan implementation praxis it is necessary to go beyond multi-actor involvement and inter-scalar government co-operation. It is necessary to scrutinize the funding sources, investigate who wins and who loses while negotiations are happening, and how plan implementation decisions are actually made.

1. Introduction

Investigating ways to effectively manage spatial transformation is increasingly pursued in urban regions worldwide (Albrechts et al., 2017). In this quest, a sound understanding of spatial planning processes is required. Spatial planning is thought to influence spatial transformation, urban growth and patterns of land use change (Xu and Yeh, 2017). Spatial planning is a multidimensional activity with various purposes, including project development, master planning, land-use planning and strategic planning. Spatial planning processes, consequently, entail a plan making process, that is, the preparation or designing phase of spatial plans, either strategic or not, as well as an implementation process, that is, the translation of the principles and intentions of a plan into tangible actions at the ground level (Healey et al., 2006). Examples of these tangible actions are a new housing settlement, a new commercial facility in the outskirts of a main urban area, the reinforcement of an intraregional transportation network or the maintenance of a green infrastructure. This paper focuses on the implementation process of strategic spatial plans.

The spatial planning literature emphasizes the complexity of processes of plan implementation; however, the plan implementation process of spatial planning processes has attracted some research attention since the early 1980s (Feitelson et al., 2017; Rudolf and Gradinaru, 2017; Talen, 1996). Spatial plan implementation has been evaluated across different plan domains, from land-use plans to strategic plans and hazard mitigation plans, as well as at different spatial scales, from national to regional and local (Lyles et al., 2016). The majority of the studies on spatial plan implementation have discussed the process from a theoretical point of view (Laurian et al., 2004). The few existing empirical studies, which often involve a single case study, have mainly focused on assessing the implementation of spatial planning objectives through the use of evaluation frameworks or through the evaluation of plan conformance and plan performance of spatial plans (Gradinaru et al., 2017; Faludi, 2000).

In this paper, we go beyond the plan conformance and performance debate. Specifically, we investigate the role of governance arrangements in current practices of strategic plan implementation in urban regions. Within this investigation and in line with the literature,

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particular attention is given to power configurations shaping governance arrangements and framing funding mechanisms and thus influencing the overall processes of strategic spatial plan implementation (Olesen, 2012, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2004, 1998; Yiftachel, 1994). In the early days of the expansion of spatial planning, spatial planners in the US and in Europe were required to think about power relations on a daily basis, and had to devise tactics and strategies to navigate the ordeals of a planning practice that was always politicized (Van Assche et al., 2014). Within the context of spatial planning practice, power configurations define the strategic relationships between public and private interest groups, but they also shape governance arrangements and ultimately affect the availability of funding mechanisms (Hillier, 2002). Being mindful that spatial planning has become increasingly project-based (Oliveira and Hersperger, 2017) and development-led (Valtonen et al., 2017), discussions on the legitimacy and transparency of strategic plans are paramount to establishing an in-depth understanding of today's strategic planning practice (Mäntysalo et al., 2011).

The literature highlights that strategic spatial plan implementation involves various governance arrangements, such as cooperation across levels of government, coordination between public entities and private actors in decision-making, negotiations, citizen participation and actor involvement (Albrechts et al., 2017; Legacy and Nouwelant van den, 2015; Walsh, 2012; Healey et al., 2006). For example, in the case of implementation of a regional strategic plan for China's Pearl River Delta, Xu and Yeh (2017) found that the process entailed various governance arrangements involving public entities, interest groups from the economic sector and ecological conservation groups. Specifically, Xu and Yeh (2017) highlight that public entities were caught up in the web of tensions involving ecological conservation versus economic imperative interests, the competing claims of different actors, and the discursive struggles over the policy inclusion/exclusion of these claims. Similarly, in a study on strategic spatial planning in the city of Johannesburg (South Africa), Harrison (2017) show that in the early 1990s, during a period of multiparty dialogue, strategic spatial planning processes were developed through multilevel government cooperation together with the involvement of public and private actors. In the same vein, Houghton (2013) argues that in South African cities public-private partnerships have played a key role in strategic planning practice and in reshaping the urban landscape.

Investigating governance arrangements in planning practice requires an in-depth understanding of the power configurations involved (Houghton, 2011). This is justified because negotiations often involve multiple tiers of government (Baarveld et al., 2015), private interest groups (Levesque et al., 2016), and public entities, which dominantly assume leadership in making and implementing spatial plans (Sotarauta and Beer, 2017). Thus, one could argue that spatial plan implementation is a 'power play' among for-profit groups, non-governmental organizations and public entities (Van Assche et al., 2011; Sørensen and Sagaris, 2010; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 1998). This argument is stretched further by studies suggesting that current planning practice resonates with recent critical reflections on the neoliberalization of strategic spatial planning (Olesen, 2014; Olesen and Richardson, 2011). Along with the global hegemony of neoliberal political ideology, the public sector has been introduced to the managerial culture of governance (Mäntysalo et al., 2011). For instance, in Finland, Norway and Sweden, this change in the governance culture has affected the ways with which cities and regions conduct their spatial planning practice (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Sager, 2009).

The literature also suggests that the availability of funding mechanisms influences the implementation of spatial strategies integrated in strategic plans (Buček, 2016; Legacy and Leshinsky, 2016). In a study involving land acquisition and metropolitan planning in Perth and Sydney, Australian urban regions, Foley and Williams (2016) emphasize that the availability of funding mechanisms, schemed through various sources, is paramount in supporting plan implementation. In another study, Olesen and Metzger (2017) suggest that the availability

of funding has greatly influenced strategy making and plan implementation through projects in the Danish Øresund Region.

To our knowledge, what is lacking in the current literature is empirical evidence demonstrating the extent to which governance arrangements, unfolding within the context of power configurations, influence the way strategic spatial plans are implemented at the ground level. In this quest, Nuissl and Heinrichs (2011), in line with Neuman (1998), contend that the theory and practice of spatial planning is strongly linked to the governance discourse. However, this link has rarely been made explicit or become the focus of scientific interest. Inspired by current literature on spatial governance, strategic spatial planning and academic debates on 'planning versus power', the purpose of this paper is to investigate the roles of governance arrangements and power configurations in current practices of strategic plan implementation. A special focus is given to the importance of funding mechanisms in supporting plan implementation and, more importantly, to understanding the main sources of funding in current planning practice. Empirical evidence is gathered from the analysis and comparison of implementation processes associated with contemporary strategic spatial plans in 14 European urban regions, namely those of Barcelona (Spain), Cardiff (Wales, United Kingdom), Copenhagen (Denmark), Dublin (Ireland), Edinburgh (Scotland, United Kingdom), Hamburg (Germany), Hannover (Germany), Helsinki-Uusimaa (Finland), Lyon (France), Milan (Italy), Oslo-Akershus (Norway), Stockholm (Sweden), Stuttgart (Germany) and Vienna (Austria). This is done by performing a qualitative analysis of 43 in-depth semi-structured interviews with regional planners and planning experts of the above-mentioned urban regions. This research method was considered the most appropriate method to achieve the following two macro-objectives: the first macro-objective was to investigate the roles of governance arrangements and funding mechanisms in processes of strategic spatial plan implementation; the second macro-objective was to understand better the extent to which power configurations shape governance arrangements and frame funding mechanisms in plan implementation.

Before we describe the case studies, we review prior research that supports the analysis of what is happening in the plan implementation practices of the 14 case studies. Following this information, we describe the research methodology. The findings are described in detail and comparisons are provided with the aim of generalizing the findings. We conclude by reflecting on the contribution of this paper to existing knowledge but also on its limitations, which together pave the way for future research on planning and democracy.

2. Review of prior research: governance, funding and power in planning practice

Spatial planning, understood as the collective decision-making process determining the use of land, based on assessing and balancing competing demands among a variety of interest groups, is clearly an element of governance (Nuissl and Heinrichs, 2011). By understanding governance as the range of arrangements, activities and agencies involved in collective action of an urban region, Healey (2006), in line with Albrechts (2004), perceives strategic spatial plans as social products which emerge as an important part of the governance arrangements of a territory. Because strategic spatial plans are socially constructed within complex ties of governance, questions are also raised about their legitimacy and the power configurations involved (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Flyvbjerg, 1998). Power is an important and often debated concept and issue in contemporary planning practice (Van Assche et al., 2014). Despite this apparent fruitful cross-fertilization between planning and governance, few efforts have been made to systematically uncover what the rich debate on the theoretical concept of governance has to offer to the equally intense debates regarding spatial planning practice (Nuissl and Heinrichs, 2011). With this paper, we intend to contribute to filling this gap. The premise of departure

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