Governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in current practices of strategic spatial plan implementation

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A B S T R A C T

Implementing strategic spatial plans is a complex task. The process involves strategy formation, institutional capacity building, funding mechanism establishment and governance arrangements, which take shape within complex power configurations. Based on empirical evidence gathered by interviewing regional planning experts, this paper focuses on the role of governance arrangements and funding mechanisms in current practices of strategic plan implementation in 14 European urban regions. This investigation was completed bearing in mind power configurations, which shape and frame governance arrangements and funding mechanism in planning practice. A cross-case comparison provides evidence that, among the governance arrangements influencing plan implementation, negotiation and interest groups involvement are pivotal. Negotiation involves private interest groups, such as real estate agencies and environmental non-governmental organizations. The paper shows that in some case studies private interest groups have a substantial bargaining power to negotiate, for example, the development of a new housing settlement or a retail facility, while other groups struggle to safeguard natural areas. It is also during negotiations that plan implementation intentions are prioritized, strategic urban projects are formulated and funding mechanisms are established. The paper demonstrates that to truly grasp plan implementation praxis it is necessary to go beyond multi-actor involvement and inter-scalar government cooperation. It is necessary to scrutinize the funding sources, investigate who wins and who loses while negotiations are happening, and how plan implementation decisions are actually made.

1. Introduction

Investigating ways to effectively manage spatial transformation is increasingly pursued in urban regions worldwide (Albrechts et al., 2017). In this quest, a sound understanding of spatial planning processes is required. Spatial planning is thought to influence spatial transformation, urban growth and patterns of land use change (Xu and Yeh, 2017). Spatial planning is a multidimensional activity with various purposes, including project development, master planning, land-use planning and strategic planning. Spatial planning processes, consequently, entail a plan making process, that is, the preparation or designing phase of spatial plans, either strategic or not, as well as an implementation process, that is, the translation of the principles and intentions of a plan into tangible actions at the ground level (Healey et al., 2006). Examples of these tangible actions are a new housing settlement, a new commercial facility in the outskirts of a main urban area, the reinforcement of an intraregional transportation network or the maintenance of a green infrastructure. This paper focuses on the implementation process of strategic spatial plans.

The spatial planning literature emphasizes the complexity of processes of plan implementation; however, the plan implementation process of spatial planning processes has attracted some research attention since the early 1980s (Feitelson et al., 2017; Rudolf and Gradinaru, 2017; Talen, 1996). Spatial plan implementation has been evaluated across different plan domains, from land-use plans to strategic plans and hazard mitigation plans, as well as at different spatial scales, from national to regional and local (Lyles et al., 2016). The majority of the studies on spatial plan implementation have discussed the process from a theoretical point of view (Laurian et al., 2004). The few existing empirical studies, which often involve a single case study, have mainly focused on assessing the implementation of spatial planning objectives through the use of evaluation frameworks or through the evaluation of plan conformance and plan performance of spatial plans (Gradinaru et al., 2017; Faludi, 2000).

In this paper, we go beyond the plan conformance and performance debate. Specifically, we investigate the role of governance arrangements in current practices of strategic plan implementation in urban regions. Within this investigation and in line with the literature,
particular attention is given to power configurations shaping governance arrangements and framing funding mechanisms and thus influencing the overall processes of strategic spatial plan implementation (Olesen, 2012, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2004, 1998; Yiftachel, 1994). In the early days of the expansion of spatial planning, spatial planners in the US and in Europe were required to think about power relations on a daily basis, and had to devise tactics and strategies to navigate the ordeals of a planning practice that was always politicized (Van Assche et al., 2014). Within the context of spatial planning practice, power configurations define the strategic relationships between public and private interest groups, but they also shape governance arrangements and ultimately affect the availability of funding mechanisms (Hillier, 2002). Being mindful that spatial planning has become increasingly project-based (Oliveira and Hersperger, 2017) and development-led (Valtonen et al., 2017), discussions on the legitimacy and transparency of strategic plans are paramount in establishing an in-depth understanding of today’s strategic planning practice (Mäntysalo et al., 2011).

The literature highlights that strategic spatial plan implementation involves various governance arrangements, such as cooperation across levels of government, coordination between public entities and private actors in decision-making, negotiations, citizen participation and actor involvement (Albrechts et al., 2017; Legacy and Nouvelant van den, 2015; Walsh, 2012; Healey et al., 2006). For example, in the case of implementation of a regional strategic plan for China’s Pearl River Delta, Xu and Yeh (2017) found that the process entailed various governance arrangements involving public entities, interest groups from the economic sector and ecological conservation groups. Specifically, Xu and Yeh (2017) highlight that public entities were caught up in the web of tensions involving ecological conservation versus economic imperative interests, the competing claims of different actors, and the discursive struggles over the policy inclusion/exclusion of these claims. Similarly, in a study on strategic spatial planning in the city of Johannesburg (South Africa), Harrison (2017) show that in the early 1990s, during a period of multiparty dialogue, strategic spatial planning processes were developed through multilevel government cooperation together with the involvement of public and private actors. In the same vein, Houghton (2013) argues that in South African cities public–private partnerships have played a key role in strategic planning practice and in reshaping the urban landscape.

Investigating governance arrangements in planning practice requires an in-depth understanding of the power configurations involved (Houghton, 2011). This is justified because negotiations often involve multiple tiers of government (Baarveld et al., 2015), private interest groups (Levesque et al., 2016), and public entities, which dominantly assume leadership in making and implementing spatial plans (Sotarauta and Beer, 2017). Thus, one could argue that spatial plan implementation is a ‘power play’ among for-profit groups, non-governmental organizations and public entities (Van Assche et al., 2011; Sørensen and Sagaris, 2010; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 1998). This argument is stretched further by studies suggesting that current planning practice resonates with recent critical reflections on the neoliberalization of strategic spatial planning (Olesen, 2014; Olesen and Richardson, 2011). Along with the global hegemony of neoliberal political ideology, the public sector has been introduced to the managerial culture of governance (Mäntysalo et al., 2011). For instance, in Finland, Norway and Sweden, this change in the governance culture has affected the ways with which cities and regions conduct their spatial planning practice (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Sager, 2009).

The literature also suggests that the availability of funding mechanisms influences the implementation of spatial strategies integrated in strategic plans (Buček, 2016; Legacy and Leshinsky, 2016). In a study involving land acquisition and metropolitan planning in Perth and Sydney, Australian urban regions, Foley and Williams (2016) emphasize that the availability of funding mechanisms, schemed through various sources, is paramount in supporting plan implementation. In another study, Olesen and Metzger (2017) suggest that the availability of funding has greatly influenced strategy making and plan implementation through projects in the Danish Øresund Region.

To our knowledge, what is lacking in the current literature is empirical evidence demonstrating the extent to which governance arrangements, unfolding within the context of power configurations, influence the way strategic spatial plans are implemented at the ground level. In this quest, Nuissl and Heinrichs (2011), in line with Neuman (1998), contend that the theory and practice of spatial planning is strongly linked to the governance discourse. However, this link has rarely been made explicit or become the focus of scientific interest. Inspired by current literature on spatial governance, strategic spatial planning and academic debates on ‘planning versus power’, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the roles of governance arrangements and power configurations in current practices of strategic plan implementation. A special focus is given to the importance of funding mechanisms in supporting plan implementation and, more importantly, to understanding the main sources of funding in current planning practice. Empirical evidence is gathered from the analysis and comparison of implementation processes associated with contemporary strategic spatial plans in 14 European urban regions, namely those of Barcelona (Spain), Cardiff (Wales, United Kingdom), Copenhagen (Denmark), Dublin (Ireland), Edinburgh (Scotland, United Kingdom), Hamburg (Germany), Hannover (Germany), Helsinki-Uusimaa (Finland), Lyon (France), Milan (Italy), Oslo-Akershus (Norway), Stockholm (Sweden), Stuttgart (Germany) and Vienna (Austria). This is done by performing a qualitative analysis of 43 in-depth semi-structured interviews with regional planners and planning experts of the above-mentioned urban regions. This research method was considered the most appropriate method to achieve the following two macro-objectives: the first macro-objective was to investigate the roles of governance arrangements and funding mechanisms in processes of strategic spatial plan implementation; the second macro-objective was to understand better the extent to which power configurations shape governance arrangements and frame funding mechanisms in plan implementation.

Before we describe the case studies, we review prior research that supports the analysis of what is happening in the plan implementation practices of the 14 case studies. Following this information, we describe the research methodology. The findings are described in detail and comparisons are provided with the aim of generalizing the findings. We conclude by reflecting on the contribution of this paper to existing knowledge but also on its limitations, which together pave the way for future research on planning and democracy.

2. Review of prior research: governance, funding and power in planning practice

Spatial planning, understood as the collective decision-making process determining the use of land, based on assessing and balancing competing demands among a variety of interest groups, is clearly an element of governance (Nuissl and Heinrichs, 2011). By understanding governance as the range of arrangements, activities and agencies involved in collective action of an urban region, Healey (2006), in line with Albrechts (2004), perceives strategic spatial plans as social products which emerge as an important part of the governance arrangements of a territory. Because strategic spatial plans are socially constructed within complex ties of governance, questions are also raised about their legitimacy and the power configurations involved (Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Flyvbjerg, 1998). Power is an important and often debated concept and issue in contemporary planning practice (Van Assche et al., 2014). Despite this apparent fruitful cross-fertilization between planning and governance, few efforts have been made to systematically uncover what the rich debate on the theoretical concept of governance has to offer to the equally intense debates regarding spatial planning practice (Nuissl and Heinrichs, 2011). With this paper, we intend to contribute to filling this gap. The premise of departure
More important than defining the components entangling planning practice is investigating the interrelationships among them. This is what we intend to do in this theory-driven section – explore the interrelationships among governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and the power configurations in which they are embedded.

Current practice of strategic spatial plan implementation reflects a shift from government, as a single actor, towards a multi-actor and community-based governance (Gonçalves and Ferreira, 2015; Opdam et al., 2015). There are a number of studies demonstrating that governance has the potential to inform spatial planning (Nuissl and Heinrichs, 2011) and thus support plan implementation (Albrechts, 2010). There are other works highlighting that the coordination of actions of actors and institutions, citizen participation, utilization of expert knowledge and the involvement of community organizations, private corporations and public entities are core governance arrangements in assisting the implementation of strategic spatial plans (Rivolin, 2017; Albrechts, 2003; Hillier, 2002). The implementation of strategic plans must also involve vision development and consensus building among citizens and interest groups (Kunzmann, 2010). Depending on the context and definition adopted, interest groups can vary from a formal entity with authority to a loose, informal, ad hoc set of individuals dealing with specific land-use issues, such as development of new roads, new tramlines or new primary schools (Foster and Barnes, 2012).

Other scholars have also touched upon the role of interest groups in the governance arrangements unfolding during plan implementation. Metzger (2013), for example, asserts that their involvement reflects an approach to spatial planning through dialogue, which has emerged with the shift to post-modernist principles in spatial planning. Healey (2006) underlines that in order for spatial planning to be successful, spatial planners must explore who has ‘a stake’ in a territorial issue and conduct an analysis to identify interest groups and to make sure that planning efforts grow out of the specific concerns of those groups. Burby (2003) highlight that when interest groups are able to submit planning proposals and claim land uses, the strength of the plans and the degree of success of the implementation improves markedly. If one agrees with this statement, it is important to consider the power configurations involving the participation of interest groups in plan implementation mainly during negotiations (Flyvbjerg, 2002, 2004). Yiftachel (1994), with examples from Israel/Palestine, shows how national authorities use spatial planners and spatial planning as a way of politically extending its territorial claims and excluding the Palestinian population. According to Yiftachel, this is achieved by using professional planning tools and procedures, which often result in the systemic marginalization and oppression of minority populations. Flyvbjerg’s (1998) well-known case study of spatial planning and power configurations in Aalborg, Denmark, showed how even in a country with a transparent and respected democracy, spatial planning was manipulated by various power configurations and domination to serve the interests of certain groups over others. Flyvbjerg (1998) argues that governance arrangements, for example actor involvement and multi-level government cooperation but primarily negotiations, reshaped the implementation of spatial plans and shaped the urban landscape in Aalborg according to some interests while diminishing others.

The case of Aalborg has been used extensively as a comparative example in other literature, in particular in discussions of the roles of negotiation in planning practice. In this quest, prior research refers to negotiation as the process of potentially opportunistic interaction by which two or more interest groups seek to do better through joint decision-making (Jönsson et al., 1998; Lax and Sebenius, 1986). On the one hand, negotiation is seen to facilitate responsive planning outcomes that recognize the unique institutional and development environment. On the other hand, the process of negotiation has been identified as one that delays the overall planning process, while simultaneously opening the door for corruption and regulatory seizure (Ruming, 2012). The literature also suggests that negotiations can help to overcome implementation conflicts that often emerge among interest groups and between interest groups and governmental institutions (Baarveld et al., 2015; Shmueli et al., 2008). However, some authors contend that negotiations can be highly disruptive for the plan implementation process (Poplin and Vemuri, 2018; Houghton, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 1998). It is during negotiations that implementation priorities are settled, the concession of planning permits are discussed and compromises regarding land uses are established (Breunig and Koski, 2017; Laurian et al., 2004). Negotiation is also thought of as a facilitator arrangement for the allocation of human and natural resources, as well as the moment to reach consensus regarding funding mechanisms to support plan implementation.

If funding mechanisms are often the result of negotiations made ahead of plan implementation, Buček (2016) considers funding as a backbone of plan implementation processes. The role of funding mechanisms in spatial policymaking and plan implementation has been increasing, mainly due to a scarcity of financial resources available as the result of financial and economic turbulence and uncertainty (Legacy and Leshinsky 2016; Buček, 2016; Healey et al., 1995). However, is not clear from the prior research who or which entities are in charge of securing and managing funding to support plan implementation. While Jansen-Jansen (2013) contends that it is the role of a public entity to bring together various funding sources to support plan implementation, Baarveld et al. (2015) advocates that funding mechanisms are often framed through private interest groups during negotiations.

Funding mechanisms, the involvement of interest groups and negotiations are only a few of the governance arrangements influencing processes of strategic spatial plan implementation. The literature suggests that investigating the various governance arrangements unfolding during plan implementation is important for the understanding of how and why spatial transformation occurs (Fischler, 2000; Forester, 2001).
However, a number of critical spatial planning thinkers, such as Van Assche et al. (2014), Olesen (2012, 2014), Flyvbjerg (1998, 2004), Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones (2002), Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998) and Yiftachel (1994), consider that power configurations are to be ever-present throughout the strategic spatial plan making and implementation processes. Investigating power configurations is not a new topic in planning practice. Michael Foucault, for example, who explicitly focused on power configurations in government and society, and on the functions of expertise in governance, featured prominently in the thinking of the power theorists in planning (Foucault, 1994). In the 1970s, Friedmann (1971, 1973) discussed in detail power configurations and their importance for local and regional economic development, as well as the restrictions they impose on planning practice. Specifically regarding plan implementation, a number of case studies have shown that in the delineation of preferable scenarios for future development, and particularly in their implementation, power relations, including its use and abuse, is something that cannot be overlooked.

Despite the insightfulness of previous studies, to our knowledge what is missing from them is a clear understanding of how negotiations involving private interest groups, for example private corporations, affect plan implementation. It is important to not only underline that governance arrangements are affected by power, but also explore deeply who holds more bargaining capacity at the negotiation table and thus ‘imposes’ their interests. In this quest, and inspired by Horlings et al. (2017), it is fundamental to understand better how and to what extent a public entity, for example a regional council in charge of strategic regional planning for a certain urban region, deals with land use claims from housing builders or the intention of retail interests to expand a commercial area. It is also fundamental to understand the role of interest groups in setting up plan implementation priorities and the extent to which funding mechanisms from private sources impact the implementation of plans and if this influences patterns of spatial transformation in urban regions. It is our objective, through the following case study analysis of current plan implementation practices, to pursue these queries.

3. Research method

Case studies are an appropriate research strategy for seeking insight into the dynamics of a specific territorial and institutional setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). The cases studied in this paper were designed according to a multi-case study method whereby all cases “serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This is justified because “the multiple-case study design also facilitates exploration of the differences and similarities in territorial governance processes within and between cases” (Schmitt and Van Well, 2016b, p. 63). These authors also advocate that “territorial governance processes can only be truly understood by performing research using qualitative methods within a specific territorial context” (Schmitt and Van Well, 2016b, p. 63). In line with the literature, a qualitative method of research by means of qualitative in-depth interviewing was employed here. The details are provided below.

3.1. Selection of case studies

The urban regions of Barcelona, Cardiff, Copenhagen, Dublin, Edinburgh, Hamburg, Hannover, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Lyon, Milan, Oslo-Akershus, Stockholm, Stuttgart, and Vienna were selected for this investigation. These cases have been chosen for the following two reasons: (i) the cases are located in countries that cover the whole spectrum of the European spatial planning systems and thus represent different strategic spatial planning approaches (Nadin and Stead, 2008; Newman and Thornley, 1996), which is essential for generalizing the findings; and (ii) the cases are embedded in territorial-specific governance settings, some of which have directly elected regional parliaments (e.g. Hannover), while others are merely the result of multilevel cooperation (e.g. Oslo-Akershus) or are in a process of a transition from informal organizations to a directly elected regional assembly (e.g. Helsinki-Uusimaa).

While some of the cases are classified as city-regions, as in Helsinki-Uusimaa, or as metropolitan areas, as in Barcelona and Milan, others assume the designation of ‘greater area’, as in Copenhagen, or simply as regions, as in Stuttgart and Hannover. In this paper, we treat all of the case studies as urban regions. In addition, the public entities in charge of the strategic spatial planning process have adopted dissimilar designations for their strategic plans, including ‘strategic regional plans’, as in Hannover, ‘strategic development plans’, as in Edinburgh, or ‘regional plans for land use and transport’, as in Oslo-Akershus. Other designations can be found in Appendix A. Despite these varied designations, in this paper we treat all of the different plans as strategic spatial plans at the urban regional scale.

3.2. In-depth interviewing, data collection and data analysis

In line with studies on territorial governance which have undertaken qualitative research through expert in-depth interviewing (e.g. Schmitt and Van Well 2016a), the primary data to support the present investigation were collected by conducting 43 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with planners responsible for processes of strategic planning and with other planning experts. Appendix A includes the main affiliation of the interviewees in each case.

The interviews were carried out in English at the interviewees’ workplaces between May and November 2016. The interviews lasted, on average, 90 min and were recorded digitally and subsequently fully transcribed. The interviews were conducted by using an interview guide expanded according to the theoretical framework discussed in previous sections of this paper. Although a large amount of data was collected, for this paper we only analysed data on the governance components of negotiation, interest groups, funding schemes and the leadership. The remaining information will be analysed elsewhere.

The interview transcripts were first organized in alphabetical order by case study and a single PDF file was created. Secondly, the governance components of negotiation, interest groups, funding schemes and the leadership were manually coded. Thirdly, each page on which a component was identified was isolated for an in-depth analysis of the context and the interplay with other components. Concrete examples were located, including objects of negotiation (e.g. housing, retail, transportation) or the nature of the interest groups involved (e.g. economic, environmental). The analysis of the role of funding schemes in processes of plan implementation was conducted by coding and further tracing not only ‘funding schemes’, but also ‘financing’, ‘financial mechanisms’, ‘budget’, ‘money’, ‘financial resources’ and ‘funding’ on the interview transcripts. Dawson et al. (2017), Legacy and Leshinsky (2016) and Ruming (2012) have adopted a similar method of data collection and data analysis.

4. Depicting practices of strategic spatial plan implementation in the selected cases

In line with the two macro-objectives posed in this paper, this section contains a discussion of the roles of governance arrangements and funding mechanisms in processes of strategic spatial plan implementation. This discussion is solely based on interviewee responses. Occasionally, a linkage to prior research is established. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the findings.

4.1. The role of governance arrangements in strategic spatial plan implementation

In a cross-case comparison, it is revealed that current strategic spatial plan implementation practices are characterized by various
governance arrangements. For example, in Cardiff urban region, regarding the discussion on the implementation of the Strategic Development Plan for the Cardiff City Region, findings show that groups holding different interests join in negotiations regarding plan implementation. On the one hand, business groups from the construction sector, and urban developers in general, exercise strong bargaining power over the regional entity, mainly in matters of intra-regional transportation projects, such as the ‘Metro for Wales’ (see Barry, 2011) and new housing developments. On the other hand, interest groups from the environmental side, such as Natural Resources Wales and other nature protection NGOs, struggle in the power play with private groups to safeguard natural areas. According to the respondents, private interest groups ‘give’ support to municipalities on infrastructure provision, for example a primary school or an access road, and claim built-up land to develop a number of houses. Regional and local authorities facilitate the exploration of built-up areas by private interest groups and receive, in turn, support for infrastructure provision. Environmental/nature protection NGOs intervene by attempting to protect a national area or requesting a green infrastructure to compensate and thus balance possible negative impacts of a housing expansion project. Findings reveal that housing builders possess a greater capacity to influence decision-making regarding plan implementation than environmental NGOs or citizen-led movements. In this regard, one could argue that economic-led power configurations shape governance arrangements and thus influence plan implementation in the urban region of Cardiff. This view is in line with Bolandös (2007) results.

Table 1
Main governance arrangements and their roles in strategic spatial plan implementation in the selected case studies (first macro-objective of the paper).
Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on the interviews. Notes: *Alphabetical order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban region</th>
<th>Main governance arrangement</th>
<th>Roles of the main governance arrangement</th>
<th>Main urban functions object of discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>Interest groups involvement</td>
<td>Providing opinions on specific subjects such as environmental protection, use of land for agriculture, housing and commercial activities.</td>
<td>Housing developments. Allocation of economic activities, including retail facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups</td>
<td>Supporting the execution of area-specific projects on transportation, housing, retail, green infrastructures and leisure facilities.</td>
<td>Reinforcement of transportation network. Housing allocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation.</td>
<td>Safeguarding meaningfulness and the common good during plan implementation.</td>
<td>Intra-regional railway transport system. Housing developments and employment land. Repurposing of outdated industrial and harbour facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups and municipalities in the region.</td>
<td>Supporting the regional authority to build a capacity for dealing with strategic planning. Securing funding.</td>
<td>Housing developments. Repurposing of outdated industrial and harbour facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups.</td>
<td>Securing infrastructure provision as compensation for being granted a planning permit or a specific land allocation for housing development.</td>
<td>Housing and employment land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation.</td>
<td>Sharing priorities of intervention and working together with public entities on the development of strategic projects</td>
<td>Protecting and requalifying green infrastructures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannover</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups and municipalities in the region.</td>
<td>Supporting prioritization of spatial interventions, thus supporting an environmentally sound and purposeful use of land.</td>
<td>Maintaining green infrastructures. Land for housing and retail activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki-Uusimaa</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups and municipalities in the region.</td>
<td>Safeguarding the achievement of joint decision-making and collectively thinking regional challenges.</td>
<td>Intra-regional transportation network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>Negotiations involving municipalities in the region and private groups.</td>
<td>Safeguarding an effective plan implementation and generating a wider engagement of interest groups around the plan.</td>
<td>Trade and commercial facilities (shopping malls). Increasing social housing offers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation.</td>
<td>Persuading municipalities to fulfil the principles or guidelines established in the plan.</td>
<td>Transportation network. Urban regeneration projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo-Akershus</td>
<td>Negotiations involving private interest groups and municipalities.</td>
<td>Facilitating mutual agreements between municipal political leaders.</td>
<td>Expanding the transportation network. Housing and employment land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation and negotiations.</td>
<td>Setting up plan implementation priorities and supporting collective decision-making on specific urban functions.</td>
<td>Expanding the intra-regional transportation network. Housing developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation.</td>
<td>Setting up plan implementation priorities and supporting collective decision-making on specific urban functions.</td>
<td>Housing and employment land. Green infrastructures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>Multi-level government cooperation.</td>
<td>Gaining trust among interest groups and municipalities, thus facilitating the implementation of small scale projects.</td>
<td>Public transport network. Projects of various natures at the district level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
The role of funding mechanisms in strategic plan implementation in the selected cases.
Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on the interviews. Notes: *Alphabetical order;
demonstrating the influence of the industrial sector in shaping Cardiff’s regional development agenda. The governance arrangements taking shape in Cardiff’s plan implementation process are similar to the arrangements unfolding in the plan implementation process in the Scottish urban region of Edinburgh and to those of the Irish Greater Dublin Area process.

The interviewees in Edinburgh concerning the Strategic Development Plan for Edinburgh and South East Scotland urban region touched upon negotiation as a ‘bargaining’ exercise involving private urban developers and public entities such as municipalities. This ‘bargaining’ exercise often implies the commitment of public entities to facilitate certain development, such as the allocation of land for housing or commercial use, in order to bargain for the support of private interest groups with respect to infrastructure provision, from roads to public spaces. The results of the interviews in Edinburgh show that private groups often have their claims fulfilled as far as they can meet, for example, the housing needs established in the strategic plan; this happens while environmental NGOs and groups of citizens try to demonstrate their viewpoints regarding a specific project. Due to the stronger economic capacity of the private groups, they play a stronger role in plan implementation when compared with the financial and decision-making capacity of the municipalities, which also results in an increase in private sector-led strategic projects.

Similar unevenness regarding the role of interest groups in negotiations can be highlighted in the Dublin case. Concerning the overall implementation process of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, negotiation involves regional and local level governmental entities as well as private interest groups from the construction, industry and retail and other service-oriented sectors. In a ‘push and block power play’, to use the words of Van Assche et al. (2014), private groups pressure the regional council and municipalities to obtain building permits for a new housing development or the implementation of a project targeting the repurposing of an outdated industrial facility.

In the urban regions of Cardiff, Edinburgh and Dublin, municipalities have a weak political and decision-making capacity and thus interest groups, mainly those holding economic interests, play a stronger role in plan implementation. In comparison, in the selected Nordic urban regions, for example in the Finish urban region composed of the city of Helsinki and the Uusimaa region, negotiations are part of its governance arrangements during plan implementation but are guided by the spirit of teamwork and consensus building and less by desires to block each other’s interests. The interviewees stressed that interest groups such as environmental protection organizations, business interests and landowners strongly influence plan implementation but in a consensus-based modus operandi. They are brought together to guarantee that plans are implemented in a way that satisfies the interests of various groups in the region. Hence, negotiations in this case study are less often used to bargain for a new housing settlement or to get planning approval for a new shopping mall, as they are in the UK and Irish cases. Instead, negotiations are mainly used to balance public versus private powers. Specifically, an important aim of negotiations in this Nordic urban region is to establish a fine balance between the economic-oriented interests of groups (the private side) and the overall aim of securing sustainable social, economic and environmental development of the regional council (the public side). Negotiations are also used to pursue equilibrium between the regional council interests and those of the municipalities composing the Helsinki-Uusimaa urban region.

Similar to the Finish case is the involvement of negotiation in the plan implementation process of the Norwegian Regional Plan for Land Use and Transport of Oslo and Akershus. The implementation of this plan in Oslo-Akershus is guided by an action plan jointly prepared by the Oslo City Council and the Akershus County Council, with the involvement of a number of interest groups through negotiations. The respondents point out that negotiations are also used to build consensus regarding plan implementation priorities. Negotiations among the Oslo City Council, Akershus County Council and private groups continue until all of those involved are confident that their interests are taken into consideration. Negotiation in Oslo-Akershus benefits from a solid trust among the entities involved. Based on our findings, we can convincingly argue that in these two Nordic cases a better balance among the various degrees of power involved in negotiations is achieved. In the Oslo-Akershus case, our findings reveal that municipalities are strongly involved in negotiations along with private interest groups in the urban region. In Copenhagen, private interest groups such as urban developers and enterprises work together with the Danish Business Authority and the municipalities on matters related to the expansion of the intra-regional rail network and the development of new housing settlements.

Atypical regarding the role of negotiation in plan implementation is the case of Region Hannover (RH). In this urban region, negotiations in both plan making and plan implementation have to be documented in written form. This is a recent legal requirement intended to bring transparency to the process of strategic planning at the regional scale. In Hannover, negotiations happen between municipalities and the regional planning department and they are primarily about setting up priorities for new housing developments or retail facilities. In Stuttgart, and according to the respondents at Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS), the VRS works more with multi-level government cooperation and occasionally negotiates with private interest groups. The VRS retains the political and decision-making capacity to safeguard regional interests if they are at risk during plan implementation by calling municipalities and private interest groups to amend accordingly a local development plan (at the municipal level) or a strategic project (which can be a private sector-led project). The VRS has the necessary power, by means of political and decision-making capacity, to ‘block’ certain land use claims, such as those presented by a municipality of a private interest group. In Stuttgart, the allocation of land to housing and industrial investments is the chief topic of discussions among the VRS, municipalities and private interest groups. Table 1 provides a summary of the main governance arrangements and their roles in plan implementation in the selected cases.

4.2. The role of funding mechanisms in strategic spatial plan implementation

Findings resulting from the interviews with regional planning experts in the selected 14 urban regions show that funding mechanisms are fundamental in supporting plan implementation and thus contribute to spatial transformation. During the interviews, our objective was not to discuss the ‘what for’ of funding mechanisms; we found it more insightful to discuss ‘from which sources’ funding mechanisms are prepared.

There is no one-size-fits-all among the cases regarding the main sources of funding or how public and private actors make funding mechanisms available. In Barcelona, for example, the Área Metropolitana de Barcelona, in cooperation with national and local authorities, is the main source of the funding mechanisms put in place to finance small-scale projects, mainly related to city-making and urban design. While in Barcelona there are no specific funding mechanisms to support plan implementation, for instance through projects, in the Hamburg urban region there are three funding mechanisms specifically intended to support plan implementation and project development. The main source of these funding mechanisms is the Hamburg Metropolitan Region (HMR). The first funding mechanism is aimed at strengthening the Metropolitan Region’s international competitiveness, the second is aimed at reinforcing public services and the third is aimed at supporting spatial structure and land use management, mainly through settlement, zoning plans and ecosystem management. These funding mechanisms are essential in order to bring about some spatial transformation at the
regional level. Projects are often developed through collaborations between HMR and the municipalities in the region. Occasionally, private interest groups are involved in funding specific projects, but the process is coordinated by the HMR in order to secure transparency and balance the multiple power configurations involved.

When scrutinizing the role of funding in plan implementation, it is essential to discuss the role of the ‘City Deals’ in supporting spatial transformation in the UK cases considered in this paper. A ‘City Deal’ is a package of funding and decision-making powers negotiated between the UK central government and city regions in the country, including Cardiff and Edinburgh (for discussions on city deals see Jones et al., 2017). The recently approved Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, for instance, sets out a transformative approach to determining how Cardiff as an urban region will deliver the scale and nature of investments needed to support the urban region’s spatial and growth plans. The City Deal for Edinburgh urban region has recently been approved after negotiations involving the municipalities composing Edinburgh urban region. The deal will mainly support plan implementation through strategic projects on infrastructure, boosting economic performance through innovation hubs, expanding the regional housing programme and reinforcing tourism activity. In the two UK cases, but also in the other cases to some extent, scarce financial resources mean that the implementation of strategic plans primarily occurs through strategic projects. These projects are mainly in the areas of public transportation and are aimed at supporting enterprise and business growth (for a discussion about strategic plan implementation through strategic projects in European urban regions, see Oliveira and Hersperger, 2017).

When considering the role of governance arrangements in strategic plan implementation, the findings reveal similarities among Cardiff, Edinburgh and Dublin, whereas there is noteworthy dissimilarity concerning funding mechanisms. In the Greater Dublin Area, funding mechanisms aimed at supporting plan implementation are directly linked to public-private partnership formation and multilevel government cooperation. The funding sources for plan implementation or project development, mainly in the areas of urban regeneration and repurposing of outdated industrial and harbour facilities to multifunctional areas (e.g. housing and office spaces), are the national government and European Union (EU) funds. Funding also emerges from cooperation agreements between city councils, such as the Dublin City Council, and private interest groups, such as housing builders of business agencies. As municipalities in Ireland have a weak decision-making and financial capacity compared with those municipalities in the Nordic countries, Germany or Austria, funding sources are closely tied to private interest groups. There are, however, some power configurations within the process of preparing funding mechanisms. Private interest groups in Dublin, as in Ireland overall, have a strong bargaining power to claim, for instance, more land for housing development by using their funding capacity. This finding is in line with Dalyís (2016) discussion on the influence of the neo-liberal agenda in shaping the strategic spatial planning process in Ireland.

Regarding funding mechanisms in the four Nordic urban regions considered in this study, findings reveal that in Greater Copenhagen, for example, the money to implement the Finger Plan through local development plans comes from the municipalities. Danish municipalities have strong financial and decision-making capacity. Municipalities try to be proactive in setting up partnerships and in negotiating with private interest groups to find ways of funding specific planned interventions or area-specific projects on new transportation infrastructures such as train-ways and train stations. A similar process of gathering funding to support plan implementation happens in the Stockholm urban region. In this case study, discussions involving funding to support plan implementation are often negotiated among the Stockholm County Council, municipalities located in the Stockholm urban region and private interest groups. Funding provided by the Swedish government, as well as by the Stockholm County Council, is also paramount so that the municipalities can implement their local development plans in line with Regional Development Plan for the Stockholm Region (RUFSS), the flagship strategic plan for the Stockholm urban region.

An interesting case for this debate emerges from Vienna. Despite the fact that the regional plan is merely a guiding and non-legally binding document, the funding mechanism to support the expansion of housing offers in the urban region are rather efficient, the respondents highlighted. There are funding mechanisms, managed by the Vienna City Council and other municipalities, which are specifically used for acquiring housing land. Other funding often results from negotiations between public entities and private interest groups. To secure this funding and thus ensure that the funded strategic projects are of regional importance, two regional managers work daily with the municipalities and private actors. Despite these efforts to secure a cohesive and integrated regional development, the interviewees in Vienna considered that there is a need for better coordination among the spatial plans in force, land acquisition schemes and concrete development of the housing and transportation sectors. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings of the role of funding in plan implementation.

5. The interrelationships among governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in the context of strategic spatial plan implementation

In this section, we critically discuss the extent to which power configurations shape the main governance arrangements (first macro-objective) and frame funding mechanisms in plan implementation processes of the selected urban regions (second macro-objective).

The overall outcomes of the interviews provided evidence that negotiation, interest group involvement and multi-level government cooperation are the main governance arrangements in effect across the 14 cases. However, in some cases negotiation is the prime arrangement, while in other cases cooperation between different levels of government is the main arrangement. Interest groups, mainly from the economic sector and environmental NGOs, are involved in plan implementation processes. The findings of this study reinforce the context sensitivity of governance arrangements, as described by Schmitt and Van Well (2016a), i.e. each case is unique and there are a number of dissimilarities regarding how interest groups, negotiations and multi-level government cooperation take shape during plan implementation. The findings are consistent with those of Shmueli et al. (2008), who recognize that negotiations involving multiple actors are an effective governance arrangement in enhancing the odds of plan implementation, and with Corken and McGreavy (2016), who state that negotiation processes can explain and justify land use changes and overall spatial transformation in urban regions embracing strategic spatial planning. It is important, however, to discuss negotiations from a more critical point of view, mainly due to the complex power configurations in which they are embedded (Van Asch et al., 2014; Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Critical planning scholarship involves discussions of plan implementation and implementation through strategic projects as expressions of the neo-liberal agenda, which is thought to stimulate urban actors to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning (Olesen, 2014; Moulaert et al., 2005; Harvey, 1989). The increasing ‘appetite’ for strategic spatial planning and a greater interest in implementing strategic plans through strategic projects is also linked to place-branding strategies and place-promotion ambitions (Oliveira, 2016; Savitch and Kantor, 2002), or to what Brenner (2004) refers to as the ‘competition state’ (p. 476). The findings revealing this increasingly embraced fast-track plan implementation through projects reinforce the arguments that characterize strategic spatial planning practices as a ‘growth-first approach to urban development’ (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 394) and a more project-based form of spatial planning (Allmendinger, 2011; Healey et al., 2006).

Our findings from the majority of the case studies reveal that when plan implementation meets reality and limited financial resources are considered, several strategic urban projects are developed.
strategic projects are often single spatial interventions and do not bring about any substantial spatial transformation, some of the regional planning experts interviewed critically stated. These viewpoints shared by some of the respondents are consistent with what Flyvbjerg (1998) demonstrates regarding the Danish Aalborg Project. In this case, the governance arrangements that were formed during plan implementation, in particular negotiations, resulted in several weakly articulated governance arrangements that were formed during plan implementation, which demonstrates regarding the Danish Aalborg Project. In this case, the governance arrangements that were formed during plan implementation, in particular negotiations, resulted in several weakly articulated governance arrangements that were formed during plan implementation, even in countries with a solid democracy and a clearly defined spatial planning system. Hence, our findings strengthen the argument of scholars advocating that strategic spatial planning has become a facilitator of economic growth and territorial competitiveness, rather than being focused on expanding the welfare state by promoting equal development across territories (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). In addition, the findings show a strong involvement of private interest groups in plan implementation. This is in line with Sorensen and Torfing (2007), who argue that strategic spatial planning processes increasingly take place in complex governance networks of actors and thus are embedded in power configurations (Daly, 2016; Nyseth, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2004).

The findings concerning the involvement of interest groups in plan implementation, in the UK cases for example, are in line with what Allmendinger (2011) refers to as neoliberal spatial governance. Specifically, in the cases of Cardiff and Edinburgh private interest groups such as housing builders play a chief role in primary infrastructure delivery. In contrast, in the Nordic capitals of Oslo-Akershus, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki-Uusimaa environmental NGOs put more pressure on the regional authorities charged with strategic regional planning tasks to maintain green areas and public spaces during plan implementation. In Vienna, interest groups such as neighbourhood associations mainly support project development and not the overall plan implementation. In the Italian case of the Milan urban region, interest groups, including those from the economic sector but also grassroots groups of citizens, are involved in pursuing the aim of guaranteeing that local politicians and decision makers accomplish the conditions established in the strategic spatial plan.

The case study analysis complements critical strategic spatial planning scholarship by revealing that negotiations are a trade-off between competing interests. The analysis highlights also that what is needed to improve the understanding of current practices of strategic spatial planning, is a thorough investigation of the private interest groups involved, the main negotiated urban functions and who plays the stronger ‘card’ at the negotiation table or in funding plan implementation processes, basically understanding in detail ‘who wins’ and ‘who loses’ during negotiations. The cases additionally show that private interest groups provide the funding necessary to support infrastructure provision and strategic project development, but request in return the approval of building permits or specific allocation of land for housing, retail or industrial activity. According to the respondents, the recent economic and financial crises have kept the door open for a greater interference of economic interests in current practices of strategic spatial planning. One could argue, therefore, that the law of the market is unrelenting in current strategic planning practice and spatial governance arrangements in urban regions are increasingly being co-opted into the dominant neoliberal agendas.

6. Conclusion

This study provides an empirically based analysis of the role of governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in processes of strategic plan implementation. It is clear that strategic plan implementation processes are different in each of the urban regions discussed above. Overall, this paper contributes to overcoming the lack of empirical studies on how governance arrangements and the power configurations unfolding within them are notorious in current practices of strategic spatial plan implementation. The novelty of this study lies in the large number of case studies analysed, which strengthen the generalization of key findings, despite the peculiarities of each of the selected cases.

The paper shows that strategic plan implementation processes are highly influenced by negotiations between private interest groups and entities of the public sphere such as regional councils and municipalities. The finding underlining negotiation as central to strategic spatial plan implementation processes is consistent with the literature suggesting that in a neoliberal environment, where private and public sectors are increasingly dependent on each other, negotiation remains a central component of planning (Rumig, 2012). However, the value and appropriateness of negotiation in processes of plan implementation differ considerably between discretionary planning systems that promote development-led outcomes (such as the case studies in Ireland and the UK) and regulatory frameworks that promote plan-led outcomes and higher levels of certainty (such as those in the Nordic countries, Germany and Austria).

Across the case studies, plan implementation processes are also affected by the availability of financial mechanisms, which is in line with the arguments of Faludi (2000) and Mastop and Faludi (1997), who underline that the availability of funding is crucial in spatial planning. This also reinforces the arguments of scholars who have reflected on a shift in strategic spatial planning practice from a public-led to an increasingly business-led planning. In this regard, public entities, for instance regional councils tasked with strategic regional planning, have been ‘giving a hand’ to private interest groups by paving the way for strategic projects with the establishment of soft spaces, such as the Strategic Development Zones in Dublin. This kind of zoning mechanism that exists in Dublin, as well as in other case studies, facilitates plan implementation through strategic projects. The projects are often funded exclusively by private interest groups. The shift towards experimental deregulatory spaces aimed at supporting development-led approaches and plan implementation through projects is in line with what Haughton et al. (2013) critically call ‘spaces of neoliberal experimentation’.

To summarize, in this paper we have developed a contribution that provides fresh explanatory capacity to understand the spatial and temporal variability of governance arrangements of strategic spatial plan implementation. The development of a negotiation-based plan implementation approach, as well as the intensification of the persuasive power of businesses interests in strategic planning practice, concurs with recent critical reflections on the neoliberalization of strategic spatial planning. It also reinforces the arguments underlining the inherent vagueness of spatial planning’s core concepts and practices due to the transfer of neo-liberalism principles into planning practice (Daly, 2016; Olesen, 2014; Van Assche et al., 2014; Olesen and Richardson, 2011). Bearing in mind the need to investigate governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in current planning practice more critically, some lessons can be drawn from this study. These lessons could support the work of planning practitioners in dealing with plan implementation practices. The lessons can, and ultimately should, help strategic spatial planning scholars understand better the overall process of strategic spatial planning within the neoliberalization of economy and society (Olesen, 2014), the emergence of new forms of spatial governance (Oliveira, 2017), and scarce financial resources at the local level of government due to austerity measures, among other causes (Newman, 2014):

- **Lesson on negotiation**: negotiation is the one process able to set up priorities for plan implementation and identify key land uses by balancing public and private interests that comply with a strategic spatial plan in force. The following is a list of principles identified as...
relevant to supporting negotiations in plan implementation processes: i) preparing a set of realistic expectations and a range of possible outcomes; ii) behaving with honesty and transparency; iii) communicating openly all issues at stake; and iv) being willing to compromise and adapt to circumstances. The way negotiations in Hannover and Helsinki-Uusimaa unfold could be given as an example.

**Lesson on interest group involvement:** interest groups are those pursuing the interests they represent by avoiding conflict with the public good and following the principles established in the strategic plan. The way interest groups take part in the process of plan implementation in Oslo-Akershus could be given as an example.

**Lesson on funding mechanisms:** funding mechanisms are clearly established, meaning they have clear goals and areas of intervention/urban functions established, which allows an effective plan implementation. Hamburg is one example; however, the funding mechanisms in this urban region are mainly aimed at funding partners. Funding aimed at supporting the housing sector in Vienna could be given as an example because negotiations in this urban region have to be documented in written form. The cases of Oslo-Akershus and Helsinki-Uusimaa could also be used as good examples of how to balance planning practice and power configurations, because a plan implementation action or a spatial intervention is only scheduled or integrated into a plan implementation action program after all the public and private interest groups involved are satisfied with the possible outcomes.

**Lesson on power configurations:** power configurations must be critically considered in plan implementation. It is necessary to secure transparency and legitimacy of the negotiation process. This can be done by documenting every discussion during negotiations – Hannover could be given as an example because negotiations in this urban region have to be documented in written form. The cases of Oslo-Akershus and Helsinki-Uusimaa could also be used as good examples of how to balance planning practice and power configurations, because a plan implementation action or a spatial intervention is only scheduled or integrated into a plan implementation action program after all the public and private interest groups involved are satisfied with the possible outcomes.

We are convinced that these generalized lessons are useful for planning theory and practice; however, this study has some limitations. We acknowledge that a thorough analysis of the roles of governance arrangements in strategic spatial plan implementation would require the investigation of building permits requested by private actors and granted by planning departments. It would also be relevant to analyse a path to plan implementation that does not involve negotiation and to investigate lobbying activities within plan implementation. In this way, it would be possible to deepen the understanding of the extent to which power configurations influence the overall process of strategic spatial planning. We further acknowledge that an analysis of funding would require knowledge of the purposes of the multiple financial mechanisms available for plan implementation in each case study. Unfortunately, we could not access such information. Another limitation relates to the methodology employed, mainly due to the interviewees and their nature. It would have been interesting to additionally interview private interest groups, such as urban developers, retail representatives and other business agents. We are, however, confident that these limitations pave more research lanes rather than threatening the theoretical and empirical meaningfulness of the paper.

The findings of this paper, together with additional input from studies to be further developed on the roles of governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in different urban regions in Europe and beyond, can help make informed decisions and better understand how strategic plans contribute to spatial transformation.

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### Appendix A. List of the organizations interviewed** and the discussed strategic spatial plans.

Source: Authors’ own. *Alphabetical order; **Organizations with which the respondents were affiliated**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban region*</th>
<th>Organizations**</th>
<th>Strategic spatial plans discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td><em>Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona.</em> Mediaurban Agency.</td>
<td>Metropolitan Urban Master Plan (PDU) with references to the General Metropolitan Plan (PGM) 1976.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>Cardiff City Council. Cardiff University. Welsh expert of regional transportation and development.</td>
<td>Strategic Development Plan for the Cardiff City Region (forthcoming) with references to the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and Cardiff Local Development Plan 2006–2026.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes}

References


Lyon Le Sepal – Syndicat mixte d’études et de programmation de l’Agglomération Lyonnaise. University Lumière Lyon


Oslo Akershus County Council. Oslo City Council.


Stuttgart Verband Region Stuttgart.

Vienna Vienna City Council. Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning, OIR. Vienna University of Technology.