

BOOK REVIEW

Spatial Planning Systems and Practices in Europe

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Spatial Planning Systems and Practices in Europe: A Comparative Perspective on Continuity and Changes

Mario Reimer, Panagiotis Getimis, and Hans Henrich Blotevogel (Eds.)

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The book '*Spatial Planning Systems and Practices in Europe. A comparative perspective on continuity and changes*' edited by Mario Reimer, Panagiotis Getimis, and Hans Henrich Blotevogel is the outcome of a collective work coordinated by the Academy for Spatial Research and Planning in Hannover. The book presents an analysis of 12 countries, based on a common methodological framework, different from those used in previous comparative research of planning systems in Europe. It deals in particular with the Europeanization of spatial planning systems and examines two main dimensions: the planning systems, with its legal and administrative frameworks, and planning cultures, seen as responsible for the concrete planning practices, as the editors and contributing authors argue.

These 12 essays, plus the Introduction and the Conclusion, provide ample evidence of continuities and changes in planning systems and practices, across Europe, in the last two decades. The book considered previous taxonomies of planning systems for the selection of the case-studies but employed a different methodological approach (e.g., multi-scalar analysis, rescaling of planning powers, and five dimensions of change). The cases examined suggest that these changes and transformations are context-dependent and therefore the transformation of planning systems and planning practices are characterized by national and local specificities which make this a highly heterogeneous process. And this is well illustrated by the specificities of the political process in countries formerly under the influence of the Soviet bloc (e.g., Poland and the Czech Republic) compared with the long standing industrial democracies in western Europe, or the case of Turkey

also included in this collection of essays, or the differences between highly centralized countries of Napoleonic administrative tradition compared with the more decentralized Anglo-Saxon administrative culture. The main point emerging from this analysis is that planning systems and planning practices in Europe have experienced since the 1990's both continuity and change as well as convergence and divergence.

In the first chapter ('Introduction') the editors present the approach adopted in this comparative study of planning systems and planning practices in these 12 countries, based on the idea that spatial planning is strongly influenced by contextual conditions in each country or locality. Each of the following chapters deals with one country and the last chapter, written by the editors, presents the main conclusions that point to multiple trends of continuity and change in spatial planning systems and practices in these countries. Chapters 2 to 5 deal with a group of countries that in previous studies of planning systems in Europe have been grouped in the 'comprehensive / integrate' planning tradition (Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, respectively). Chapter 6 examines the case of France, which together with Germany is considered in previous planning systems studies as being part of a 'regional-economic' planning tradition. The next two chapters analyse the cases of Italy and Greece, respectively, considered as being part of an 'urbanism' tradition. The following three chapters deal with the cases of Belgium, United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic, considered in previous studies as the 'land-use planning' tradition. The last two country chapters deal with the case of Turkey and Poland, offer an historical overview of this issue in the case of Turkey, and an overview of the evolution of spatial planning in Poland since the fall of the Soviet Union and its influence in Eastern Europe. In the last chapter ('Conclusion'), the three editors highlight and compare the common and the diverse trends that emerge from the analysis of each of these 12 countries. One of the conclusions is the existence of a diversity or multiplicity of trends, both in terms of continuity as well as change, thus the conclusion that European spatial planning systems and practices experienced in the last two decades multiple trends of continuity and change.

This well-organized collection of essays offers abundant and recent empirical data on the multiple and complex facets of institutional and administrative changes in the planning systems, in a diverse group of European countries, on the non-linearity of these processes, on the diversity of social forces embedded in these practices, on the content and geographical scope of national spatial planning systems. Notwithstanding the comprehensive approach adopted, the book would profit if the role new information and communication technologies have increasingly in planning systems and planning practices worldwide had been properly considered in the analytical framework adopted by the authors. And this is even more so, considering the emergence of urban e-planning as a new planning paradigm in developed and in developing countries as well.

The findings presented in these essays confirm and reinforce those of previous comparative planning studies even if the methodology was different. The book identifies a number of problems and challenges with which planning systems are confronted in these countries. Some of these essays point the need of better coordination of spatial planning with other sector policies; or the simplification of spatial planning systems, allowing therefore more flexible planning practices; the need of an increased accountability within planning systems, and so on. There are also interesting new findings, as the evidence that countries can move from one planning tradition to another, which was previously seen as a more static process, while others tend to maintain for longer periods the respective planning tradition. Also new seems to be the evidence that supports the argument that informal planning instruments are becoming more important within formal planning systems, almost everywhere in the countries considered, as well as strategic planning methodologies, as these countries move from traditional hierarchical forms of government to more decentralized and networked modes of governance in all tiers of the state administrative

structure. The importance given to planning varies from country to country and within each country over time, as variable is also the importance of municipalities within each of these spatial planning systems. The evolution from traditional top-down to bottom-up planning systems is a trend also found in some of these countries.

In sum, this is a book that will be valuable to policy makers, planners, students and researchers interested in spatial planning, in particular those doing comparative research of planning systems in Europe or with a specific interest in the development of urban e-planning in different institutional frameworks.