Soft and hard planning in the city-regions: spatialities, territorialities and governmentalities I and II

City-regions have became the nexus of regional development during the past decades. The processes of city-region formation, bordering and political leadership have been debated in and academia and practice alike. City regional and urban spatial development and planning are framed by multiple politics of space, territory and governance, creating intermingled ambiguities and complexities that challenge established and traditional institutional settings. The territorialities of internationalization and state restructuring have not only gravitated towards the city-regions, but also created new relational spaces and territories that evade old borders. “Hard” spaces, borders and governments have often become seemingly ill-suited to addressing city-regional issues with focus, reach and scope that appear to call for “softer” application of spatialities, territorialities and governmentalities. Urban planning practices reflect these trends via new ideas of urban development, new planning processes, new forms of governance, new rhetoric, as well as new institutional and territorial partnerships and networking.

The session explores the novel theoretical and practical developments in planning at the city-region level, both formal and informal, from multiple viewpoints. The scope of the papers ranges from geopolitics and region formation to plan rhetoric and practical local adaptations.

Session is organised by Pia Bäcklund (University of Tampere), Vesa Kanninen (Aalto University) and Simin Davoudi (Newcastle University). Discussant for the session is Simin Davoudi.

Thursday 29.10. 13:30–15:00
Chair: Vesa Kanninen, vesa.kanninen@aalto.fi
Geopolitics of city-regionalism: bringing the state back in
Sami Moisio, University of Helsinki
Old regions and penumbral borders in soft planning
Kaj Zimmerbauer, University of Oulu
European spatial planning and its spaces of governance
Juho Luukkonen, University of Oulu
Politics of space in urban redevelopment
Rob Imre, University of Tampere

Thursday 29.10. 15:30–17:00
Chair: Pia Bäcklund, pia.backlund@uta.fi
New trends in city-regional planning: emergences of voluntary, strategic and persuasive plans and practices
Vesa Kanninen, Aalto University & Pia Bäcklund, University of Tampere
“It is like buying a pig in a poke” – Institutional ambiguity in urban infill in Finland
Markus Laine, University of Tampere
How to proceed from an interesting case to an interesting study – case Östersundom master plan
Johanna Tuomisaari, University of Tampere
Emplotting urban change: turning soft knowledge into the built environment
Lieven Ameel, University of Tampere/Helsinki
Across urban studies and related fields, there has been growing interest in processes of city-region building. Whereas initially the emphasis was often placed on the geo-economic resurgence of city-regions, attention is now turning to the political construction of city-regions and the ways in which different city-regional formations have been made visible by the state as well as regional and local actors. Our present interest is in the variety of ways in which city-regionalism gets constituted as a geopolitical process and brings together the political and the economic in state strategies that are instigated by different kinds of actors with dissimilar capacities to act. Focusing on different state contexts, we consider the manner in which city-regionalism is taken up and articulated as a politico-spatial strategy or as a technology of government in these contexts. In such conceptualisation, city-regionalism becomes politically rationalised through conceived challenges, risks and possibilities which touch upon both the (security of the) state and its population. Over the past decades, city-regionalism has become one of the key geopolitical processes through which the internationalisation and associated restructuring of the state is envisioned to take place.

Contemporary planning agenda as well as planning research highlights the ideas of soft, relational spaces and fuzzy borders. This has led to a situation where the differences of spaces themselves are not being taken sufficiently into consideration. All too often the studies have been focusing on new regions or “regions-in-becoming”, and this has created too one-sided understanding that contemporary planning is about making new spaces that “transcend and jar against established territorially bounded bodies at regional and sub-national scales”. My aim is not to study how new soft spaces of governance emerge or how soft spaces are hardened. Instead, I take different approach and study how the hard spaces become softened. The starting point is an approach where planning is not (only) about drawing new (city)regions on the maps, but also about the pressures to combine the new planning vocabulary with old regions and regionalism. This means acknowledging that not all borders are fuzzy: there are more clear-cut and hard ones as well, which nevertheless are not immune to neoliberal planning paradigm. Accordingly, and perhaps more importantly, I acknowledge the need to find out more exactly what actually happens when the (hard) borders of old regions become treated with current planning practices and vocabulary. It can be argued that the old “regional spaces” do not just simply soften to be like the newly conceived planning spaces, but their borders can instead become a hybrid of hard, fuzzy and penumbral boundaries, and the region in question becomes hardly any softer.
In this study, I argue that planning is both territorial and relational, i.e. both hard and soft simultaneously. It is territorial in a sense that planning is inescapably connected to territorial elements (e.g. planning authorities and jurisdictional areas in which plans and planning policies can be conducted) and that practices of planning inescapably territorialize space (e.g. by delimiting planning areas and by defining targets of planning). Planning is relational in a sense that the planning ideas, discourses and practices that prevail in particular context, do not occur in a vacuum but are a result of/are affected by the transnational circulation of planning ideas, concepts, knowledges and policy procedures. While the involvement in the transnational planning networks affect the planning discourses and styles of thought, it may also potentially lead to the transformation of planning practices in particular geographical contexts.

In this study, I’ll introduce the idea of the field of European spatial planning as a distinctive space of Europeanization within which visions, ideas and concepts related to the European spaces and theirs planning are circulated and (re-)formulated. While the field involves various actors and institutions, I’ll take a closer look at a particular centre of calculation within the field in which European spaces are made visible and amenable to governmental practices through scientific analyses – namely, the ESPON research programme. The ESPON is a powerful network of planning practitioner’s and academics which exemplifies well the new ‘soft’ governmental technologies which the EU deploys in the process of (re-)making European spaces.

Industrial heritage/industrial revival: the politics of space
Rob Imre
University of Tampere

Industrial heritage and industrial revitalisation projects have attempted to make use of spaces built around depopulated and failed heavy industry areas in cities around the world. In this paper I am starting a comparative project by gathering information and examining a set of cityscapes that have experienced such changes: Hamilton in Canada, Pittsburgh in the US, Newcastle in Australia, Bochum and the Ruhr Valley in Germany, Gdansk in Poland, and Miskolc in Hungary. These examples raise questions about democracy in the city/urban landscape, with problems around the usage of old industrial areas, usually involving some form of heavy industry like steel mills, coal mines, and shipbuilding. Many of the revamps of these places have been driven by a different kind of politics of space and I start my project here by comparing some of the results of these initiatives.
New trends in city-regional planning: emergences of voluntary, strategic and persuasive plans and practices
Vesa Kanninen
Aalto University
Pia Bäcklund
University of Tampere

Spatial planning at city-regional level, having been in the shadows of regional and municipal planning, has developed into a markedly strategic endeavor characterized by informal processes and outcomes. The apparent need for inter-municipal strategic approaches in urban regions has not gone without responses, as rising partly from the planning system limitations, partly from truly city-regional issues to be tackled. The research into planning practices at city-regional level has identified strengthening currents, spanning the last decades, of both informal spatial planning practices, and varying attempts by the formal planning systems to cater for the city-regional problematic. These sometimes conflicting trends have left the city-regions in ambiguous situations of juxtaposing city-regional spatialities, cooperation and mutual strategic visioning with the legal borders and duties of the planning systems. Drawing from cases from five countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, England), and focusing on the ways in which newly formed city-regional spatial planning practices can be a vehicle of positive transformations in e.g. planning capabilities, institutional cooperation and urban competitiveness, the research recognizes the need for careful local applications. Acceptable, feasible and legitimate approaches, formal and informal, that may integrate current conflicting trends into proper and mutually fostered strategic spatial planning may be emerging, yet are also in dire need.

"It is like buying a pig in a poke” – Institutional ambiguity in urban infill in Finland
Markus Laine
University of Tampere

Urban densification and infill construction is one way to address the need for sustainable urban development. Constructing within existing infrastructure allows for reducing mobility needs, for implementing energy efficient urban solutions, conserving unbuilt areas and saving resources. Infill can be promoted as environmentally and economically sustainable, but the sustainability of infill becomes complicated when we consider the social dimension. Several studies illustrate how compact urban development faces many challenges (Dows 2007; Geurs & Wee 2006; Vella & Morad 2011; Lewis & Baladassare 2010; McConnell & Wiley 2010; Vallance, Perkins Moore 2005). The studies revealed that the key challenge contains two interrelated questions: 1) how to compete with urban sprawl at upper policy level and 2) how urban infill planning and construction should be made in existing neighborhoods. We are interested in the latter question. Our case about urban infill in an inner city neighbourhood in Tampere (later: Tammela-case), Finland is a test bed for city planning – residents’ interaction in a compact city development process and urban infill. In Finnish cities, housing associations consisting of apartment owners are the main landowners. Therefore, residents’ opinions have to be taken into account; otherwise, urban infill will face an impasse. As this issue is new both the city planners and citizens, they seem puzzled in the situation. In this paper, we analyze the challenges and the potential that urban densification holds from the viewpoint of the residents
and what kind of institutional ambiguity they face in the case of urban infill in Finland.

How to proceed from an interesting case to an interesting study – case Östersundom master plan
Johanna Tuomisaari
University of Tampere

Östersundom master plan is a large scale local master plan process in the capital region of Finland. The key objective of the plan is to build a new urban neighborhood for at least 70 000 people and thus answer the demands for housing in a fast-growing urban region. However, the plan area borders on a Natura 2000 site, and fitting together strict nature conservation provisions with the plan has proven to be difficult. Currently, the process is in a deadlock: the plan cannot be ratified, but from the planning department's point of view, the plan cannot be further adjusted without compromising the major goals set for the plan.

The planning project is thus an example of an escalated conflict between urban development and nature conservation. In the paper I present preliminary findings of the study; however, the main motive for the paper, is to consider possible directions for further, more detailed and focused analysis. As is very often the case with rich empirical cases, this case also offers multiple, to a large extent overlapping points of departure for analysis. Hence, the fundamental and yet unanswered question I put forward is how to define and outline a perspective and a research question which is manageable, relevant and interesting.

Emplotting urban change: turning soft knowledge into the built environment
Lieven Ameel
University of Tampere/Helsinki

This paper examines the importance of narrative concepts - emplotment, in particular - for the understanding of contemporary urban planning practices. Planning has increasingly been understood in terms of narrative, as a form of "persuasive story-telling" (Throghmorton 1996). Drawing on narrative and literary theory, however, has been rare in planning theory to date. Narrative emplotment (White 1981) can provide an analytical framework with which to analyze planning narratives and rhetorics, and the dialogue between planning narratives and stories told by local stakeholders. One of the key arguments made is that narrative theory may constitute a key to examine and adapt cities' and citizens' soft knowledge, which is largely encoded in sets of stories (including literature, media narratives, biographies).