

## Book Review

# Planning Cultures and Histories

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*Planning Cultures and Histories: The Evolution of Planning Systems and Spatial Development Patterns*  
Dominic Stead, Jochem de Vries and Tuna Tasan-Kok (Eds.)

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In *Planning cultures and Histories*, Dominique Stead, Jochem de Vries and Tuna Tasan-Kok and five other contributing authors explore the influence of planning cultures and the evolution of planning systems and spatial development through four case studies, different in scope and scale. As previous research has already shown, including publications of some of these authors, the contributions in this volume reveal clearly how different and specific combinations of political, ideological, social, economic and technological factors have been important factors affecting the way urban and regional planning systems are organized and how they function in practice.

This edited collection of five papers, published before in the journal *European Planning Studies*, in 2015, offers two main contributions to the growing literature on comparative planning studies in Europe. It provides not only an international comparative perspective of planning cultures and histories, but offers also new conceptual frameworks and perspectives for the interpretation of the differences and similarities found worldwide in national and local planning practices. And despite the already vast library centred on planning systems there are still important gaps, some of which the book aims to address with these well researched case studies. Nonetheless, being a short collection of five papers, focused on European cases, it seems necessary further exploration of these issues, in other geographies and periods, in the North and in the South as well.

In the Introduction (Chapter 1), the editors explore the rationale behind the collection of papers, the aims, and their main (hypo)thesis. For the editors, ‘the diversity of planning cultures and histories across the world helps to explain some of the diversity of planning systems and planning outcomes’, although as they also stress clearly, these are not the only factors responsible for the differences found in planning across countries.

In Chapter 2 (Planning Culture - A Concept to Explain the Evolution of Planning Policies and Processes in Europe?), Joerg Knieling and Frank Othengrafen explore the relation, at the national

level, between spatial planning and the cultural context, in different parts of Europe, highlighting trends towards convergence in Europe (e.g., planning concepts) due to the European Union and globalization influence, as well towards divergence (or no convergence) in key dimensions, namely at the level of societal environment, one of the dimensions in the cultural model of planning the authors applied in previous publications.

This is followed in Chapter 3 (Planning and Culture Unfolded: The Cases of Flanders and the Netherlands), written by Jochem de Vries, by a discussion of the role of culture and institutions, by comparing planning and urbanization patterns in Flanders and the Netherlands, arguing that the differences found in the planning systems in the two cases, or the professional ideas, do not provide a full explanation of the difference in urban development found in the two cases, since past events are important for the explanation of current urban physical patterns.

Joost Tennekes, Arjan Harbers and Edwin Buitelaar in Chapter 4 (Institutional arrangements and the morphology of residential development in the Netherlands, Flanders and North Rhine-Westphalia) compare how institutional arrangements impacted on the morphology of residential development in specific areas of these three countries (The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany), which are areas with different patterns of urban development (compact and low levels of urban sprawl; low-density development and extensive urban sprawl; moderate densities and medium levels of urban sprawl). By focusing on the physical outcomes of the institutional arrangements the paper adds to the literature on comparative planning studies a less frequent perspective on this issue.

In the last chapter, (Analysing path dependence to understand divergence: Investigating hybrid neo-liberal urban transformation processes in Turkey), Tuna Tasan-Kok employs path-dependency theory to explain how historical events have shaped urban development of the Levent-Maslak axis in Istanbul's central business district, arguing that despite the fact of neo-liberalism being influent worldwide its influence and impacts are mediated by local circumstances, thus the locally specific developments found in the different regions of the world, of which the case study in this chapter is a good illustration.

In sum, one of the main contributions of this collection of essays is perhaps the fact that it shows why is it possible to exist a wide diversity of planning systems, policies, practices and outcomes, as illustrated by these case studies, but also in other parts of the world as has been repeatedly reported in planning literature. In part the explanation for the existence of this diversity seems to reside in the motivations and in the role of certain actors within the urban process itself. More than the formal norms it seems to be the concrete practice of the different institutions that really matter. In fact, as Chapter 2 shows, similar concepts or processes can have very different impacts due to different societal environments. Also, important to retain from these essays is the suggestion that history matters and that certain events can produce indeed an enduring impact in the territory through planning practices.

Not being a completely new vision of planning cultures, systems and practices, since most of these perspectives were already present in previous works of these authors, this edited collection of well written essays will certainly be helpful for those interested in comparative planning studies, including comparative studies of urban e-planning practices, in Europe and in other regions of the world.

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