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## Planning



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URN: 0156-559915844

*This is a translation of the following entry:*

Fürst, Diertrich (2018): Planung. In: ARL – Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (Hrsg.): Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung. Hannover, 1711-1719.

*The original version can be accessed here:*

urn:nbn:de:0156-55991584

Typesetting and layout: ProLinguo GmbH

Translation and proofreading: ProLinguo GmbH

Recommended citation:

Fürst, Diertrich (2018): Planning.

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-559915844>.

# Planning

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**Public planning is institutionalised, methodologically grounded and political (it must deal with numerous conflicts between relevant interests and social values/standards). The high demands made on public planning and the limited steering ability of planners lead to planning dilemmas. Planning is subject to constant change, and is closely linked to changes in the state or in the concept of the state.**

## 1 Terminological demarcation

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Planning is a diffuse term, because it is closely related to the coordination of activities. Hence, the academic literature offers numerous definitions of planning depending on the specific perspective of the author(s) concerned: do they focus on reducing uncertainties in the face of an uncertain future, are they concerned with planning processes, or do they foreground the communicative logic of planning? A simple definition of the term reads: planning is the attempt to anticipate the future based on objectives and values (criteria) and to shape it through a formalised process.

Planning theory occasionally makes differentiations according to planning levels (national, regional or local authority), areas of planning (spatial, sectoral, project or programme planning) and planning periods (long-term, medium-term or short-term). For the logic of planning, what is decisive is whether a given planning activity deals with planning for a specific project or general development planning, whether it concerns a regulatory strategy for future uses, or aims at coordinated actions.

The term ‘planning’ in planning theory generally means the public planning of spatial and urban development as well as of infrastructure projects. Such planning activities are institutionalised (within organisations, through legal provisions and training courses) and methodologically structured with regulated processes and can thus be subject to legal review ( $\triangleright$  *Legal remedies in planning*). Institutionalisation plays a special role in this regard, because it also contributes to determining the planners’ power to shape policies, to limiting external influences in planning and the latitude to determine options for future activities.

Planning in the private sector is also institutionalised as a rule, but public planning differs from it through its multidimensional system of objectives (plurality of interests and concerns), through the distinct mediation of interests to form a consistent action programme, through the strong dependency on fluctuating political majorities and the tendency to see planning issues primarily as issues of distribution. This makes public planning generally more conflict-prone than private-sector planning and also less conducive to solutions that are relatively far removed from the status quo.

## 2 The logic of planning

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Planning must always resolve two key objectives: the processing of information and conflict resolution, i.e. the integration of various interests into a consistent set of priorities. If in the past, planning was primarily viewed as the processing of information and methodological approaches were primarily geared toward this, the politicisation of planning made it increasingly clear that public planning predominantly means conflict resolution. Over the past 50 years, this has led to the creation of methodological focal points. The elements of planning are (Fürst 2004): the object of planning, the subject (person or group) processing information and values (interests), an institutionalised political arena (conferring binding effect on planning/legitimising planning) and a hierarchical, administrative control system (cascading system of planning in a federal system). Planning logic follows certain steps: Analysing the current situation and forecasting the development without interventions, determining objectives and values for future development,

determining the need for change, developing courses of action, analysing effects (impact analysis; spatial and environmental impact assessment; ▷ *Environmental assessment*) as well as assessing the options, ▷ *Public participation* and the ▷ *Weighing of interests* in the case of objections, defining the final contents of the plan, implementing the planning act as well as undertaking an ▷ *Evaluation, audit* of it, and, if necessary, making corrections to the planning acts during implementation.

In practice, this linear logic cannot be adhered to in this way and has triggered a controversy about whether planning can intervene and steer at all, or if it is de facto a targeted process undertaken by a network of stakeholders to adapt to a multiplicity of concerns, restrictions and imponderabilities (Wiechmann 2008: 16 et seq.). In practice, the analysis of the so-called stakeholders (public agencies, owners, etc.) is of great importance, and legal requirements as well as existing sectoral plans must be taken into account. In addition, objectives may be specified at an early stage, and assessments can be included (explicitly and implicitly) in the analysis of the current situation. Objectives and values are an expression of interests and social norms and require the cooperation of all those parties which have legitimate interests in planning or represent social concerns. As planning becomes more specific, the conflicts of interest grow; this means that a formerly presumed consensus may occasionally break down and that the planning process has to be reset to an earlier level. Planning processes are de facto iterative, i.e. they proceed in small steps and link back to earlier specifications, because they have to cope with three major problems: management of conflicting interests (▷ *Moderation, mediation*), reduction of uncertainty in the light of an uncertain future and changing environmental conditions (▷ *Forecasting*) and creativity in finding suitable alternatives and courses of action. In practice, planning is thus turning into a process of searching for new, consensual and sustainable solutions.

Methods are used to improve planning processes. They relate to as-is analyses (statistical, geo-scientific and sociological methods), to reducing the uncertainties of forecasting (status quo extrapolation, scenarios), assessing alternatives (assessment processes), finding consensual solutions and evaluation (controlling, ▷ *Monitoring*) (Fürst/Scholles 2008).

### 3 Spatial planning as a type of planning

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▷ *Spatial planning (Raumplanung)* is a special type of planning. It consists of two fundamentally different forms of action: the determination of a regulatory strategy and the coordinated steering of spatial development processes. The first type focuses on establishing a future-oriented, regulated system for the shared use of scarce spatial resources (land), while the second type strives to coordinate the use of space to optimally develop the potentials and courses of action for a space or a local authority. Development strategies should stipulate guidelines for investments in the space. Both types of action are mutually complementary, but only the first type can be determined in legally binding terms, in analogy to bye-laws agreed in political committees, while the second type always depends on the good will of all participants and can only become binding through contracts.

Public planning obviously leads to social controversies even at an early stage, because it tends to increasingly impact the substantive use of space by private individuals, ministries and local authorities, especially because planning was previously perceived as a means of control and

to reduce diversity. This understanding indirectly reflects the controversy about the role of the state in society. Today, this controversy (market or state) is de facto moot, as holistic planning, with large-scale interventions in society, has been proven to be unfeasible (lack of consistent, collective systems of preferences) and to be incompatible with the economic and social order (deprives freedoms and rights, inconsistent with markets, too complex, unable to adapt to fast-changing environmental conditions, unreceptive to the diversity of interests in a pluralist society, restrains ‘bottom-up’ innovations and initiatives). On the other hand, a modern society without planning is inconceivable: It is an important instrument to reduce the complexity for future actions and serves to coordinate activities in an increasingly pluralist and fragmented social structure.

This discussion had repercussions on the understanding of planning and steering in spatial planning (Fürst 2005). If planners in the post-war period still adhered to a technocratic understanding of planning shaped by enlightenment, which would ensure them of a special status in society, this approach changed in the 1960s in favour of more participatory planning and up to the current perceptions of planning as a strategic moderation of pluralist interests. While the 1970s still saw a desire to elaborate integrated development strategies, which would unify all relevant sectoral planning as well as spatial and financial planning into a consistent planning strategy (e.g. in Hesse, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia, but also in the form of the integrated urban development plans of certain large cities), this hope perished in the mid-1970s, when the impossibility of this objective became clear. Such integrated strategies are too rigid (unable to adapt to changing general conditions), too apolitical (conflicts regularly occur during implementation) and too far away from practical considerations: they did not sufficiently take into account the autonomy of the integrated authorities. Today, these holistic concepts have been discarded, and planners pursue ‘incremental planning’, i.e. planning in small steps, which remains flexible, is more risk-friendly and is considered to be a constant process of negotiating interests and concerns, while at the same time adhering to a long-term orientation framework (▷ *Incrementalism/perspective incrementalism*).

## 4 Project and programme planning

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The focus today is on two planning variants: project planning and programme planning. Project planning unquestionably occurs far more frequently and motivates agencies far more intensively, but programme planning has a decisive significance for the coordination of a multitude of stakeholders. The latter variant relies on four important functions: the early consideration of future tasks; the extension of the timeline of action into the future; the consideration of various interests; the constructive handling of social, material and spatial interdependencies. The early consideration of future tasks and the extension of the timeline expand the scope for conflict resolution (compromise space) and thus directly serve a coordinating function.

The resulting professionalisation of planning is also an expression of the complexity of the subject. Planning concerns not only the necessary methods and instruments or the substantive means of expression, but also addresses topics such as ▷ *Ethics in spatial planning (Raumplanung)* (How should planners behave?), participation (What influence should the relevant interests have on planning, and how should stakeholders be involved in the process?), coordination (How can interdependencies be managed optimally?), the weighing of interests (How should different

interests and concerns be balanced and how are priorities established?), power (How can dominant influences be neutralised?), as well as questions about the social function of planning, i.e. which particular concept of the state should be associated with planning.

## 5 Planning and governance

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Spatial planning affects more or less all social interests to the extent that they claim space, but in taking environmental issues into account, it also affects concerns that are not located in the immediate area (e.g. noise, immissions/environmental pollution, micro-climate, the beauty of the landscape), thus spatial planning inevitably has a socio-political impact. Planning must reflect these impacts, because this will also result in repercussions for what it is permitted to do and what is expected of it. For this reason, the more recent planning discussions have increasingly turned to the issue of  $\triangleright$  Governance, i.e. to social steering. Perceptions that planning in the technical sense could have a steering function were abandoned in favour of an understanding of planning as an intermediate process for mobilising and coordinating activities that influence spatial development. Planning should enable activities, but planners are no longer the parties giving direction to them. Instead, finding direction is a collective process, in which planners could have a mediating role, introduce ideas and develop early-warning systems to prevent undesirable developments (cf. Selle 2005). Today, steering is also understood to be an interactive process of governance, in which the stakeholders actively participate. This corresponds to an understanding of statehood in which the state is no longer a sovereign but a guarantor, which sets and assures the constructive framework conditions without being the main driver of societal developments. This change of perception has not facilitated the task of planners, as they are still expected to constructively steer those processes by ensuring that the processes are strategically designed – to focus on shared objectives, to take the strengths and weaknesses of a region into account, to be creative regarding future options, to manage processes effectively and to be substantively guided by planning requirements.

The new understanding of planning is based on planners acting in stakeholder networks in the context of technical, institutional, social, economic and space-specific particularities. This requires a strong sensibility in relation to influences outside of their control, which can exert a latent impact on the planning process. This discussion has strongly influenced the planning profession in recent years. This includes cultural determinants that cause certain behavioural patterns to prevail and suppress others, a phenomenon that is addressed by the more recent debate on  $\triangleright$  Planning culture. But likewise, power and the manipulation of power have obtained more weight, not least due to deregulation and the privatisation of public tasks that have given rise to powerful capital interests articulating their opinions in planning processes and influencing the outcomes (Flyvbjerg 1998). Increasingly, planning offices and project developers or private developers determine the contents of planning. This also includes thought patterns of planners that have not been called into question (Kahneman 2011): traditional patterns of thought that are rather adverse to new ideas; implicit prejudices, because things have always been this way; biased, because serious events dominate the current prevailing viewpoint (such as the reassessment of nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima shock); or overly hasty decisions, because reasoning, too, is governed by the ‘principle of least effort’, i.e. the first solution that appears plausible is

chosen. Such subconscious fallacies may have a decisive impact on planning as they may lead a planner to give certain concerns insufficient weight or to ignore them entirely, because arguments are considered to varying degrees or because of factual or virtual discrimination.

## 6 Historical planning controversies

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As with any other profession, the planning discipline is driven by considerable controversies. These have been numerous over the last 60 years (Fürst 2005): while spatial planning in the 1950s was still influenced by the ‘state versus market’ debate, the 1960s saw the rise of questions about a holistic versus incrementalist approach (integrated comprehensive strategy or a series of sectionalised strategies), but also about the limits of rational action and the significance of intuition in planning. The 1970s saw the arrival of the problems posed by participation and the redesign of planning processes, while the focus in the 1980s moved to the theme of moderating and mediating, with a growing trend toward taking operative interests into account and coordination, to informal planning and the integration of environmental issues in spatial planning. In the 1990s, it was not only the themes of the organisation and governance of planning processes which defined the debate, but also the strategic concepts appropriate to planning; after the turn of the millennium, substantive issues prevailed, which served primarily to elevate spatial planning as a social problem-solver, such as cooperation in regard to climate change, the energy transition, demographic change, etc. A consistent controversy concerned and still concerns the question of the steering power of spatial planning. Proponents of the notion that spatial planning is essentially regulatory planning ascribe a comparably high steering impact to it and see a substantial potential for planners to shape space, while others, who primarily focus on development planning, define planning as a largely context-bound, emergent process resulting from the interaction of numerous stakeholders and the collective identification of consensual courses of action. Context-bound means being integrated in numerous framework conditions, which determine the planning process but are scarcely affected by it.

Planning practice subsequently changed from a technocratic and hierarchical process to participatory planning, from target-orientation to strategic planning, from formal planning to an increasing introduction of elements of informal planning (planning diplomacy), from regulatory planning to development planning and from planning as the management of interdependencies, with the growing significance of upstream processes to elaborate guiding principles to more effectively coordinating the heterogeneity of interests towards shared perspectives on action before the start of the actual planning. This should strengthen the strategic component at the same time: coordination no longer relies on the lowest common denominator but instead opens up shared perspectives for action, which are attractive and therefore motivating for stakeholders. Practice shows, however, that stakeholders, who are increasing short on time according to the ‘principle of least effort’, always focus more strongly on those activities that directly affect their interests: projects, but not more general programmes. Accordingly, the governance arrangements relating to stakeholders and projects have gained greater weight in planning. In addition, small-scale governance arrangements (e.g. at the district level) can be organised more easily than large-scale ones (e.g. at the regional level; ▷ *Regional planning*).

## 7 Planning dilemmas

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Planning and planning theory intensely reflect the change in worldviews, which are driven by technology and the social and natural sciences. Instead of linear, mono-causal trajectories, non-linear ones dominate; instead of directive steering, self-organisation and network steering prevails; instead of simple solutions, growing complexity is the challenge; instead of clarity in the perception of the world, planners far more frequently have to address ambiguities (pluralisation of the prerogative of interpretation) that increasingly must be decided on a political rather than a scientific basis. Planning is determined by instability, uncertainty, complexity, sinking levels of autonomy, highly interconnected stakeholders and a declining ability to steer the subject of the planning. For this reason, planning is no longer perceived as deterministic, but as an evolutionary process of collective action aimed at learning and searching for new solutions.

But this results in a number of planning dilemmas: between the demand for new solutions driven by the public and the strong inertial constraints of the planning environment when planners are in a weak position; between the need in planning for consistency in the framework data (which cannot be influenced by the planning) and the high degree of dynamic change in a globalised and digital world; between long planning horizons as demanded by the economy, and the faster changing political majorities; between the economy's demand for increasingly faster action and the steadily slowing decision-making processes in politics; between the legalistic system logic of the public administration and the political system logic of planning; between the need for consensus in planning and the growing intensity of conflicts in fragmented societies; between the expected comprehensiveness of ideal planning and the factual selectiveness of practical planning.

## 8 The limits of planning

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In response to these challenges, planning has turned increasingly into ▷ *Strategic planning*. This defines long-term target corridors, but remains flexible in regard to specific measures, which are, moreover, elaborated in mediated processes to arrive at a consensus. In this context, good planning means planning that is open to learning, error-friendly and self-critical. For the idealistic perception that all interests in a society can be given equal consideration through planning appears illusory in view of growing social inequalities, increasing concentrations of power and substantial structural power (manifested through institutions, patterns of thinking and models for action): planning is a selective process, both logically and in regard to its governance arrangements, and all the more so, the more effectively it wants to shape the future and change the current situation. For the more planning strives to shape the future, the more it has to rely on powerful stakeholders.

In addition, the range of steering instruments that planning has at its disposal is rather weak. Firstly, it may make use of obligatory instruments (binding planning objectives). However, these require political negotiations in the processes through which they become binding. Secondly, planners can use trade-off-based instruments, by means of which they and the stakeholders can achieve a binding effect through contracts. While such contracts can be used in numerous planning decisions, they are mostly used in development planning and can be terminated. Thirdly, planners use persuasive instruments, which are, however, based on an undertaking of the addressees to

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adhere to those commitments. Here, what is decisive is how persuasive planners appear, and how persuasive the planning process and the envisaged courses of action are.

Yet the instruments with the strongest effect are also the ones that have to contend with the strongest resistance from stakeholders. For this reason, strategic planning strives to gain the support of the veto-holding actors in relation to the binding planning objectives through attractive planning processes and courses of action. Accordingly, contemporary spatial planning is always a constructive interplay between development planning and regulatory planning, with development planning taking the lead and regulatory planning offering the necessary safeguards for long-term spatial development processes.

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Last update of the references: December 2016