Trends and policies in Strategic Spatial Planning and Regional Governance in Europe

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Context: Developments, Challenges and Opportunities

- **The growing complexity (the crisis of representative democracy, diversity, the globalization of culture and the economy, the rising cost of energy);**
- **the financial crisis and the subsequent economic crisis;**
- **persistently uneven development, issues of spatial quality, sustainability, equity, social justice;**
- **the ageing of the population**
- **the problems of fragmentation;**
- **the increasing interest (at all scales, from local to global) in environmental issues**

- **a re-emphasis on the need for long-term thinking;**
- **a growing awareness that producing plans may not be considered as the main purpose of planning;**
- **an emerging recognition that planning without implementation is futile.**

- **Dominance of the market fuelled by a neo-liberal ideology. To enhance city and regional competitiveness cities are urged to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning in order to be competitive**
- **Awareness that a number of planning concepts (compact cities, livable cities, creative cities, multi-cultural cities, fair cities, just cities, learning regions) cannot be achieved solely through physical hard planning**

Evolution in the planning field

- **In the 1980s a retreat from strategic planning can be witnessed fueled not only by the neo-liberal disdain for planning, but also by post-modernist skepticism, both of which tend to view progress as something which, if it happens, cannot be planned.**
- **A new generation of strategic (mainly urban) projects, such as the French "Projet urbain," has been trying to develop a more inclusive approach informed by insights in policy analysis and strategic planning. From these practices, a whole body of knowledge is developing, which could be described as "theorizing practice" .**

- **Planning and urbanism seem highly complementary in their approach, as well as in their strengths and weaknesses. There is a need for cross-fertilization between the more model-based and top-down planning views, with the more casuistic, bottom-up experiences, to construct an integrated approach.**
- **in both the public and private sector, the need emerged to develop more strategic approaches, frameworks, and perspectives for cities, city-regions, and regions.**

We cannot understand the "what" of strategic planning without at the same time explaining the "how" and the "why"

STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING AS A POSSIBLE ANSWER?

What?

Strategic spatial planning is a transformative and integrative, public sector led but co-productive socio-spatial process through which a vision/frames of reference, justification for coherent actions and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame, what a place is and might become.

- **The term ‘spatial’ brings into focus the ‘where of things’, whether static or dynamic; the creation and management of special ‘places’ and sites; the interrelations between different activities and networks in an area.**
- **The transformative focuses on the structural problems in society; it constructs images/visions of a preferred outcome and how to implement them**
- **Cities possess a distinctive spatiality as agglomerations of diversity locked into a multitude of relational networks of varying geographical reach.**

- **Strategic spatial planning processes with an appreciation of ‘relational complexity’ demand a capacity to ‘hear’, ‘see’, ‘feel’ and read the multiple dynamics of a place in a way which can identify just those key issues which need collective attention through a focus on place qualities, sustainability, equity**

How?

- **It focuses on a limited number of strategic key issues;**
- **it takes a critical view of the environment in terms of determining strengths and weaknesses in the context of opportunities and threats;**
- **it analyses problems, external trends, forces, opportunities and resources available;**
- **It identifies and gathers major actors (public and private);**

- **it allows for a broad (multi-level governance) and diverse (public, private, economic, civil society…) involvement during the planning process;**
- **it creates solid, workable long-term visions/perspectives (a geography of the unknown) and strategies at different levels taking into account the power structures -political, economic, gender, cultural, ethnic-, uncertainties and competing values;**
- **It designs plan-making structures and develops content, images and decision frameworks for influencing and managing spatial change;**

- **it is about building new ideas and processes that can carry them forward, thus generating ways of understanding, ways of building agreements, and ways of organizing and mobilizing for the purpose of exerting influence in different arenas.**

Why?

This question is related to our values:

- **diversity (openness to “the other”);**
- **sustainability (in the broadest sense);**
- **equity (fair use of resources and fair treatment of people);**
- **spatial quality (not elitist and not at the expense of the socio-cultural);**
- **inclusiveness (open dialogue);**
- **accountability (to the people we work for).**

Strategic planning focuses, both in the short and the long term, on framing decisions, actions, projects, results and implementation and incorporates a clear link to the budget, monitoring, evaluation, feedback, adjustment and revision.

As governance is looked upon as the management of common affairs of regions, cities there is a clear link with strategic planning

Governance

Challenge?

- **The power constellation in a city in a region determines what the problems and challenges of a city/region are and how they should be addressed.**
- **Some actors (individuals, groups, institutions) have more resources and power, which allows them to pursue their ideas and policies.**
- **Therefore, power relations must be built into the conceptual framework of planning and looked at in a given context of place, time and scale regarding specific issues and particular combinations of actors.**

- **A feasible and efficient planning process should be centered on the elaboration of a mutually beneficial dialectic between top-down structural policies and bottom-up local uniqueness.**
- **Place policymaking is embedded in multiple institutional domains and interaction arenas. This blurs the meaning of traditional administrative boundaries and hierarchical settings in the development and implementation of policies (see the European Interreg program).**

Pluralist and Inter-Culturalist Place

- **It is necessary to involve relevant actors (public and private) needed for their substantive contribution, their procedural competences, and the role they might play in acceptance, in getting basic support and in providing (a kind of) legitimacy.**
- **Out of a shift towards a more hybrid democracy in some places, a type of governance has emerged that expands practical democratic deliberations rather than restricts them; that encourages diverse citizens' voices rather than stifles them; that directs resources to basic needs rather than to narrow private gain.**

- **This type of approach uses public involvement to present real political opportunities, learning from action not only what works but also what matters. Through the involvement of citizens (and especially weak groups) in socially and politically relevant actions, some degree of empowerment, ownership, or acceptance is sought for these citizens**

- **In Europe, increased personal mobility has made places more diversified. This can be seen either as a threat or as an opportunity. On one hand, it can destabilize a place as migrants bring in habits, attitudes, and skills different from the original society. On the other hand, it can enrich and stimulate possibilities by creating hybrids, crossovers, and boundary blurring .**
- **Places must be creative with mutual understanding between cultures and ideas of equity (this is nothing less than a claim to full citizenship).**

- **Inter-culturalism builds bridges, helps foster cohesion and conciliation, and produces new ideas out of the multi-cultural patchwork of places.**
- **This gives a voice to the minority groups or the otherwise socially excluded, so that their ideas are taken into account and their ideas are brought into the process that influences the realms of change as well in planning, political decision-making as in implementation**

Institutionalization

- **The life of an institution often seems to be more important than what it does. Hence the need to view governance institutions not as a set of formal organizations and procedures established in law and "followed through," but rather as referring to the norms, standards, and morals of a society or social group, which shape both the formal and the informal ways of thinking and acting.**

- **In some places, the process of "discourse structuration" and its subsequent "institutionalization" become perhaps more important than the plan as such.**
- **In this way, new discourses may become institutionalized and embedded in the norms, methods, attitudes, and practices, thus providing a basis for structural change.**
- **Gradually, new approaches and new concepts can be sustainably embedded via institutionalization.**
- **Governments may call upon this intellectual capital when using its control function to reframe ways of thinking.**

Multi-Level Governance

- **A multi-level governance approach would offer the potential to tease out causal linkages between global, national, regional, metropolitan, and local change, while also taking account of the highly diverse outcomes of such interactions.**
- **The dialectic between shifts in institutional sovereignty towards supranational regulatory systems (e.g. the possible impact of European directives for deregulation of public transport) and the principle of subsidiarity, which entails the rooting of policy action in local initiatives and abilities, illustrates the embeddedness of place policy-making in multiple institutional domains and interaction arenas which blur the meaning of hierarchical settings in the development of policies.**

- **Tensions may occur between the well-known scale and related government structure of a nested hierarchy from large to small or from top to bottom and scale in terms of the reach of relationships in time and space.**
- **In a new governance culture, the construction of arenas (who has to be involved, what is fixed and what is open in these arenas and which issues must be discussed), their timing (links to the strategic momentum), and the awareness that "fixed" may be a relative concept in some contexts all need careful reflection and full attention.**

EPILOGUE

- **In Europe, planning is diverting from the idea of government as the sole provider of solutions to problems towards an idea of governance as the capacity to substantiate the search for creative and territorially differentiated solutions to problems, challenges, and opportunities.**
- **It implies a move towards a more desirable future through the mobilization of a plurality of actors with different and even competing interests, goals, and strategies**

- **Strategic spatial planning as presented is conceived of as democratic, open, selective, and dynamic process of coproduction. It produces a vision which leads to a framework within which the problems and challenges can be understood and provides a justification for short-term actions within a revised democratic tradition.**

- **A dissection of the process reveals the key elements that underlie this strategic planning: content and process; the static and the dynamic; constraint and aspiration; the cognitive and the collective; the planned and the learned; the socio-economic and the political; the public and the private; vision and action; the local and the global; legitimacy and a revised democratic tradition; values and facts; selectivity and integrativity; equality and power; the long term and the short term.**

- **I see a need for inquiring into the epistemology of innovative practices, for making sense of what has been learned in action in relation to a wider context and for testing the depth and comprehensiveness of these practices. This should help efforts to evaluate and make sense of these practices in relation to a wider (theoretical) context. Abstract conceptualization and generalization of the accumulated knowledge of learning in action may help theorists to see some of what can be learned from practice. Strategic spatial planners, on the other hand, can be inspired and guided by new emerging theories.**

- **The critical question of the leverage that the European strategic spatial planning exercises will achieve over time must be raised. Do they have the persuasive power to shift territorial development trajectories or -as some argue - are they little more than a cosmetic veil to hide the growing disparities evolving within Europe? A number of the European experiences provide a fertile laboratory for advancing the understanding of the nature and potential of strategic spatial frameworks and strategies for twenty-first century conditions.**