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I have started thinking on preparing a review of this book, for the *European Planning Studies*, the moment I notice that it has been officially published. This twenty-four chapter book - *Situated Practices of Strategic Planning*, edited by three worldwide know scholars on the subject of strategic spatial planning - Louis Albrechts (KU Leuven, Belgium), Alessandro Balducci (Politecnico di Milano, Italy) and Jean Hillier (RMIT University, Australia) arises at a time “strategic spatial planning has gained increasing interest among planning researchers” (Mäntysalo *et al.*, 2015). But, also at a time where academics have been suggesting that strategic spatial planning has undertaken a neo-liberal turn (e.g. Olesen, 2014).

If strategic spatial planning finds its roots among European urban regions, I noted with much interest the promises postulated in the preface of this book over the incorporation of worldwide practices of strategic spatial planning, from Wales (Chapter 12), to South Africa (Chapter 13), to Egypt (Chapter 10) and Canada (Chapter 15). This, to only mention some of the situated practices the Part 2 of the book extensively debate. In my viewpoint this examples of the *praxis* of strategic spatial planning around the world greatly contribute to both academic and practical debate by demonstrating what is at stake in different places in the world. Furthermore, this selection of practices, makes this book shining brighter on the shelves of libraries, planning departments, and office desks of urban geographers, spatial planners, place managers and all of those experts devoted to plan and make of cities and regions better places to live, to work, to play, to love and to dream.

I was much curious to read this book six years after my review, also for this journal, of the book - *Making Strategies in Spatial Planning* (see Oliveira, 2014 for the review, and Cerreta *et al.*, 2010, for the book), and highlight, truly comprehensive theoretical evolutions, the expansion of practical applications as well as critical thinking towards strategic spatial planning. At the early stage of my reading, I become happily surprised of seeing a large number of international case studies as well as a rethinking of this more strategic approach to spatial planning in the context of national planning systems.

The book, in my viewpoint, responds to the call Mäntysalo *et al.* (2015) have made for “more practice-oriented research on strategic spatial planning as well as more research on skilled practitioners’ practice stories – in order to grasp it as art and phronesis – in dialogue with theory” (p. 181). This because, the editors have sought out contributors who were critical

academics/practitioners and also those actively involved in context-specific practices of strategic planning. It also seems to respond to Albrechts (2010, 2015), who has recently, and repeatedly, insisted that strategic spatial planning is in a critical need of comprehensive debate that fundamentally questions the political and economic processes of which it is part.

As written by the editors in the preface (pp. xi-xii) one of the aims of the book is to challenge planners, practitioners, politicians and engaged citizens in different locations around the globe, responding, thus to Mäntysalo *et al.* (2015). The other aim is to contribute to the discussion (academics and practitioners) on the merits and the pitfalls of strategic spatial planning by building empirical evidence over a good number of cases. For that purpose, the editors organized the contributions of thirty three authors in three Parts.

Part 1 is a novel one among recent books on this prominent subject in today's challenging environment for urban regions around the world. It critically discuss the intellectual development and implementation of strategic spatial planning in six continents of the world, representing, thus, a myriad of spatial planning cultures as well as governance settings. If Albrechts (Chapter 1), in a more theoretical manner, accentuates that the objectives for using strategic planning have typically been to construct a challenging, coherent and coordinated vision, to frame an integrated long term spatial logic, for instance for land-use regulation, for resource protection, for sustainable development and for spatial quality, the book provides other justifications on why urban regions have been embracing it.

Bearing in mind that due to its situated nature (Albrechts, 2004), strategic spatial planning cannot be debated out of the spatial-context-specific conditions under which it has taken place. As argued in Chapter 11 of this volume, in order to assess the role, legitimacy and efficacy, strategic spatial planning processes must be defined and observed on the basis of an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the local context in which they have been implemented.

It is beyond the scope of a book review to engage in detailed discussions of each chapter. It is important, however, to point out the key remarks of each part. This, despite that all the chapters have seduced me to a greater extent. While reading the book, I have entered a state of satisfaction and hope. Hope to read effective applications of strategic planning beyond Europe (Part 1 has contributed to this) and read further critical analysis based on the debated cases (Part 2 has contributed to accomplished my desire). In this regard, the Part 1 of this book - *Situated experiences of strategic planning worldwide* - illustrates that strategic spatial planning has been employed for multiple reasons within a specific set of political, cultural, economic and institutional conditions.

The first part of the book provides empirical evidence on the application of strategic spatial planning, in situations of territorial development which cross the borders of different nations, weakly explored in the literature. And, in situations of national and regional experiences. The cases demonstrate that strategic spatial planning has been employed for: i) economic development purposes including competition, branding of cities (Chapter 3, China); ii) for political integration geared at macro-economic issues (Chapter 4, East Africa); iii) for coordination of strategies and policies between territories that are institutionally distinct but interdependent in functional terms (Chapter 5, Øresund region – Sweden and Denmark); iv) for economic restructuring and institutional reform (Chapter 6, China); v) for controlling urban sprawl (Chapter 7, France); vi) as a response to trends involving technology shifts as well as changing demographics (Chapter 8, USA); vii) for addressing the transcalar dimension of problems and transformation processes with the rising relevance of metropolitan governance (Chapter 9, Australia); viii) for addressing urban expansion (Chapter 10, Egypt); ix) for spatial planning reforms (Chapter 11, Italy); x) for nation building (Chapter 12, Wales); xi) to changes in the political landscape (Chapter 13, South Africa); xii) as a legal obligation (Chapter 14, Antwerp); xiii) to cope with large-scale flooding (Chapter 15, Canada) and also xiv) within the context of internal major events such as the Olympic games (Chapter 16, Brazil).

More critical points of view towards strategic spatial planning are debated in Part 2 - *Conceptual and critical nodes in strategic planning*. This part, composed of seven chapters, presents some ontological and epistemological challenges for strategic spatial planning, mainly on issues regarding knowledge, power and conflict. If in one hand I was delighted in reading empirically well informed practices of strategic planning from all the corners of the world. On the other hand, the authors that have greatly contributed to this Part 2, have fulfilled my ‘thirst’ for: i) critical debates; ii) the theoretical and empirical linkage between strategic and statutory planning, and iii) and the relationship between land use planning and strategic making in the context of a noticeable growth of urban regions. And, I am not the only one calling upon critical debates. Allmendinger and Haughton (2010) as well as Sager (2013) have accentuated that spatial planning is in desperate need of both critical debate that questions the political and economic processes of which existing planning approaches are an integral part.

In the second part of this book, the noble contributions by Hillier (Chapter 18) and Salet (Chapter 23), offer ample theoretically informed discussions of what strategic spatial planning is and what it might become in the future. For instance, Salet allures the readers for the

“vulnerabilities of the modernist and supply-led planning systems” (pp. 373), claiming that “strategic spatial planning approaches tend to be introverted, planner-centric, and engaged in trajectories of specified end-means juridification” (pp. 374). The chapter by Searle (Chapter 19) challenges current conceptions of spatial strategic planning on several fronts by raising pertinent ontological questions about the nature of strategic planning. In my viewpoint Searle’s chapter, prominently contributes to the literature and practice of strategic planning. Servillo, in Chapter 20, address practice-related matters by reflecting on the procedural and institutional dynamics that occur in different planning systems. Servillo’s assumption is that strategic planning generates dynamics that affect not only the mere technical dimension of strategic planning tools, but also a wider socio-institutional imaginary. In this regarding, actors involved are vital because they are the proxies that determine continuity and rupture in the process of evolution of the spatial planning systems in place. This assumption is in line with Sorensen (2010) who argues that the influence of strategic planning works through multiple processes in which the relevant actors can see an opportunity to use strategic planning to push forward a policy change.

The chapters by Mäntysalo and Grišakov (Chapter 21) and Balducci (Chapter 22) focus on process-related issues. For instance, Mäntysalo and Grišakov debates scenario planning as part of strategic spatial planning in the sense of strategic framing. While Balducci argues on the need to design a vision of strategic planning which is adequate to the emerging drawbacks and complexity of urban regions. For that, Balducci highlights that he ‘trading zone’ concept is a promising tool to cope with those challenges. I have been intrigued by the notion of ‘trading zone’ since the publication of the book *Urban Planning as a Trading Zone*, edited by Balducci and Mäntysalo (2013). In his chapter of this book, Balducci convincingly argues that trading zone theory can be particularly inspiring in order to reflect and design spatial planning processes. Putting it simple, a trading zone is a platform to simplify complex questions with the objective of exchanging information in a specific local context.

The ideas debates in Part 2, lead to Part 3. The final part of the book, sketches the contours of a more radical strategic spatial planning in line with Albrechts (2015). Albrechts (Chapter 24) briefly summaries the contribution of each chapter by answering some of the questions posed in the Introduction (pp. 18-19). In my viewpoint, the novelty of this book lies on the situated practices of strategic planning. All the cases demonstrate that strategic spatial planning is context-sensitive. It requires deep understanding of the contextual factors, such as cultural, political, economic, institutional as well as legal, as Albrechts argues (pp. 392).

To conclude, a critical unpacking of the importance of strategic spatial plans as drivers of land change in urban regions in a context of multilevel territorial governance is missing. Furthermore, core areas of urban regions have been trying to conciliate place-making with strategic planning. Nevertheless, I have been noticing that the gap between advocates of place-making and urban planners, for instance, is growing with potential negative impacts for everyday life of ordinary citizens. In addition, I would like to see debated the extent funding schemes, either supra-national, national, regional or local impact plan-making and plan-implementation. Urban regions, in a scenario of scarce financial resources, tend to design plans envisioning potential funding pipelines to support implementation, deviating the plan, eventually, from the real needs at the ground. With this in mind, I argue that there are certainly topics for future books.