



Reframing strategic spatial planning as a ‘coproductive trading zone’ between state-led and place-based interests: Reflections from Maryland and Finland



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ABSTRACT

The rescaling of planning policies and practices has brought out the need to reframe our understanding of the democratic legitimacy of emerging governance arrangements. For example, in the UK, state-coordinated local planning has increasingly been linked to the foundations of ‘post-political’ spatial planning, characterized by a democracy deficit and overall inadequate political debate about planning alternatives. This article reflects upon the changing state–local relationship by reframing strategic spatial planning as a ‘coproductive trading zone’ (CTZ) between state-led and place-based interests. The aim of the article is to present a conceptual opening to planning theoretical debate and policymaking by intertwining the recent yet partly separate planning theoretical paths regarding ‘post-political planning’, ‘trading zones’ and ‘coproduction’. The conceptual framework is then utilized to analyse the recent planning developments in Maryland and Finland, where the need for increased state-level coordination of spatial planning has been highlighted. The attention is on the emerging plea for a new kind of state–local coalition emphasized in public sector led strategic planning policies that claim to draw from place-based practices and engagement. The concept of a CTZ offers a useful framework for transparent policy development that increases understanding about the democracy deficit in strategic state-led spatial planning and the potential ways to overcome the deficit.

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Introduction

Planning on a state scale has undergone significant changes during the history of planning, ranging from the rational, modernist planning era led by great individuals to more communicative forms of planning valuing citizen engagement (e.g. Sandercock, 1998; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010). In the early 21st century, the challenges related to climate change and accelerating urbanization have increased the importance of urban growth management and spatial planning at the higher planning scales, including the national/state level, where inter-sectoral and spatial coordination of urban growth management issues have become more generalized (see e.g. Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Phelps, 2012, cf., Loh and Sami, 2013). However, at the same time, citizen participation, place-based development, and multi-actor and inter-scalar preparation of policies are increasingly emphasized to maintain local forms of democracy and to find legitimization

for public-sector led planning approaches (e.g. Albrechts, 2013). Devolution of land use powers to local jurisdictions has been a dominant approach in many countries in Europe and the United States (US) (e.g. Allmendinger et al., 2005; Knaap and Hacoü, 2007).

However, in the UK, for example, increasingly state coordinated planning practices have been recently described as ‘post-political’, characterized by a democracy deficit and overall inadequate political debate about planning alternatives (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, see also Allmendinger et al., 2005). Consensus-based governance networks that function at least partly irrespectively of the traditional forms of representative democracy have become the primary arena for consensual policymaking (cf. Swyngedouw, 2009). Planning has been rescaled from traditional governmental scales to fluid governance networks, often favoring short-term economic growth objectives over environmental and social concerns (e.g. Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007, 2009).

Contrary to post-politically labeled strategic spatial planning policies and practices, the concept of a *trading zone* has recently offered a fresh outlook on strategic planning practices as the

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term attempts to overcome the critical challenges related to the legitimacy of strategic planning by reviewing strategy-making processes as an arena for political debate and bargaining (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Balducci and Mäntysalo, 2013). In addition, the concept of *coproduction* reframes the state–citizen relationship and focuses on the equal partnership between actors involved in the strategic planning processes (Albrechts, 2013). Recognizing the value of strategic spatial planning and related multi-actor collaboration, these concepts direct attention towards the critical step related to the opening up of consensus-based governance networks more widely, to cover diverse interests not only related to economic but also social and environmental issues.

The concept of a trading zone builds on the premise of the unrealism of full agreement, and hence the added value of the concept relates to the objective of finding a satisfactory solution: the trading of ideas in a trading zone does not necessitate a shared understanding or a shared ideological view related to the planning subject, but a narrower approach in the form of a ‘limited agreement’ can be taken as a result of bargaining and compromising, instead of aiming at a total consensus, in order to generate progress in the planning process (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Balducci and Mäntysalo, 2013). As neither strong local planning nor strong state-led planning are seen as adequate solutions to tackle the increasingly ‘wicked’ (Rittel and Webber, 1973) challenges of our urban environments (e.g. Frece, 2005; Knaap and Frece, 2007; Krueger and Gibbs, 2008; Lewis et al., 2009; Luukkonen and Moilanen, 2012; Moilanen, 2012; Murtonen, 2012), the concept of a trading zone directs attention to the important question of achieving concrete and transparent planning solutions and collaboration through the trading of narrow political interests and the building of connections in interactive planning arenas between the state and local levels.

The aim of this paper is to bring together the recent theoretical discussions related to trading zones, coproduction and post-political planning by developing a conceptual frame of a ‘coproductive trading zone’ (CTZ), which is then utilized in reflecting the recent changes in state-level planning. Especially the processes that emphasize both increased state coordination of urban growth management issues and the place-based approach to spatial planning are analysed in relation to the theoretical framework (see also Allmendinger et al., 2005 for a study on changing central–local government relationships within the UK). Particular interest is on the strategic means to combine increased state coordination with democratic participation in planning. The recent post-politically labeled planning developments are discussed in light of the concepts of coproduction and trading zones with the attempt to reframe new state-led strategic planning practices as arenas for multi-level governance and coordination of the state space.

The article contributes to the recent planning theoretical debates by intertwining separate conceptual pathways into more coherent framework by reframing strategic spatial planning as a CTZ between diverse scalar interests, hence offering land use policy development and renewal a fresh conceptual opening. The idea of a CTZ is elaborated and its potentials reflected against the recent planning practices in Finland and Maryland, offering insights into future research and policy-making. The reframing of state–local relations through the concept of a CTZ offers a transparent frame for consensual yet politically sound policy development that can be utilized in deepening the ‘coproductive planning culture’ among state and local planners.

The strategic means to pursue state-level planning objectives are studied empirically by reviewing the recent developments taking place in Maryland in the United States (US) and Finland in the European Union (EU), as both have recently highlighted the

need for the increased state-level coordination of issues related to urban growth management and spatial planning.¹ At the same time, the emphasis on place-based development and strong local planning authority is giving character to both case areas. Therefore, the aim of this article is to intertwine the discussions related to increased state-coordination and place-based development in the case areas, not treating them as contradictory development paths but scrutinizing whether it is possible to promote both state and local level objectives simultaneously without losing sight of democratic participation. Maryland and Finland function as informative cases regarding state–local cooperation due to their recent and still on-going attempts to reorganize spatial planning through strategic planning processes to better serve both local- and state-level needs and to improve the resource efficiency of existing planning practices. The cases are used as informative examples in developing the frame of a CTZ, hence shedding light not only on existing empirical evidence and practices but also on emerging potentials of the examined conceptual framework.

The research materials consist of research and policy documents from both case areas, which are analysed using the principles of content analysis.² The cases are studied by analysing key planning documents (e.g. ME, 2006, 2012, 2013b; MEE, 2011, 2012; MDP, 2011, 2012a, 2012b) and recent policy processes (PlanMaryland in Maryland and the envisioning process for the spatial structure in Finland through several literary and web-based materials from diverse time periods) as well as recent research related to the case areas (e.g. Knaap and Frece, 2007; Frece, 2008; Lewis et al., 2009; Kalliomäki, 2012). Furthermore, several empirical observations are made based on the author’s previous research related to Finland (Jauhiainen and Moilanen, 2011; Kalliomäki, 2012; Luukkonen and Moilanen, 2012; Moilanen, 2012) and based on extensive research material provided, for example, by the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, related to the case of Maryland (see <http://smartgrowth.umd.edu/>).³

The article proceeds by first outlining the theoretical framework intertwining the post-political planning debate with the concepts of a trading zone and coproduction. Second, the article presents the key spatial planning policies and practices in Maryland and Finland. Changes in state–local relationships are then reviewed in more depth in relation to the theoretical framework by discussing strategic spatial planning between state-led and place-based interests. In the conclusions, the main findings of the article are presented and their implications are discussed in relation to planning policy and practice.

¹ The terms ‘spatial planning’ and ‘urban growth management’ are treated in this article as parallel terms due to the difference in planning terminology in the US and the EU. While spatial planning in Europe at a general level refers to different scalar and sectoral combinations aimed at ‘improving’ the spatial organization of society (Faludi, 2002, see also Dühr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2010; Haughton et al., 2010; Kalliomäki, 2012), ‘land use planning’ in the US has little reference to this wider comprehensive planning approach (e.g. Akimoto, 2009) and the term ‘spatial planning’ is not used. Therefore, North America’s ‘urban growth management’ is considered here as an adequate conceptual frame due to its emphasis on consensus-based, integrative planning and its reference to the public, governmental activities that intend to anticipate and accommodate future development and balance competing development goals (Porter, 2008).

² Content analysis is used as a tool of qualitative research to outline the thematic variations within the studied document instead of a more systematic quantitative method to arrange and summarize data (see e.g. George, 2009).

³ The author has also spent one year as a visiting research scholar at the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, thus having experience of the recent planning developments in the case area.

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