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## Planning systems



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# Planning systems

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The term 'planning system' is mostly used to describe planning activities in a given national context. The link between the planning system and the nation state is based on the fact that planning systems have developed within the framework of national statutory provisions and general institutional conditions. The benefit of characterising planning systems lies in the comparison of different national systems and in the exchange of knowledge.

# 1 Planning systems: Basic notion and context

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## 1.1 Toward a description of the term and concept of planning systems

Even if planners have an understanding of what a planning system means within a given field of activity, the actual framework of what is understood as a planning system may be diverse. In addition, there is a lack of clarity regarding the term *planning system*, which is reflected in the often synonymous use of the terms *planning system*, *spatial planning model* and *planning culture*. In the German planning context, the term *Planungssystem* is widely used, while the English term *planning system* is used less frequently in English academic literature. The German term for *spatial planning model* is used in more recent literature (Dühr/Colomb/Nadin 2010), and is largely synonymous with *planning system*. There seems to be a tendency to avoid using the term *planning systems* due to its proximity to systems theory and the criticism it has received.

Nevertheless, systems theory can be used as a possible theoretical anchor point for planning systems, as theoretical and analytical systems processes within ▷ *Planning* were conceived in the 1960s and 1970s. From a historical perspective, this phase can be regarded as the peak period of ▷ *Spatial planning* (▷ *History of spatial planning (Raumordnung)*). Analytical systems processes prevailed as hegemonic theory in the 1960s and were applied in the 1970s, even if their limitations had become clear and they were widely criticised (Pallagst 2007). Systems analysis examines in particular spatial units such as cities as complex systems of interconnected parts. This connectedness means that new developments in one part of a ▷ *City, town* also affect the other parts of the city as a system (Taylor 1999). Contrary to the notion of physical planning, cities were no longer seen as static, but rather as flexible systems that are open to and affected by change. This perspective called for new regulatory, financial and organisational skills on the part of planners (cf. Hoch 1994). Systems analysis in planning was also generally stimulated by a new belief in the application of scientific principles in political and social processes (Taylor 1999: 69). Accordingly, planning situations were mapped as idealised models that made it possible to control and develop complex situations through generalised processes. Despite today's criticism of theoretical systems approaches in planning, however, the development of planning as it is known and practised today is closely linked to this theory. This theoretical systems understanding also underpins the organisation of planning as well as the derivation and specific characteristics of planning systems. Many of the regulations and instruments that are used in planning practice today and that significantly determine planning systems are based on systems theory, such as linking urban growth with infrastructure systems or limiting urban growth through boundaries (growth boundaries). However, the limits of systems approaches must be taken into account, particularly in connection with uncertainties in planning processes. Schönwandt (2002: 16) also points to the persistence of analytical systems approaches and ways of thinking in planning and notes a contradiction between actual planning practice and the criticism put forth within current discourses on planning theory (▷ *Theory of planning*).

With regard to the concept of planning systems, there is another essential and characteristic component, namely their embeddedness in national contexts. The term *planning systems* is usually used by experts to describe planning actions in a specific national context. In this

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regard, reference is usually made to the German planning system, the French planning system, the American planning system, etc. The term *planning systems* here also offers a more precisely defined contextual framework than the more diffuse term *planning cultures*, which can be place-related. Planning systems can also be understood as components of the contextual framework of a  $\triangleright$  *Planning culture*, something which has been discussed recently in some edited volumes (c.f. Knieling/Othengrafen 2009; Othengrafen 2010; Sanyal 2005).

The close link between the planning system and the nation state is based on the fact that planning systems have developed within the context of national statutory provisions and a nation's institutional framework. This provides the field of planning with its legitimacy and competences and ultimately allows for the control function of planning (Newman/Thornley 2005). These arrangements form the basic structures in which national planning operates.

Some characteristics of planning systems are outlined below, although they do not amount to a precise definition. Rather, the aspects referred to as the planning system also differ in various planning cultures, as can be seen from the different perspectives of Healey and Williams (1993) and Turowski (2002), which are drawn from the British and German planning context respectively. Planning systems in the new understanding describe the totality of territorial governance structures ( $\triangleright$  *Governance*), which aim to shape spatial patterns in certain areas (Nadin/Stead 2008: 35). In addition, the role of individual sectors is also important. Furthermore, the development of planning systems also depends on the economic structures in which a state operates. Systems with a more neoliberal approach, such as the US, shape planning systems in a different way than is the case in communist systems such as China, to cite two extremes. The role of the welfare state as a form of government in how planning systems develop has been highlighted by Nadin and Stead (2008), among others. Based on Esping-Anfersen's 'three worlds of welfare', a distinction is made between social democratic, liberal (Anglo-Saxon) and conservative welfare systems (Stead/Nadin 2009). In addition, the common values and visions of planners as a professional group and their status within a society are also deemed to have an impact on planning systems (Healey/Williams 1993).

Planning systems include certain components that usually also enable comparability between systems. Turowski (2002) provides a fairly simple yet striking illustration of the characteristics of planning systems based on a characterisation of the German planning system, which can be applied to other states. Table 1 gives an overview of this means of characterisation, without the German specifics filled in.

**Table 1: Characteristics of planning systems**

<b>National structure</b>	<b>Planning levels</b>	<b>Statutory basis</b>	<b>Planning instruments</b>	<b>Substantive nature</b>
...				

Source: The author, based on Turowski 2002: 12

Since these structures vary from one country to another, planning systems exhibit differences that are reflected in the respective planning levels, which, as in Germany, act in an interlinked way (▷ *Mutual feedback principle*), while in certain other countries (e.g. the US) they have scarcely any wider relevance except at the municipal level. Statutory bases are also a decisive factor in connection with planning systems, as they can provide a national framework for planning (Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland) or be adopted in some nation states for larger units of the territory (e.g. federal states) (Austria, Belgium, the US). There is a broad spectrum of diverse planning instruments of both a formal and informal character within planning systems (Pahl-Weber/Henckel 2008; ▷ *Instruments of spatial planning (Raumplanung)*). In substantive terms, more and more parallels are emerging in planning systems in Europe, e.g. in relation to more compact building types and the principles of ▷ *Sustainability*. Planning systems also differ in their level of development, which Faludi (2002: 6) referred to as their ‘maturity – e.g. ‘mature systems’. The more developed the planning system, the more mature its hierarchies and coordination mechanisms.

In the early 1990s, Healey and Williams (1993: 702) outlined a still relevant description of what constitutes planning systems at the urban level:

‘Urban planning systems may be seen to consist of three elements:

- 1) a plan-making function, expressing strategies and principles for spatial organisation and land use/built form arrangement;
- 2) a developmental function, which may range from land assembly and servicing, to infrastructure provision and construction and development activity;
- 3) a regulatory function relating to the control of building location and form, and activity change within existing buildings.’

Here it becomes clear that planning systems become effective at different levels and can also be defined specifically for those levels, i.e. not only for the national level, but also for the urban level.

In recent literature (Reimer/Getimis/Blotevogel 2014), planning systems are classified together with planning practices and comparatively examined with regard to such criteria as scope, procedures and instruments, scale, actors and policies, which allows a broader understanding of planning systems.

Overall, it can be seen that planning systems are perceived very differently in the international context, whereby the concept of a planning system as shown in Table 1 is characteristic of the German planning context.

## 1.2 Planning systems: the need for adaptation and the potential for change

Planning systems are not static, but have to deal with various changes over time. The extent to which planning systems can change has been laid out in various studies (see also Reimer/Getimis/Blotevogel 2014). The fact is that planning systems have to respond within their respective

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frameworks to certain developments and changes that can occur due to changing social processes. ▷ *Globalisation* and global networks are just two examples that have been identified as potential triggers of such changes (Sanyal 2005). Flexibilisation and deregulation tendencies in the course of the growing competitive orientation of cities and regions also deserve mention (Newman/Thornley 2005). The requirements of sustainable and environmentally-oriented planning, but also the trend towards strategic planning and more intensive participation processes (▷ *Strategic planning*; ▷ *Participation*) play a role as well as processes of Europeanisation (Reimer/Getimis/Blotevogel 2014).

On the other hand, Healey and Williams (1993) note that planning systems can only prove to be changeable to a certain extent, since each system is to a certain extent fixed by the respective normative, political and administrative regulations. The responses to change are therefore mainly 'defensive reactions' (Healey/Williams 1993) rather than proactively forward-looking reforms. Adams, Scott and Hardman (2013) go one step further and see the passivity and rigidity of European planning systems as obstructing innovation.

Whilst planning systems are diverse, they are also exposed to global trends that can lead to an increased convergence, especially in terms of planning instruments. These include spatial trends such as sustainability, climate change (▷ *Climate, climate change*), privatisation, ▷ *Territorial cohesion*, ▷ *Migration* as well as the increasing dialogue on the training of planners in a European context (Stead/Cotella 2011).

While planners speculate at regular intervals about possible alignment and converging tendencies between planning systems (cf. Healey/Williams 1993; Savitch/Kantor 2002; Stead/Cotella 2011; Reimer/Getimis/Blotevogel 2014), nothing concrete can be said about actual convergences, and it is sometimes assumed that there can be no convergence between planning systems even in similar cultures such as the European context (Newman/Thornley 2005). Stead and Cotella (2011) offer a stakeholder-focused observation here: stakeholders in national and subnational circles (also called epistemic communities, circles of practitioners or policy networks) play a decisive role in shaping planning systems based on their respective (mostly national) characteristics and – under the strong influence of (sub)national discourses – in developing them accordingly. These tendencies stand in the way of a more comprehensive harmonisation of planning systems. In addition, the differences between the systems are not necessarily perceived as an obstacle in the discussion of planning systems, but rather as an 'asset', i.e. as a factor conducive to discourse (Stead/Cotella 2011: 14). The often feared, standardised adoption of European policies with planning relevance within national planning systems was also only sporadically evident in a few Central and Eastern European states and their transformation from formerly socialist to predominantly democratic planning systems (Pallagst 2000).

Overall, the concept of planning systems is complex and heterogeneous; yet, it is characterised by a discourse on possible generalisations or convergences between systems.

## 2 Current understanding and use of the term *planning system*: Comparison of systems and the exchange of knowledge

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The real benefit of characterising planning systems today lies in the comparison of different national systems and in the exchange of knowledge. At the beginning of the 1990s, there were hardly any comparative descriptions of planning systems, and the existing literature was mostly limited to the respective national languages (Healey/Williams 1993). However, this gradually changed with the beginning of the European debate on planning systems, but also on planning cultures, which was stimulated by an increasingly European view of planning, speculation about spatial planning powers at the European level and the need to discuss planning-related issues across national borders. This necessarily presupposes a basic understanding of the regulatory planning framework in another country.

In the meantime, the term *planning systems* is often used in a (national) comparative context, with the aim of characterising and typifying planning systems and generally achieving a transfer of knowledge between different planning contexts (see also Reimer/Getimis/Blotevogel 2014).

In addition, inspired by discourses on Europeanisation, several attempts were made to characterise and typify planning systems, initially primarily for the European context. A first compelling typification that provided the starting point for a comparative discourse in planning science is offered in the EU Compendium of Planning Systems and Policies (CEC 1997). Based on this, Dühr, Colomb and Nadin developed the following system of spatial planning models (see Fig. 1).

Newman and Thornley (Newman/Thornley 2005: 28 et seq.) provided a further typification with the division of European planning systems into so-called 'families' based on legal and administrative characteristics:

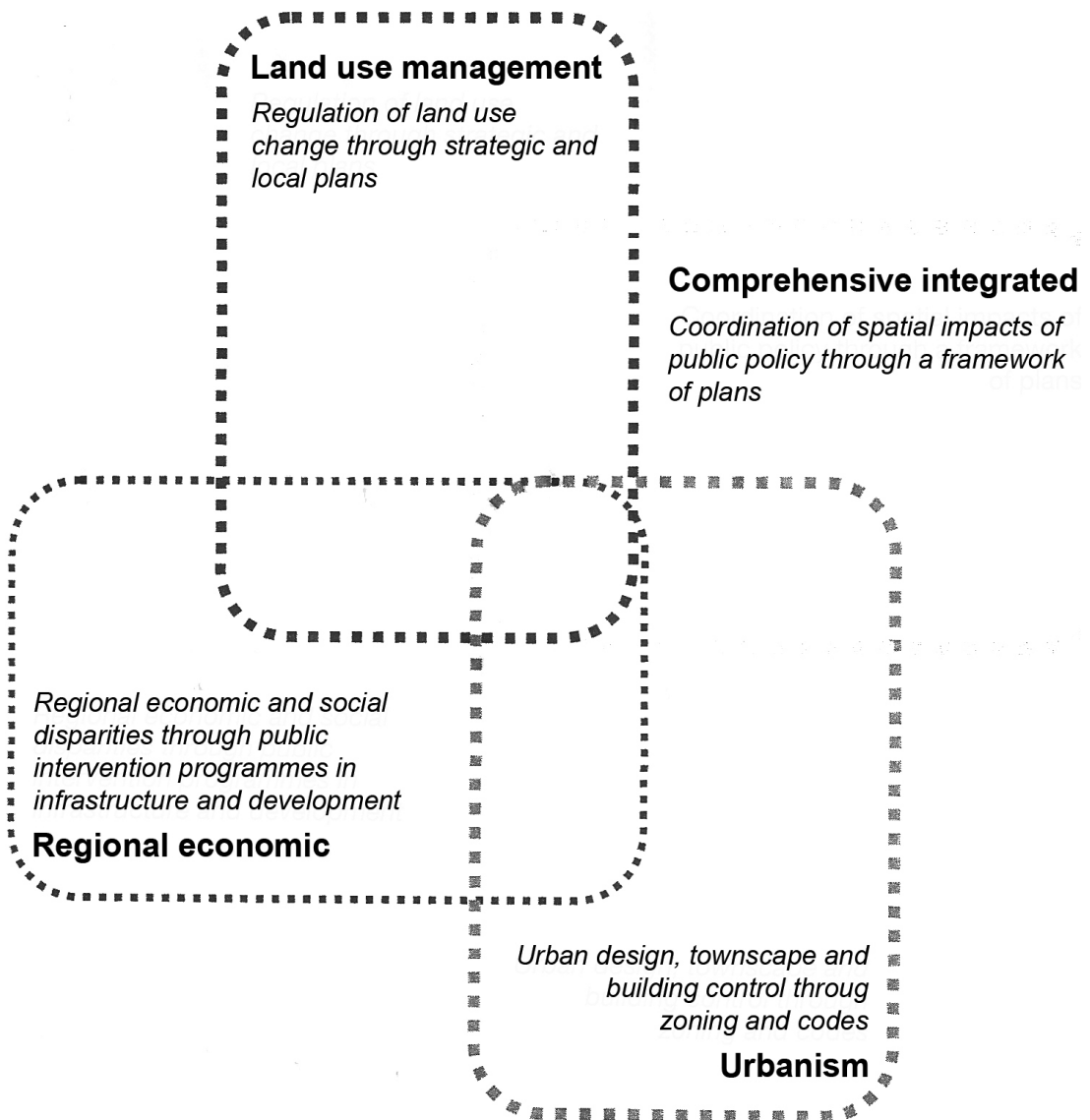
- British (local administrations as 'agencies' carrying out government tasks),
- Scandinavian (more pragmatic approach to legislation),
- Germanic (clear distribution of competences on several planning levels),
- Napoleonic (centralised),
- Eastern European ('state of flux': after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the direction in which planning would develop was unclear for quite some time).

Another authoritative typification was conceived and carried out by Farinós Dasí, Milder, Payá Abad et al. (2007) as part of an ESPON project for a comparative study of territorial governance. This comprehensive typification is based on the compendium of planning systems as a starting point, while the dynamics of the integration of other states into the  $\triangleright$  *European Union* (EU) and the continuous further development of planning guidelines have made the compendium a document of planning history. Farinós Dasí's typification classifies selected countries according to so-called planning styles. The term *planning styles* was deliberately chosen in order to distance the typification from the notion of planning traditions. The basic types are:

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- the comprehensive integrated approach,
- the regional economic approach,
- land use planning,
- urbanism.

Figure 1: Models of spatial planning



Source: The author, based on Dühr/Colomb/Nadin 2010: 181



These are examined in greater detail and the extent to which they overlap is also highlighted. For example, as far as the German planning system is concerned, for example, there is a focus on the comprehensive integrated approach as well as on the regional economic approach.

What all of these typification schemes have in common is that they are all based on various legal, administrative and to some degree economic systems. Overall, the typification of planning systems is complex and depends on which aspect is given priority (Stead/Nadin 2009). Here it becomes clear that diversity seems to be a common denominator of planning systems, since they usually have different planning instruments, forms of governance, plan graphics, scales, groups of actors as well as different planning guidelines and plan contents.

However, the academic literature and discourse on planning systems largely refer to Western states, especially the European context, even if planning systems exist in some form in all countries of the world. Looking at the Global South, for example, planning systems are described as follows (remark made with regard to the systems that prevail in Africa): 'There is little relation between the existing planning system and reality' (Ryser/Franchini 2008: 53). In countries such as Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia there are planning systems with responsibilities at certain levels as well as legislation within the national framework, but these are counteracted by informal settlement activity,  $\triangleright$  *Segregation*, lack of coordination and political instabilities. Here, too, it becomes clear that the social context, especially the value system and also the aspect of  $\triangleright$  *Ethics in spatial planning* (or lack thereof), is an essential framework and that systemic maturity cannot guarantee the adequate fulfilment of planning responsibilities within a planning system.

### 3 Conclusions and outlook

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The conclusions of this article provide a cautious prognosis on the future of planning systems and on further needs for action, especially for spatial science research.

With their respective characteristics, planning systems continue to provide the decisive framework for planning action in the national contexts. Despite the need for change over time and restrained convergence processes, this will not change in the future.

The previous and current discourses with regard to planning systems show different spatial priorities within the European planning systems and those of the Global South. In view of the global problems that need to be addressed and the associated global view of planning, these discourses could profitably be broadened and better joined up. The benefits for the individual planning systems would lie not in greater convergence, but in mutual learning as a basis for more efficient problem solving in planning.

The notion of the ideal type of planning system is often found in the literature, especially in the European context (see also Nadin/Stead 2008). In fact, it is apparent that planners sometimes struggle when asked by non-experts how an ideal planning system should be designed. In view of the diversity and complexity of planning systems and the sometimes unpredictable challenges of the future, this question will probably never be answered.

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