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Why it matters for spatial planning

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Teaching, Learning & Researching **Spatial Planning**

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Teaching, Learning & Researching Spatial Planning

TOOLS, CONCEPTS AND IDEAS TAUGHT AT THE SECTION OF SPATIAL PLANNING AND STRATEGY OF THE
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Multi-Level and Multi-Actor Governance

Why it matters for spatial planning

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This chapter sheds light on how planning is affected by multi-level (vertical) governance relations that shape an enabling environment for planning decisions and multi-actor (horizontal) governance aspects which are crucial for integrating planning with other policy agendas and effectively engaging citizens and other stakeholders in decision-making. The chapter makes a plea for taking those inter-dependencies more seriously and basing planning decisions not only on a thorough governance and stakeholder analysis but also more direct engagement of stakeholders in decision-making, knowledge co-creation, and co-design of spatial visions, plans, and solutions.

**MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE, PARTICIPATION, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT,
SPATIAL PLANNING**

Introduction

Spatial planning is concerned with mediating competition for land use and property, managing development rights, and regulating and coordinating the processes of spatial development towards desired spatial and urban qualities and sustainable futures. Spatial planning, however, does not operate in a vacuum. In fact, planning and urban design disciplines, like architecture (see Till, 2009), are not autonomous but rather contingent upon a variety of processes, actors, and stakeholders operating at different scales and in different sectors of policy and society. Planning is increasingly done in close collaboration with citizens and other stakeholders to ensure more democratic urban and regional governance, but also, more pragmatically, to build support visions and plans elaborated and gain access to knowledge and resources to design and implement them. Planning is also increasingly intertwined with other policy agendas, such as economic development, transport policy, social policy, environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, or, more recently, energy transition and the circular economy, which makes decision-making on spatial development more complex and subject to pressures from those (often conflicting) policy agendas. Finally, spatial planning is becoming increasingly connected to various geographical scales and levels of government, with processes of rescaling of decision-making and growing interdependencies – between the local, the urban, the regional, the national, and the supranational – in what one may call multi-level governance system. At the same time, we are witnessing increasing bottom-up activity of citizens and local

organisations demanding to have a voice, agency, or influence on the shaping of urban futures, especially in the context of growing inequality and the challenges of digital and sustainability transitions.

An important reason for this growing dependence of planning on multiple levels of government, processes cutting across multiple geographical scales, and involving multiple actors and stakeholders from diverse sectors and societal groups, is the fact that planning increasingly requires dealing with the so-called wicked problems. These problems involve a diversity of stakeholders, are notoriously hard to define, riddled with uncertainty about how they will unfold, interconnected with other problems, and impossible to solve with a ‘silver-bullet’ solution (see Rittel & Webber, 1973). Prime examples of urban wicked problems include urban inequality or climate change mitigation and adaptation. Planners are far from being all-knowing experts and cannot address those problems alone. To quote John Forester, ‘we should be wary or distrusting of any experts who seemed confident about actually “solving” these kinds of policy problems!’ (Forester, 2020: 112).

The main message that this chapter conveys is that the shifts needed to tackle wicked urban problems make spatial planning a boundary spanning activity, whereby planning decisions and actions have to span across administrative, sectoral, and/or scalar boundaries. This, in turn, greatly increases the complexity of planning and calls for more flexibility, adaptivity, and the paying of more attention to the vertical and horizontal interdependencies, interests, and power relations. Planning depends

on what happens above the city scale (policies and processes with territorial impacts related to the regional, national, and supranational scales and levels of government) and below it at the scale of the district and neighbourhood. In the face of wicked problems and growing complexity of urban issues, planners also depend on the actors and stakeholders around them, namely on officials dealing with a variety of public policies, on the authorities of the municipalities and regions their jurisdiction, on private sectors players, on organised civil society, on providers of technical expertise and scientists, and, last but not least, on the citizens' interests, attitudes, and their (local) knowledge and participation in city making.

This chapter will sketch out some of the implications of these shifts. The following section will discuss planning from a vertical, multi-level governance perspective. Then the focus will shift towards the multi-actor dimension, i.e. the need to engage a diversity of stakeholders in the planning process. The concluding sections will bring these arguments together, highlighting caveats and opening questions raised by the shift towards multi-level and multi-actor planning practice.

2. Multi-level perspective

For the past few decades, in Western democracies at least, we observed a trend of moving from government to governance. As Rhodes (a British political scientist studying this phenomenon) put it: 'governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition or ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed' (1996: 652-653). That means shifting from a model of man-

agement of public affairs in which the state plays a dominant and leading role, in a hierarchical, top-down decision-making and policy implementation system, towards one in which the state increasingly shares responsibilities for managing public affairs with non-state actors, that is companies and civil society organisations, making the state operate not only as a hierarchical system but also a network system. The term 'governance' is used in various disciplines and policy areas with different aspects of it emphasised, but our focus here is, in particular, on how the state increasingly makes policy together with a network of diverse actors at different territorial levels.

Having observed how, since the late 1980s, the European states find themselves increasingly intertwined with and co-dependent on the European Union (EU) and its policies that have a territorial impact, such as the Cohesion Policy or the European Environmental Policy, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks coined the term 'multi-level governance' (2010), which was quickly picked up and advocated as a mode of managing policies to solve the increasingly complex and interconnected urban and regional challenges by the EU itself (European Commission, 2020) as well as other international organisations, including the OECD (2017,2019) or UN-HABITAT (2022). Multi-level governance has two dimensions. The first is vertical, which relates to the 'multi-level' component of the term referring to increased interdependence of authorities operating at different levels of government, from the city, through regions, to national governments, and even supranational organisations like the EU. Whereas, the second can be defined as horizontal and relates more to the increasing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors, who

also operate at different territorial levels (Bache & Flinders, 2004).

Let us first ponder the multi-level or vertical dimension. The territorial organisation of states comes in different shapes and sizes but is typically hierarchical and involves the central- or national-government level on top, a form of sub-national administration, with certain powers and responsibilities, operating at the regional level (e.g. provinces, regions, counties), and local level governments running public affairs in municipalities. This can be compared to a Matryoshka doll, with a large doll containing a smaller one, and that one containing an even smaller one, and so on (see Figure 1). In the last few decades, the levels of government below the national government have been gaining prominence, with more and more policies and resources (financial, fiscal) being transferred to them in a process of decentralisation of state authority (OECD, 2019; Hooghe et al., 2016).

In theory, this involves coordination between levels of government which are nested, from the national down to local. In practice, however, multi-level governance can be a messy and complicated process with different levels of government interacting with one another in ways that cut across the seemingly hierarchical relations, making the Russian doll metaphor not all that appropriate. What also tends to happen is that there are multitude (sometimes overlapping and changing) cooperative links and interdependencies between authorities operating at different levels, creating a fuzzy patchwork of cross-boundary and cross-level cooperation. Thus, cities and regions can, for instance, interact directly with the European Commission, which manages the EU Cohesion Policy and distributes funding for specific types of territorial interventions directly to the

local and regional authorities, bypassing the central government. By the same token, EU policies sometimes create very tangible constraints for planning at the municipal level (Evers & Tennekes, 2016), triggering changes in planning practice on the ground. In other words, the Europeanisation of spatial planning (Nadin et al., 2018; ESPON, 2021). For instance, the NATURA 2000 policy designating certain areas of high environmental value as protected and restricted for urban development. EU policies can also offer concrete incentives for certain spatial planning initiatives, such as planning for metropolitan regions, by provision of financial resources to support the activities of metropolitan cooperation bodies via the so-called Integrated Territorial Investment instrument (e.g. Krukowska & Lackowska, 2017).

We can also take flood risk management and climate adaptation policy in the Netherlands as an example of such complex patchworks of multi-level governance: there is a national 'Delta Programme'. Initiated by the central government and managed by the so-called Delta Commissioner, it is implemented in close collaboration with sub-national actors, with knowledge provided by and through regional sub-programmes in which certain cities play a key role and the local impacts of climate change are investigated and place-specific solutions devised (see Dąbrowski, 2018). At the same time, local governments lack formal responsibility and competences for flood risk and must rely on close collaboration with water boards, the regional special-purpose jurisdictions who manage waters and ensure flood safety. In this task, the city of Rotterdam, for instance, has to deal with no less than three water boards, but also has to consider surrounding municipalities, the port authority, the province, and cross-border partners in the wider delta area. The

and policies to support territorial cooperation and development in territories belonging to a larger shared geographical space. The EU, for instance, has been promoting such macro-regional cooperation as part of its Cohesion Policy, prompting new linkages and strategic cooperation between national, regional, and local governments, for instance, around the Baltic Sea, along the Danube river basin, or within the Alpine macro-region (Gänzle et al., 2019).

Summing up, these multi-level interdependencies have important consequences for how national and sub-national authorities operate and for the scope of and constraints of spatial planning at different scales. Firstly, decisions made beyond the administrative boundaries of a given city or region, for instance in neighbouring areas, can have important consequences for that territory. Secondly, decisions made at other levels of government, national or European, can have important consequences for planning practice on the ground in cities or regions. Thirdly, planning and coordination of territorial policies in a multi-level governance setting makes these processes very complex and riddled with multiple obstacles, which the OECD calls ‘multi-level governance gaps’ (e.g. OECD, 2016). These can include, for instance, clashing objectives of authorities at different levels (e.g. with the central government promoting spatial development that allows to adapt to climate change impacts and limit exposure of cities and populations to future flood risks, and the municipal governments planning for urban expansion in low-lying areas to maximise profits from land development) or capacity gaps, whereby some municipalities lack administrative, financial, or technical capacity to engage in implementation of national programmes (e.g. for climate mitigation or circular economy policy requiring expert knowledge

and substantial human resources). Fourthly, multi-level governance entails a certain risk of dilution of ambitions, as the core goals and values promoted by a policy or strategy may be watered-down by agreeing on the lowest common denominator between the multiple actors involved. Lastly, planning and implementing policies with a territorial dimension in a multi-level governance setting requires crossing multiple boundaries, across different political, organisational and planning cultures, administrative borders, and policy sectors. Such boundary-spanning activity requires skills, resources, and experience which is often missing in practice.

3. Multi-actor perspective

As already mentioned, multi-level governance includes a horizontal or multi-actor dimension, with the trend towards the engagement of a diversity of actors in planning and in urban and regional policies, from public agencies, market players, civil society organisations, to individual citizens. In other words, this aspect of governance relates to the engagement of stakeholders in running urban and regional affairs. While this reflects wider trends towards network-based mode of decision-making and policy-making, with the state playing a less prominent role, there are multiple reasons which such engagement is a good idea, if not a necessity.

There are normative reasons for this, at least from a democratic standpoint. Engagement of a diversity of stakeholders, and especially of citizens, allows for creating a greater sense of ownership of strategies, plans, and urban initiatives among them and can strengthen the local community bonds. Engaging stakeholders in decision-making and in

the making of plans and strategies allows for the enhancement of the legitimacy of the decisions taken by the public authorities. This matters especially when they entail burdens and sacrifices from the stakeholders affected, as is the case with the increasingly urgent measures to reduce carbon emissions or reduce the generation of waste and consumption of materials, for instance. By the same token, one can argue that by giving agency to local stakeholders and citizens in decision-making on important urban or regional matters and plans, one can strengthen local democracy, without which democratic processes remain distant and abstract for these local actors. What is more, engaging stakeholders who represent deprived social groups, such as the residents of low-income neighbourhoods or marginalised communities – who, depending on the context, can include ethnic minorities, women, youth, or elderly citizens – is a critically important for addressing the growing urban inequality and socio-spatial injustice (see Soja, 2010; Feinstein, 2014, and Rocco's chapter in this book). Thus, participatory practices give these groups voice and agency in decision-making on the future of their urban environments and can help promote fairer and more just urbanisation as well as ensure procedural justice in planning and urban policy-making. Arguably, such empowerment through participation in planning is particularly urgent in the face of growing disillusionment with democracy and the rise of populist voting, especially in the so-called 'places that don't matter' affected by decades of policy neglect (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018) or in areas which are the most negatively affected by the current imperatives of sustainability transitions, such as old industrial or mining regions. Finally, engagement of a diversity of stakeholders can enhance transparency and ac-

countability of planning and urban or regional policies by providing a degree of social control over the decision-making process and enabling the stakeholders engage to hold the authorities accountable for these decisions.

There are also good pragmatic reasons for engagement of stakeholders in planning and policy-making. From this efficiency perspective, stakeholder engagement allows those involved to, first and foremost, navigate and mitigate conflicts, which are an inherent element of spatial planning. As Campbell (1996) observed, planning entails facing multiple conflicts stemming from the tensions between the clashing goals that planning activity may subscribe to: 1) the pursuit of economic growth and efficiency, 2) the pursuit of social justice, and 3) the protection of the natural environment. The first goal entails seeing the city as a location where production, consumption, distribution, and innovation take place, competing with other locations for markets and investors. In this perspective, space is a resource to serve economic activities through networks of infrastructure and businesses districts, etc. This inevitably leads to resource conflict if one considers the development of a just city, i.e. guaranteeing access to public goods and the benefits of urbanisation for all, as a goal of planning. From this perspective, the city is an arena of struggle for a fairer distribution of amenities, services, and opportunities among different citizen groups and communities. The pursuit of the just city agenda, however, as Campbell argues, may entail a development conflict, because providing spaces for social and community needs can encroach upon natural assets which need to be safeguarded and restored. From this perspective, the city is seen as a consumer of resources as well as a generator of waste and

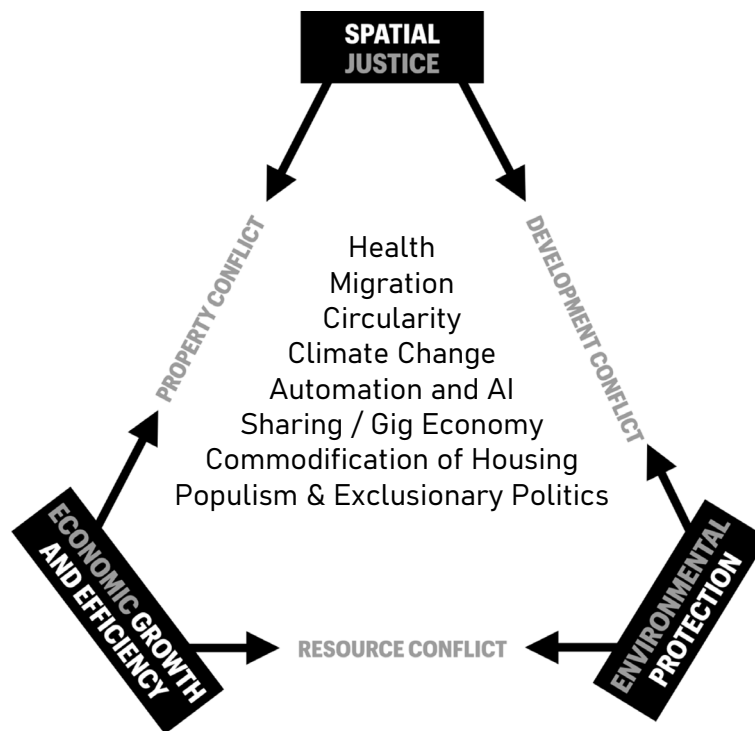


Figure 2: Conflicts in planning, exacerbated by the current major urban challenges. Source: Adapted from Campbell, 1996.

pollution. The triangle of planning conflicts (see Figure 2) is closed by the all too familiar resources conflict between the pursuit of economic growth and environmental protection. Finding ways to mitigate planning conflicts is becoming increasingly urgent in the wake of the major urban challenges of today – from climate change, integration of migrants, coping with pandemics, to the housing crisis – which exacerbate these tensions.

By engaging the stakeholders whose interests are aligned with those conflicting goals of planning in a dialogue, we can seek compromise and win-win solutions to mitigate the said conflicts. What is more, engagement of diverse stakeholders, with different kinds of resources, expertise, or tacit, local knowledge can allow the planners to find new ways and solutions to try and address the wicked urban problems that we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. For instance, designing and imple-

menting place-based circular economy strategies requires a great diversity of insights and skills which planners often lack as well as the engagement of all relevant economic actors along the value chains to close material loops and reduce the generation of waste (see Obersteg et al., 2019; Heurkens & Dąbrowski, 2020). Participatory practices involving diverse stakeholders in the co-creation of policies or spatial interventions designed to address this kind of challenges allow the planners to pool knowledge and create the needed networks of stakeholders, overcome their limitations, and, ultimately, deliver plans and strategies that have a greater chance of success. Stakeholder engagement can also help overcome opposition of stakeholder groups towards specific developments. In fact, this opposition tends to stem less from NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitudes than from the lack of dialogue with citizens and missing participation in the early stages

of planning the deployment of wind parks close to residential areas (Wolsink, 2000). Thus, participation can boost acceptance of planning decisions and create a sense of ownership of those decisions, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Moreover, pragmatically speaking, by enabling participation of diverse stakeholders in the planning process, planners can identify and engage potential 'allies' and actors who can support the planned developments with resources and capacity to convince or attract other stakeholders.

That being said, stakeholder engagement, just like the coordination and integration of strategies across levels of government and administrative boundaries, is a notoriously challenging task. Again, we can list many normative and efficiency caveats about participation in planning. Concerning the former, by giving agency to a wide range of stakeholders, we risk diluting or even completely departing from the originally pursued goals of a plan or strategy as new issues and interests are brought to the table. More importantly, stakeholder engagement always includes a risk of capture by powerful interest groups able to skew the process to pursue their agenda. The most vulnerable and marginalised groups tend to lack capacity to actively take part in public hearings or stakeholder workshops. Finally, another caveat is the suitability of participatory practices for application in specific socio-political contexts, where there is a lack of participatory practices or other cultural conditions that may skew the participatory process. Thus, we need place-specific and context-sensitive approaches to engagement of stakeholders.

Likewise, it is easy to denigrate stakeholder engagement efforts on efficiency grounds. Participatory processes are typically resource-intensive and

time-consuming, making planning activities more lengthy and costly for budget-strapped municipalities. While digital innovations in participation, rolled out in many cities in the last two decades, allow to involve larger groups of stakeholders and citizens in planning, this involvement remains shallow and biased towards the most tech-savvy groups (see Kleinhans et al., 2015; Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010, and the chapter by Kleinhans and Falco in this book). Consequently, it hardly contributes to democratisation of urban governance (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010; Brownill & Parker, 2010). Moreover, if there are deficits of capacity and knowledge about the issue in question among some groups of stakeholders, ensuring meaningful and effective participation can be a major challenge. This is especially problematic when dealing with complex, multi-scalar issues such as climate change (Few et al., 2007). Finally, in the face of the growing importance of regional or metropolitan planning it is extremely difficult to spark public interest and devise effective participation practices at those higher geographic scales perceived by the stakeholders as abstract and distant (see Pickering & Minnery, 2012). Thus, even though citizen engagement in planning processes is clearly on the rise, it often 'remains relatively weak in a sizeable proportion of countries, pointing to the need for further development of participatory planning practices' (Nadin et al., 2021). Against this background, we need to better understand the barriers to effective stakeholder engagement, map and embrace the increasingly thorny conflicts that planning has to deal with, and experiment with participatory practices based on partnership-building and co-creation.

4. Conclusions

In this chapter, we stressed two governance trends that increasingly affect planning: interdependencies across levels of government and across administrative boundaries (the multi-level dimension), and the shift towards multi-actor decision-making and engagement of a growing diversity of stakeholders in planning. Both of these trends bring a promise of helping municipal and regional governments to address their wicked urban challenges. These challenges require a crossing of boundaries between disciplines and organisations and the building of broad coalitions of stakeholders to pool resources and mitigate the conflicts that they exacerbate.

This is probably best illustrated by the climate crisis, which is both a global and a local issue that is riddled with uncertainty and is calling for an 'all hands on deck' approach for the mitigation of climate change and the potential of the built environment to adapt to its impacts. To plan for low-carbon and adaptive urban and regional futures, and have a chance of success, planners need to collaborate and coordinate actions across levels of government, while engaging a diversity of relevant stakeholders and citizen groups. Both of these tasks entail dealing with barriers and inevitable conflicts.

The global shift from government to governance, from hierarchy to networks, is not unproblematic, but it does open up new possibilities and opportunities for improving planning and design processes and their outcomes. There is no shortage of ideas and governance innovations that can be experimented with in different urban and regional contexts, operationalised in the planning practice, and, ultimately, upscaled and transferred across differ-

ent locations. To seize these opportunities, we need engage the wicked urban problems and embrace the conflicts they arouse rather than ignore them. For this, we also need to rethink the roles of planners as enablers of dialogue and co-production of new knowledge, sustainable solutions, and shared values.

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