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Conference Report

CONCUR Expert Workshop: The Impact of Strategic Spatial Plans on Land Change in Urban Regions: Debating Plan Making and Plan Implementation, Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL, Birmensdorf, Switzerland, 9–10 November 2017

Introduction

Globally, urban regions are undergoing a highly dynamic process of land change. In European urban regions, especially since the 1990s, strategic spatial planning has played a key role in guiding urban transformation. The Swiss Federal Research Institute (WSL), through the project From Plans to Land Change: How Strategic Spatial Planning Contributes to The Development of Urban Regions (CONCUR),¹ has been devoting attention to the contribution of strategic spatial planning and spatial policies to land change in urban regions. The Impact of Strategic Spatial Plans on Land Change in Urban Regions: Debating Plan Making and Plan Implementation expert workshop was organised specifically to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue on how strategic spatial planning and land-change science can influence each other. The workshop was held at WSL (Birmensdorf, Switzerland) from 9 to 10 November 2017 and brought together eight experts on spatial planning, territorial governance, land-use change and land-change modelling alongside the CONCUR project team. The first day of the workshop was composed of thematic lectures along with an introduction to the current state of research conducted within the CONCUR project. On the second day, the discussions mainly followed three trajectories: (1) the role of strategic spatial plans in urban transformation, (2) plan implementation through strategic urban projects and (3) appropriate planning data that can be used in land-change models led by the CONCUR project team.

¹ See <https://www.wsl.ch/en/projects/concur.html> (accessed 17 January 2018).

Expert lectures on strategic spatial planning, governance and land-use change

The eight multidisciplinary lectures focused on timely subjects for spatial planning and land-use science scholarship. Details on each presentation are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Expert lectures during the first day of the CONCUR expert workshop

<i>Title of the presentation</i>	<i>Expert</i>
In search of the ‘strategic’ within spatial planning instruments: aggregated findings from 32 European countries	Peter Schmitt
The role of strategic spatial planning in shaping urban transformations: the Finnish context	Raine Mäntysalo
Strategic spatial planning and strategic projects: the case of Copenhagen	Gertrud Jørgensen
Cooperation in regional planning: Oslo–Akershus Regional Plan 2015	Peter Austin
From strategic spatial planning to hybrid governance in territorial development	Frank Moulaert
Urban land use models: model types and the representation of planning	Peter Verburg
Why is it important to integrate spatial planning into land use models?	Jasper van Vliet
Critical perspective on combining narratives and models for urban spatial planning and plan implementation	Thomas Houet

Source: Authors’ own elaboration

Peter Schmitt (*Stockholm University, Sweden*) started the debates by presenting the results of a study on spatial planning instruments (SPIs) across 32 European countries while stressing the importance of spatial planning at the sub-national level. Although Schmitt’s talk underlined the diversity of SPIs throughout Europe, patterns between groups of countries can still be observed. For example, SPIs in the Nordic countries present some similarities, as they can be described as being lightly strategic and partly influenced by the neo-liberal shift. This is in line with Olesen (2014), who argues that strategic spatial planning practices have in recent years taken a neo-liberal turn in many north-western European countries.

Raine Mäntysalo (*Aalto University, Finland*) highlighted the importance of retaining statutory planning systems while engaging with the strategic approach to spatial planning. In his view, the relationship between statutory planning systems and strategic planning is not merely a dualistic relation of either ‘strategic’ or ‘statutory’ planning but is instead a dialectical one. Mäntysalo emphasised that what is needed in planning practice is strategic wisdom in which the objective is less about producing plans per se, but rather about formulating plans that can be truly strategic. In line

with Mäntysalo's arguments, Gertrud Jørgensen (*University of Copenhagen, Denmark*) stressed the role of statutory plans specifically in the urban region of Copenhagen (i.e. the 'Finger Plan'²). Jørgensen argued that the Finger Plan is partially strategic and spatially specific, with a number of thematic regulations. In addition, plan implementation often occurs through projects in this Danish urban region. The strategic projects of Køge Bay (1966), Ørestad (1992) and Nordhavn (2008) were given as examples.

Peter Austin (*Urban Development Department of the City of Oslo, Norway*) highlighted the importance of a strong connection between levels of government, along with a strong reliance on values and continuous communication in spatial planning at the regional level. Austin gave as an example institutional proximity as the key 'ingredient' for the formulation of the Regional Plan for Land Use and Transport in Oslo and Akershus 2015.³ Several spatial planning issues, including housing, the repurposing of outdated industrial facilities and transport, were addressed based on the strong communication between the Oslo City Council and the Akershus County Council.

Frank Moulaert (*Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium*) critically addressed the concept of 'territorial governance' by reflecting on the value of governance approaches informed by political ecology, relational geography, socio-ecological system and social innovation. Moulaert proposed a hybrid governance perspective that emphasises the socio-ecological and sociopolitical dimensions of governance and thus considers it as part of socio-ecological systems thinking.

Peter Verburg (*Vrije University Amsterdam, the Netherlands*) outlined the diverse objectives of urban modelling, which vary between explaining drivers of urban change, exploring future scenarios and determining alternative planning options. Verburg underlined the importance of being aware of the intended goals of a process of urban modelling before selecting a land-use model. This point was addressed and enhanced further by Jasper van Vliet (*Vrije University Amsterdam*), who advocated that an urban modelling exercise must start with the formulation of the spatial planning problem at stake and thus not restrict itself to the actual availability of computational tools. In this quest, Thomas Houet (*University of Rennes 2, France*) demonstrated how urban modelling can be a powerful approach for validating future development scenarios. Houet suggested that to support a long-term perspective in spatial planning, land change modelling would be more effective if done dynamically and not performed by means of 'one-shot' explorations.

While spatial planning researchers are often focused on better understanding how planning practices, including governance and institutional configurations, influence urban transformation, land-change scientists are more preoccupied with generally

² See https://danishbusinessauthority.dk/sites/default/files/fp-eng_31_13052015.pdf (accessed 17 January 2018).

³ See <http://www.akershus.no/ansvarsomrader/samferdsel/samferdselsplanlegging/regional-plan-for-areal-og-transport-i-oslo-og-akershus> (accessed 17 January 2018).

explaining the driving forces behind urban land change. In this regard, the question of how to establish a comprehensive linkage between strategic planning and land change was addressed in the second part of the first day.

An analytical framework bridging the gap between strategic spatial plans and land change

To fulfil the CONCUR project's aim of contributing to filling the gap between strategic spatial planning and urban land change, an analytical framework was developed by the project team. The framework is the result of two years of work involving both qualitative and quantitative research in twenty-one European urban regions. Desk research and fieldwork were conducted to assess planning intentions expressed in strategic plans, the territorial governance configurations in strategic spatial planning processes and external forces involved in the preparation of large-scale urban development projects. This analytical framework will be tested in Zurich (Switzerland), Bucharest (Romania) and Austin (Texas, USA).

The invited experts discussed and critically commented on the proposed framework. The key components of the framework were explained through two schematic representations summarising important findings regarding the phases of plan making and plan implementation. Key governance configurations in plan making were illustrated through some of the selected case studies. For example, the involvement of interest groups was illustrated using the case of Edinburgh (Scotland) and the influence of planning legislation was demonstrated based on the Dublin case (Ireland). Facets of the plan implementation phase, for example the role of private investors as well as political consensus, were illustrated with the case of Milan (Italy), whereas the role of the national government and regional authorities was exemplified by the case of Copenhagen (Denmark).

The lively discussion covered a wide range of different aspects and many interesting topics were raised by the international experts. For example, the experts suggested that urban modelling could be used as a form of impact assessment for spatial planning. Several comments were raised on the proposed distinction between the plan-making and plan-implementation phases. Despite the evidence that the fieldwork conducted by the project team revealed a clear division between these two phases of the strategic spatial planning process, the experts contended that the boundaries between plan making and plan implementation in day-to-day planning practices are rather blurred and highly complex. The experts recommended also that further improvements of the framework must contemplate the integration of market forces, power relations, the role of arts and culture and the impact of small-scale projects, and must also account for unpredictability. Notwithstanding the possible expansion of current knowledge provided by the analytical framework on the linkage between planning and land change, the question whether strategic spatial planning has a transformative

or a responsive character (see Healey 2009) was a topic that garnered much attention during the workshop.

The role of strategic spatial plans in urban transformation

Investigations of ways to effectively manage urban transformation are increasingly pursued in urban regions worldwide (Albrechts et al. 2017). Strategic spatial plans have become an increasingly popular means of constructing a coherent and coordinated vision and of framing an integrated long-term spatial logic regarding land use, resource valorisation, sustainability and spatial quality (Sartorio 2005). The question whether strategic spatial plans effectively steer urban transformation, or only reconfirm transformations that are already on the agenda, was addressed during the second day of the workshop. For example, the case of Barcelona (Spain) was addressed during the discussions, as the strategic spatial plans from the 1990s were specifically aimed at preparing the city for the urban transformations linked to the 1992 Summer Olympic Games. Another example stressed how the spatial concept of polycentricity has gained importance throughout the past two decades in the strategic regional plan for the Stockholm urban region. The case of a strategic urban project in the urban region of Amsterdam, the Zuidas project,⁴ concerning what is currently the city's financial district, was given as an example of the influence of unforeseen events in urban transformation. As an overall concluding remark, it was argued that strategic spatial plans can steer urban transformation, but over the long term. It was also highlighted that the planning and land-change science communities must devote particular attention to the importance of strategic projects in urban transformation.

Strategic spatial plan implementation through strategic urban projects

The discussions that were intended to obtain a better understanding of the positive and negative impacts of implementing strategic spatial plans through strategic urban projects started from an analysis of the reasons for their implementation and their role in steering urban transformation. The experts underlined that strategic urban projects are seen as more attractive if compared to a more organic manner of implementing spatial plans. This is because of their potential to spread internationally and their attraction for private actors such as businesses. It was emphasised that it is easier to bring actors together when a strategic project is in discussion because strategic projects are more tangible and concrete, and hence they connect quite strongly with local politicians, as they are implemented in a shorter time frame than are spatial

4 See <https://www.amsterdam.nl/zuidas/english> (accessed 17 January 2018).

plans. Most of the examples of strategic urban projects that arose during this discussion were aimed at improving public transport networks. The experts also underlined the importance of small-scale urban projects in urban transformation (such as those involving schools, recreational parks or housing for elderly people) and their role as incubators for large-scale projects. It was stressed that in areas where local actors are less familiar with strategic thinking, developing and implementing small-scale strategic urban projects can be more effective in guiding urban transformations.

The lack of social housing in various European urban regions was also stressed during the workshop. In some urban regions, the development and implementation of strategic urban projects generates negative impacts on housing availability and affordability. The experts touched upon the need for a change in policy making, arguing that appropriate policies and planning for social housing and housing affordability are needed. Some of the experts underlined the importance of informal governance arrangements in contributing to addressing such socio-spatial and spatial-economic issues. Bearing in mind these drawbacks of strategic spatial plans and the complexity of the implementation phase, discussions on the appropriate data in spatial planning and land-change modelling led the workshop towards the final panel of discussions.

Data in (strategic) spatial planning and land-change modelling

The discussion on data in spatial planning and land change modelling started with a presentation on how the CONCUR project team envisions the operationalisation of the analytical framework. At the core of the operationalisation is a module to extract planning intentions that are afterwards weighted through translators of external forces and governance performance and adapted for the CLUMondo land-use model.⁵ The experts acknowledged the difficulty that lies in the intersection of the very strong simplification of the modelling process and the complexity of planning practices. Questions were raised and discussed regarding how to deal with fuzzy borders within spatial plans and with mixed land uses, as well as concerning how to handle trade-offs between, for example, urban compactness and gentrification processes. Discussions were also extended to the possible data sources available to capture the contribution that strategic spatial planning makes to urban transformation. The experts suggested paying particular attention to the floor space used per capita as well as to the building densities and typologies (i.e. low-rise or high-rise). The two-day workshop ended with a short feedback session and a round of acknowledgements, in addition to a discussion of the next steps and the publications that will arise from the discussed subjects.

5 See <https://www.environmentalgeography.nl/site/data-models/models/clumondo-model> (accessed 17 January 2018).

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