🏆 *reviewed paper*

Changing Cities – Changing Minds

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1 INTRODUCTION

Long established planning practices are hard to overcome. Top down control mechanisms remain in place with little devolution and self-determination.[1] In many countries ministers can overrule elected regions and municipalities and governments continue to hold the purse strings, invoking national interest to legitimise their reserve powers. Although conventional wisdom claims that cities are the drivers of future prosperity, many city dwellers undergo precarious employment, expensive commuting, overpriced housing, congestion, pollution and erosion of the public realm, undermining their quality of life. Disillusioned by party politics, some are turning to alternatives. Out of necessity, a parallel universe is emerging in urban areas, also in the developed world, relying on own resources and contributing creatively to a 'vibrant city'. Yet, activists may become the victims of their own success when the developing industry reaps the benefits of their efforts, not seldom acquiesced by planning. The motivation of this paper is not just a 'vibrant city' but a more equitable and inclusive city. It draws on twelve cities in north-west Europe where dynamic stakeholders are realising their aspirations by reinventing planning in cooperation with bottom-up forces.

2 THE CHANGING ROLE OF PLANNING

A long standing obstacle of planning is its limited powers over implementation. In market economies statutory plans may prescribe who should have the right to use land and how. Such plans may prevent development from happening, but they cannot make it happen. With the advent of neo-liberalism and the gradual erosion of the welfare state the role of planning became contested in many countries by the development industry and, albeit marginally, by direct action from below. Conversely, some academics argued that cities are generated from the bottom-up.[2]

During periods of recession, the nation state devised new ways of shifting the balance between the public interest and private property rights in favour of the latter to stimulate development. In the UK, for example, development corporations substituted traditional local planning, acquired compulsory purchase powers also for municipally owned land and had access to enormous amounts of public money for infrastructure provision to attract private development. Enterprise zones offered further advantages to the development industry to accelerate this process.[3] Gradually, local planning powers were eroded, and municipalities lacking control over their own finances and undergoing continuous cuts were unable to trigger development. Planning by plans became planning by negotiation but this did not mean that development became speedier. It took several business cycles and bankruptcies to build the second financial city in London's Docklands which is still under construction more than thirty years after the setting up of the London Docklands Development Corporation.[4]

Presumption in favour of development[5] often led to greater spatial polarisation and social segregation. This became visible mainly in cities where related unrest was acted out. Occupy is just one example of such

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[1] The International Manual of Planning Practice gives a good overview of planning laws and their implementation in countries in five continents. The new and expanded edition containing information on some 120 countries worldwide will be published in 2015. Judith Ryser & Teresa Franchini (eds). 2015 International Manual of Planning Practice. Isocarp (forthcoming).

[2] for an academic approach cf for example: Michael Batty, Generating Cities from the Bottom-Up, using complexity theory for effective design. In: Cluster. http://www.cluster.eu/generating-cities-from-the-bottom-upcreare-la-citta-dal-basso-in-alto/

[3] These powers were provided by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Development corporations replaced de facto local authority planning powers for a limited period of time, akin to the 1946 Now Towns Act.

[4] The London Dockland Development Corporation was instituted in 1981 and wound up in 1998. http://www.lddc-history.org.uk/lddcachieve/index.html

[5] cf for example National Planning Policy Framework in the UK consolidating planning guidance and adding presumption in favour of sustainable development without defining 'sustainable' operationally.

protests,[6] the temporary informal use of indeterminate spaces is another. Many more grievances were emanating from the increasing gap between rich and poor: student marches against higher fees, resistance against evictions and displacements from gentrifying areas, a swell of squatters. Cities are the stage of such manifestations, regardless whether they relate directly to the management of space.

Aware of their eroding powers some cities perceived the need to change their minds in the light of these urban transformations.[7] Some cities were reconsidering their role in spatial management including planning in this process.[8] No longer endowed with the same external resources, some cities were exploring alternative approaches by mobilising hitherto untapped internal resources to maintain quality of life in cities. Among them are the twelve cities which have become self-selected partners in the experiment of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (Isocarp) during its 50th anniversary congress in autumn 2015.[9]

The twelve cities which form the experimental part of the 2015 Isocarp congress. Source Isocarp

3 EXPERIMENTS OF PLANNING TOGETHER, BUT DIFFERENTLY

Created in the 1960s at the height of self-assured planning powers the International Society of City and Regional Planners (Isocarp) has evolved over time.[10] This year a few of its members have decided to test the current planning discourse about genuine participation, devolution, redistribution and shared responsibility

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[6] For a critical account of Occupy and its relation to space, cf Sam Halvorsen. 2015. Subverting Space in Occupy London: Rethinking Territoriality and the Geography of Social Movements. PhD Thesis, UCL.

[7] cf for example the initiative of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) to devise a spatial development plan to manage land supply across the city region. http://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1314449/10-manchester-authorities-start-consultation-joint-spatial-development-plan

[8] One of the pioneer cities changing its approach to planning and sustainable development using indigenous resources innovatively was Curitiba in Brazil when Jaime Lerner was mayor and later regional governor. http://newint.org/books/reference/world-development/case-studies/sustainable-urban-development-curitiba/

[9] The 2015 congress of Isocarp takes place in 12 cities in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany with a subsequent plenary in Rotterdam, 19-23 October 2015. www.isocarp.org www.isocarp2015.org

[10] Judith Ryser (ed). 2015. Isocarp, Fifty Years of Knowledge Creation and Sharing. Isocarp (forthcoming).

for the planet. They subscribed to the premise that cities were best placed to contribute to changing the minds of the actors directly involved in, and affected by changing cities. Although the twelve cities share a geography and a long term history, the planning deficiencies they identified and the innovative approaches they initiated are expected to have resonance beyond their region and relevance to structural changes in planning worldwide, owing to globalisation which has created unprecedented interdependence between world regions, regardless of their relative stage of development. The twelve cities will share their experiences with planners from all continents in a genuinely devolved setting where they will contribute actively to 'rethinking planning' and the role and responsibility of planners at the 2015 Isocarp congress.

The assumption of the paper is that the transformation of mentalities and broader power sharing are the prerequisite of a more equitable urban development process than hitherto. The paper identifies what these cities have in common in their alternative approaches, what distinguishes them and what lessons can be learnt from these inside-out initiatives across cultures and levels of economic development. It focuses on how these twelve cities are changing existing practices and, in particular, circumventing the inertias of the existing planning system to transform their visions into reality. What they appear to have in common is to take on board the aspirations of the beneficiaries of collectively reached objectives and to engage their sustained active participation in a continuous process of change. Critical observations may provide some insights into this process and point to practical changes toward more equitable, wider ranging, truly interactive and accountable urban governance.

4 TWELVE PLANNING ISSUES, TWELVE APPROACHES, TWELVE CHALLENGES TO MIND-SETS

In the global context the twelve cities are small and medium sized. However, in European terms they and their specificities form part of dense polycentric city networks.[11] The Ruhr which used to be Germany's mighty power-house groups ten former industrial towns in a region of 8.5 million population, now declining and in need of economic restructuring. Dortmund is the largest city of the Ruhr region with a large technical university which cooperates actively with businesses with the aim to make the economy of the region internationally competitive. The Randstad in western Netherlands to which Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Delft belong encompasses 7 million people. Amsterdam, the largest city in the Randstad is not the administrative but the financial capital. Brussels with its 1.1 million population is a national and EU capital, as well as a semi-autonomous 'city-state'. Rotterdam is the largest European port, Schiphol is the fourth busiest European airport, Groningen is an important European energy generator and trade node, Delft houses the largest technical university of the Netherlands, Maastricht is one of the earliest cross border EU regions, the Meuse-Rhine 'euregio' with Aachen in Germany and Liege in Belgium cooperating across three different languages, cultures and nationalities. Eindhoven was the seat of Philips and continues to accommodate the R&D activities of the global Philips company reoriented to medical imaging and nano-technology. Wageningen accommodates an internationally renowned university focusing on food, healthy environment and agricultural research. Deventer is a small historic town which is losing its industrial base and turning its historic core into a regional destination for shopping and specialised services, such as publishing. The latter assumes a special role as a pilot city to test the implementation capacity of Dutch cities of new national planning legislation.

 These cities are participating in the Isocarp experiment because they are aware of their exposure to global competition and the need to mobilise their own human capital to innovate and valorise their assets in pursuit of a sustainable position in the globalising world. By selecting planning problems of international relevance which they aim to turn into opportunities they are expecting to gain from sharing knowledge with planners engaged in similar endeavours in cities from other parts of the world. The question is whether planning issues have generic characteristics which are relevant to other places under different conditions. This experiment should show whether approaches, better still solutions can be shared across different cultures and stages of economic development for planning issues identified as critical at a given local level and in a specific context.

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[11] cf for example: Peter Hall and Kathy Pain. 2006. The PPolycentric Metropolis, learning fro mega-city regions in Europe. Earthscan

4.1 Communalities and divergences

The twelve cities share some common ground which guided the selection of their twelve specific and complementary planning questions. Most importantly, they all rest on the sustainability principle, a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives. Secondly, the focus is on implementation and deliverability of the proposed interventions, taking advantage of cities as locus of realisation rather than abstract visions and strategies. Thirdly, European cities share history. They have been long in the making, growing erratically over centuries, affected by colonialism and undergoing dramatic change with industrialisation and urbanisation before the world wars. Most of the twelve cities had to cope with devastating war damage, initially through ad hoc refurbishment due to lack of labour and material, later through demolition and reconstruction following modernist principles. With increasing affluence and popularisation of the motorcar cities tended to lose population to the outskirts, smaller market towns and the wider hinterland.[12] However, business cycles and deindustrialisation are affecting these cities unevenly to this day, some growing, some declining. Fourthly, they are all undergoing impacts of globalisation and have to face the austerity regimes following the latest financial crisis. Fifthly, most of the twelve cities are very cosmopolitan, as population, immigration and asylum seeking are increasing, mainly in the larger cities.[13] In some of them half the population is of foreign origin which brings them closer in minds to cities in the developing world.

Foreign Citizens in the Netherlands in 2003 by Country

source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_Netherlands#mediaviewer/File:COB_data_Netherlands.PNG

Against this common backcloth, individual cities selected diverse approaches to their experimental workshops. Most of them resorted to local authorities, cities and regions as hosts, some chose universities, and others social entrepreneurs. Some decided to involve several groups of stakeholders while others went ahead with a single host. The issues they selected were at different stages of the planning process. Some focused on implementation, others were at the negotiation or planning stage, others involved in evaluation. However, all had selected concrete places of intervention, sometimes several, some small, some at regional scale.

City	population	% foreign population*	planning issue
Amsterdam	813,562 (2014) municipality 1,575,263 (2014) metro 2,332,773 metro region 6,979,500 Randstad growing	50,5% foreign (2012) 30% non western origin	How to build the city in a cooperative way?
Rotterdam	619,879 (2014) municipality 1,181,284 metro 2,261,844 metro region growing	45% foreign 70% singles in city centre	How to develop unprecedented port city synergy?

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[12] For a recent discussion about the effects on restrictive planning of urban sprawl on house prices, cf Wendell Cox, 2011. The cost of smart growth revisited: a 40 year perspective. http://www.newgeography.com/content/002324-the-costs-smart-growth-revisited-a-40-year-perspective

[13] http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLEN&PA=37943eng&LA=EN

Schiphol Haarlemmeer Amstelveen	144,226 (2014) 85,749 (2014) growing	[4th European airport, 65,00 staff]	How to connect a globalising world?
Eindhoven	216,036 (2011) growing	4.5% foreign students from 150 countries	How to react when traditional industries move away?
Groningen	197,823 (2014) growing	25% = students	How to sustain energy resources?
Maastricht	119,664 (2011) steady	4.5% foreign	How to build a trans-border urban system?
Delft	99,737 (2014) growing	19,500 students (2012) 2236 foreign 11% 3375 academic staff, 2280 admin staff	How to create a sustainable knowledge region?
Deventer	98,510 (2014) steady	1.2% foreign	How to implement a national legal framework for local integrated planning and implementation?
Wageningen	37,434 (2014) steady	7400 uni staff 7933 students from 106 countries 25% foreign	How to feed the world's metropolises?
Brussels capital region	1,139,000 (2012) growing	27% foreign	How to build an international capital with active local participation?
Antwerp	480,721 (2009) growing	17% foreign	How to rework the productive city?
Dortmund	580,956 (2012) declining Ruhr metro: 8,572,745	~ 30% foreign 24,000 students 3200 foreign students from 100 countries	How to leverage economic growth from spatial projects?
* these figures are only order of magnitudes, from diverse web sources, unchecked/ uncheckable and uncoordinated.			

Table: Twelve participant cities, planning issues, population

4.2 Planning for and by people

The economic dimension of sustainability tends to dominate periods of recession. Nevertheless, a number of cities deliberately focused their approach on the premise that planning was for and by people. They attempt to move away from prescriptive planning to soften the chasm between the aspirations of the many and the interests of the few. Both Brussels and Antwerp chose a very pragmatic approach to implementing concrete development objectives deliverable step by step, within a broader and longer term spatial policy frameworks. Struck by the demise of its main employer Philips, activists in Eindhoven responded by bottom-up initiatives to assist the large redundant workforce to survive by building on indigenous resources and energies while aiming to turn the city into a 'brainfield' which would offer opportunities to the whole population. Led by social entrepreneurs, the Amsterdam Pakhuis de Zwijger initiatives were closest to direct bottom-up action, while Maastricht wanted to illustrate cross-border, cross cultural cooperation focused on sharing localised experiences of punctual interventions with cultural diversity in mind within its broad context of international cross border cooperation. Even Schiphol, a de facto airport city, was sensitive to local requirements and aspirations and the need to create closer connections between the function of the airport as a global hub and its need to connect to the locality, not only Amsterdam and the Randstad but also its immediate neighbourhoods, and thus to turn a mono-functional airport city into an urban environment which contributes to local identity and pride.

4.3 Taking care of the environment

Environmental concerns motivated Wageningen which introduced food supply as a planning issue, not usually prominent in mainstream planning. Groningen also attached importance to the environmental dimension in its strategy to transform the Energy Valley into green and decentralised energy production while retaining its energy trade hub position. The prime objective of the IBA, the international garden exhibition was to regenerate the degraded environment of the Emscher Park in the Ruhr for leisure, culture and recreation while experimenting with renewable energy generation on sites of past coal extraction and fossil fuel energy generation. This intervention accompanied by considerable state subsidies took place during a period of growth from 1989-1999 when there was faith in the European Spatial Development Perspective adopted in 1999 and the ability of the EU to create greater social cohesion and territorially balanced sustainable development across the EU space as a whole which was expected to generate economic growth. The financial crisis of the mid-noughties decried that and pushed economic concerns into the forefront of national as well as planning policies. This was also the case of the Ruhr and Dortmund is now focusing on opportunities for job creation.

4.4 Economic motivation

Unemployment is an issue in all twelve cities. Faced with rising unemployment (13.9% in 2013) Rotterdam decided to create greater synergy between the city and the port. Conventional wisdom postulates that high income countries cannot produce goods competitively in the globalising world. Rotterdam contested this premise by 'making things again' with the contribution of its large number of SMEs (small and medium size firms) producing high value added goods locally. In Rotterdam's view, high quality, high end goods such as cruise ships can be produced competitively in the developed world because of the innovative capacity of its SMEs and its universities which build on past excellence and pioneering R&D. Delft is counting on its technical university as its local and regional economic driver. It seeks greater integration between the internationally renowned campus to exploit the quality of life of the city to attract and retain students and business start-ups.

Increasing affluence in developing countries is putting pressure on wages, reducing profitability and thus directing surplus capital in pursuit of better returns elsewhere. Witness speculative investment from developing countries into real estate in developed countries, leading to ubiquitous CBDs worldwide, designed by the same starchitects and realised by the same international developers, thereby putting similar demands on planning systems globally. Globalisation is also contributing to greater global mobility and movements of people, as well as goods and capital. All these factors confirm the pertinence of sharing contemporary urban planning issues internationally as contribution to a mutual learning process.

4.5 Institutional hurdles

Planning tends to be constrained by both economic pressures and political processes expressed in statutory top down objectives. Although planning has to navigate between these constraints, it has to identify its room for manoeuvre, even in terms of non action if need be. Cities throughout the world face contradictions between objectives at different levels of decision making: international, national, regional and local. There is constant tension between forces from above and those from below. Deventer, together with some other small cities in the Netherlands, has been designated to test the implementability at local level of new national legislation integrating spatial planning, environmental protection, water management and infrastructure. Deventer has chosen this opportunity to revisit its own local governance with a broader range of stakeholders and more active citizen participation. Although the test focuses on plan making, implementation encompasses a far broader set of stakeholders to get national policies translated into local spatial intervention. Sharing international experiences on the discrepancy between planning processes and governance is expected to make a concrete contribution to new approaches.

Institutional issues may be more difficult to resolve at a larger regional scale, such as the Meuse-Rhine Euregio which has been in existence since 1976 but has acquired judicial status only in 1991. It includes three main cities in three countries, Aachen in Germany, Liege in Belgium and Maastricht in the Netherlands and other smaller cities, and encompasses five provinces with 3.9 million inhabitants. It straddles three national and one regional language and diverse economic activities, ranging from heavy industry to European services, culture and tourism. From Maastricht's point of view,[14] cross-border cooperation focuses on knowledge and innovation (a start has been made in the health care sector), relation between culture and the economy (with a bid for 2018 European city of culture), and a place for cosmopolitan gathering. EMR 2020, strategy for the Euregio Meuse-Rhine[15] focuses on similar sectors: economy and innovation, culture and tourism, besides labour market, education and training, health care and public safety. This example shows the inertia embedded in cross-cultural communication, even more so cross-border cooperation, let alone international interaction. This leads to methodological issues of comparative studies.

5   MATTERS OF METHOD

Methodological aspects are important in academic comparative research, in particular in studies which reach across cultures, different contexts, and data from different sources previously collected for different purposes than the objective of the study in hand. Such studies can be confined to a preselected set of criteria, a limited

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[14] Memorandum on the internationalisation strategy of the Municipal Council of Maastricht. EN_Samenvatting MaastrichtIntlPolicy.pdf

[15] EMR 2020, a future strategy for the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. Stichting Euregio Meuse-Rhine, 2013. (with assistance of Interreg IV-A EMR, in collaboration with the participant regions, provinces and cities).

number of quantitative or quantifiable factors, few expected outcomes. Comparisons like the ones proposed in the twelve cities during exchanges between planners with knowledge on the topic but from different backgrounds, places and cultures which deal with real life experiences are fraught with complexities, contradictions, unruly qualitative aspects and culture-bound interpretations. They do not lend themselves to reductionist modes of establishing correlations, which are just that and not explanatory causalities. In such a complicated environment, what is the purpose of comparisons and what can they usefully achieve?

5.1 Transferability

Both academic and real-life comparisons raise a fundamental methodological issue. Are findings from a particular situation directly transferable to another one, can they give rise to a generalised model of thinking, analysis, problem solving, or is there a need for transposition, 'translation' from one situation to another? Or are the only lessons applicable elsewhere of a generic nature? Are outcomes at best producing general principles, and do they need adjustment to different contexts?

5.2 Justification of international comparisons

It could be argued that although academic comparative studies are often expected to produce transferable findings such transfers do not necessarily take place, not least because they would have to happen after the contractual research period. Conversely, the twelve city experiment could be used as a test of this question. The exchanges between international planning professionals on twelve specific planning issues in which they have expertise are rooted in concrete cases in the twelve cities and those linked to the international participants. However, the twelve cities have a lot of contextual communalities while the contexts of experiences from other continents vary widely. For this reason, planning issues, especially in the developing world might be considered too divergent for planning solutions generated in the developed world to be relevant. From a different standpoint, a case could be made for the usefulness of such comparisons due to correspondences and interdependencies of planning methods and processes worldwide. For example, some ex-colonies have planning laws which are still modelled on post war UK planning legislation. Many western planning firms have carried out work in the developing world, devising masterplans for cities like New Delhi or Chandighar, designing plans for international developers and investors, or more recently for governments, land owners and decision makers of emerging countries, like the United Arab Emirates or China. With decreasing planning work in developed countries this trend is on the increase. There is great mobility of planning students, not only across Europe stimulated by EU programmes, but a growing number of students from the developing world are studying in the developed world who continue to work there and eventually repatriate that type of knowledge for home use or to assist their investors abroad.

All these actions amount to a long standing transfer of planning culture, regardless of whether the approach was appropriate to different situations, levels of development, cultures and lifestyles. While such transfers tended to take place from the developed to the developing world, globalisation is changing these relations. It could be argued that foreign investment from emerging countries into cities in the developed world affect the planning system there by attaching extraneous conditions to investment and obtaining long term concessions.

At a more structural level, situations which were attributed to conditions of the developing world, such as self-build housing and informal economy have become more widespread in cities of the developed world and are addressed by Amsterdam and Antwerp respectively. The populations involved in these processes tend to be immigrants from developing countries who bring with them not only skills of informal action but also different mind sets towards city living which, in turn, affect expectations and demands of urban spaces and their uses in their recipient countries. These processes can be seen as a basis for a reverse transfer of planning practices and implementation. The 'twelve city experiment' could operate as a laboratory to identify such movements of planning cultures and explore their mutual impacts.

Polarisation and greater disparity between 'haves' and 'have nots' takes place worldwide and provokes movements of discontent. The twelve cities share the objective to become more inclusive and equitable which means that planning is less about development than redistribution. Comparing approaches and findings at an international event like the Isocarp congress may be justified as potential contribution to the creation of vibrant cities worldwide. Isocarp invites the CORP constituents to participate in this experiment.