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THE MOBILITY AND/OR FIXITY OF URBAN AND PLANNING POLICIES – THE ROLE OF DIVERGENT URBAN PLANNING CULTURES

Abstract. Cities and regions are increasingly interconnected on a global scale. In the process of the making of cities and regions policy actors increasingly rely on globally flowing and very mobile urban policy models, which have been originally developed in different socio-spatial contexts. Simultaneously the search for these policies and their implementation is refracted by local/regional factors, which are relatively fixed as they are rooted in historically produced planning cultures. In this conceptual paper governance change is discussed through looking at the interplay between fixity and motion in urban development. For this purpose approaches to planning cultures and policy mobilities are related to each other theoretically.

Key words: urban governance, planning cultures, policy mobilities, planning policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing interconnectedness of cities and regions in economic, social and even political terms has certainly been pushed by both, processes of globalization und European integration. While most of the literature about the global-local nexus predominantly focuses on economic interconnectedness (e.g. Sassen, 1991) and the need for cities to improve their competitiveness (Begg, 1999; Giffinger and Hamedinger, 2009; Parkinson *et al.*, 2004), some urban scholars consider how cities and regions are interconnected or related to each other through the exchange of knowledge and information in different policy fields (e.g. through city networks; see Atkinson and Rossignolo, 2010). Not surprisingly, these scholars

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point to the fact that the EU has consciously embarked on a variety of programs and policies since the 1980s in order to foster the exchange of ‘best practice’ or to stimulate ‘learning processes’ between cities and regions through the dissemination and exchange of policy models. Also in spatial planning the EU has pushed the idea of ‘good’ or ‘best’ practice and their exchange between and within Member States since the end of the 1990s. Stead (2012) lists a bulk of EU policy documents basically concerning spatial development and planning, which explicitly pay attention to the identification and dissemination of ‘good’ or ‘best’ practice (e.g. the European Spatial Development Perspective (CSD, 1999), White Paper on European Governance (EC, 2001), the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs, 2007)).

Urban planning is increasingly influenced by policy models circulating on an European or even global level, but this must not necessarily lead to real changes in the organization or the fundamental goals of urban planning. More importantly, against the background of historically developed and deeply rooted local planning cultures, the question arises if and in which respects planning policy models developed in certain national-(regional)-local contexts could be easily adopted in other contexts. It seems that changes in urban planning could be better explained through looking more precisely at how globally or European wide flowing good practices of urban planning are articulated with deeply rooted and relatively fixed existing urban planning practices. Processes of articulation could be conflictual because of the contradictory nature of the relation between the supra-local and the local practices of urban planning and their inherent values and norms. Taking up and modifying an argument developed by David Harvey in 1982 changes in urban planning or even in urban governance can only be understood through shedding light on the complex interplay between ‘fixity’ and ‘motion’, between what is ‘fixed’ and what is ‘mobile’ in urban planning in terms of values, norms, practices and institutional frameworks. So, in order to understand changes in urban governance and urban planning we need to create concepts which theoretically bring together ‘relationality’ and ‘territoriality’, or ‘fixity’ and ‘motion’; a claim, which is for example brought into the discussion by Lees (2012) concerning the mobility of gentrification policies on a global scale. MacLeod and Jones (2011, p. 2463) also urgently point to that and formulate a more general claim concerning urban theory: ‘it is with this in mind that we caution for any relationally constituted metropolitics and urban political/metropolitan theory to retain within this ontological purview the territorial demarcations that are intertwined with and provide shape to the relational lines of connection and disconnection, mobility and immobility: for they are place dependent’. This claim is a central point of departure for the arguments developed in this paper.

In recent critical geographical and urban research literature the accelerated circulation of policy ideas and ‘good’ policy models has been theoretically packed

into different concepts or notions like ‘policies in motion’ (Ward, 2006), ‘policy mobilities’ (McCann, 2011; Temenos and McCann, 2012) ‘trans – urban policy pipelines’ (Cook and Ward, 2012), ‘urban assemblages’ (McFarlane, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2011b), or ‘circulation of knowledge’ (Robinson, 2011). From a basically political economic point of view, most of the scholars scrutinize,

- which actors, institutions, organizations and technologies are involved in the development and dissemination of urban policy models,
- who is benefiting from them in terms of power in certain locales,
- which socio-spatial consequences the circulation of policy models in certain cities/regions produces, and more fundamentally,
- how changes in urban governance and the making of cities could be explained.

What clearly comes up in all of these different approaches is that urban policies are not simply imported or implemented in certain local contexts, but that these policy models mutate in the course of movement and that they are a kind of refracted through historically developed local/regional political and planning cultures as well as through the social and economic structures of cities or regions (Cook and Ward (2012) refer to ‘certain pathways and trajectories’; Stead (2012) to ‘path-dependency and path-shaping’). However, until now, most of these scholars focus on a thorough analysis of the *mobility* of certain urban policies and their conscious mobilization by local policy actors. The role of ‘planning cultures’ in framing these processes of mobilizing and circulating policy models has partially been neglected in this discourse.

At the same time, the recent discourse about the conceptualization and empirical analysis of planning cultures mainly concentrates on describing different elements of planning cultures, which are said to be strongly embedded in political cultures. Broadly speaking, the latest contributions to this discourse (Friedmann, 2011; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Reimer and Blotevogel, 2012) argue for an even stronger ‘cultural sensitization’ (Reimer and Blotevogel, 2012) of empirically guided planning research, which aims at a sober comparison of different planning systems in Europe or even in the world. Implicitly this re-orientation means to concentrate on an analysis of the *fixity* of planning cultures as these ‘cultural elements’ of planning systems are deeply rooted in political cultures.

To summarize, it seems that conceptualizations of, on the one hand, policy mobilities, and on the other hand, of planning cultures, eagerly work to explore one central aspect of the intricacies of planning policies and urban governance change separately without conceptually and empirically taking into account the other aspect. A central hypothesis of this paper is that theoretically combining both conceptualizations could improve the analysis of urban governance and urban planning change as it takes care of the interplay between ‘fixity’ and ‘motion’. Mainly an analysis of planning cultures could add to a better understanding of

the mobility of planning policies or the ‘transferability of spatial planning methods, techniques, operating rules, instruments, programs and so on’ (Stead, 2012, p. 113) between completely different contexts.

Consequently, this paper predominantly focuses on answering the following questions:

- How can concepts of planning cultures improve our understanding of the mobility of planning policy models?

- How can conceptualizations of the mobility or circulation of policies be combined with conceptualizations of planning cultures in order to better understand processes of governance change?

In order to do so, the paper proceeds as follows: in the next chapter different theoretical approaches, which seek to grasp the mobility and circulation of policies, will be questioned with respect to their conceptualizations of ‘refractions’ or ‘mutations’ of these mobile urban policies when applied in certain locales. After that, different concepts of planning cultures will be discussed concerning their potential contribution to better understand urban governance change. In the final chapter some conclusions will be made and questions for further research formulated.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE MOBILITY OF URBAN AND PLANNING POLICIES – BASIC CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

As mentioned above the growing literature which concerns the conceptualization of the mobility of urban policies can mainly be divided into three strands: urban assemblages, circulating knowledge, mobile policies/policies in motion.

2.1. Urban Assemblages

McCann and Ward (2011a) describe cities as assemblages; a concept, which they explicitly borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to shed light on the contested processes of the production of cities. They also heavily allude to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) when they describe how mobile urban policies contribute to processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. Assemblages are seen as ensembles of interrelated elements like actors, institutions, technologies or resources, which themselves are related to different spatial scales. Urban assemblages figure as ‘inventions’ or ‘formations’ as they embody both modernization and continuation in urban governance for a certain time and territory. In vein with this approach Cook and Ward (2012) favour the idea to empirically examine the

role of ‘transitory assemblages of various elements – institutions, presentations, websites’ in the process of construction, and hence fixing certain policy models in certain territories.¹ Furthermore, in the eyes of McCann and Ward (2011a) using the concept of ‘assemblages’ really helps to escape the narrow analytical confines of dichotomies like global and local as these assemblages are in a constant process of re-making, in which forces, which unfold on different spatial scales, are involved simultaneously. But, what is more important for them is that these assemblages also produce uneven spatial development and changes in power structures. New assemblages could be detrimental for some policy actors in terms of political power, and in turn, legitimate the practices of other policy actors.

Cook and Ward (2012) have further developed this approach to understand the mobility and circulation of policy models through the introduction of the concept of ‘trans-urban policy pipelines’. Basically with that notion they mean the infrastructure and practices which facilitate the movement of policies (e.g. conferences) around the globe. More interestingly, they depict how trans-urban policy pipelines strengthen processes of territorialization of certain policy ideas on the local level. As processes of territorialization are always accompanied by conflicts or protests by local actors, whose positions seem to be threatened through the invention of new urban policies, they argue to look more precisely at the ‘obstacles’ and ‘conflicts’, which could considerably hinder the invention of new policies. Cook and Ward (2012) mention some elements, which certainly seem to refract the application of globally mobile urban policies in cities. Particularly they hint to the ‘social and political acceptability’ of elements of globally traveling policy models (like ‘Business Improvement Districts’) in certain socio-spatial contexts. Unfortunately, this argument has not been further explored by them in their paper. It misses a clear picture of how to theorize and operationalize these ‘obstacles’, and accordingly, how to explain the different trajectories of the development of urban policies. Exactly regarding this question, concepts of planning cultures could add to a more sober understanding of urban trajectories and to disentangle which elements of assemblages are really fixed and hard to re-work through mobile policies. Not least, the ‘social and political acceptability’ of policies is deeply enshrined in historically constructed political and planning cultures.

McFarlane (2011) is more sensitive concerning this critique as he discusses assemblages more clearly from an ontological perspective and critically reflects on other conceptualizations of assemblages:

This broadly nonconceptual sense of assemblage contrasts with a more explicit rendering of assemblage as idea – a name for relations between objects that make up the world, an ontology of assemblage – which then requires content specification. And there is a notion of assemblage as an approach, an orientation to an object (McFarlane, 2011, p. 652).

¹ In their paper Cook and Ward (2012) analyze the mobility of the policy model of ‘Business Improvement Districts’ and its territorialization in the case of Sweden.

For him ‘assemblage thinking’ also means to dig into urban histories, which influence the paths of urban policies. According to McFarlane (2011), this means to decipher ‘habits of practice’ or ‘ways of going on’, so ‘assemblage draws attention less to an ecology of relations and more to the particular urban alignments formed through processes of gathering, dispersion and change’ (McFarlan, 2011, p. 654). However, at this point it is not clear, which aspects of ‘urban histories’ are considered to come into play as potentially mobile or deeply rooted and fixed in the course of urban governance change.

2.2. Policies in Motion/Policy Mobilities – Circulating Knowledge

Broadly speaking, urban scholars who refer to the term ‘policy mobilities’ or ‘policies in motion’ want to figure out which processes underpin the increasing mobility of policies and how cities are relationally constructed through these growing flows of policy models. Cities are mainly seen as nodes in a space of policy flows. Peck (2002) also speaks of ‘fast policy regimes’; these are ‘policies that work’, which are globally circulating and adopted to change policies in certain places. McCann (2011; Temenos and McCann, 2012) alludes to the idea of ‘policy mobilities’ in order to explain the construction of cities through being part of spatially wider flows of capital, knowledge, and information. In his approach he tries to gauge the impacts of the ‘global circulation of urban policies’ on the making of certain cities and to examine more precisely which actors, institutions, processes and technologies are involved in the mobilization of urban policies. Urban policy mobilities are ‘socially produced and circulated forms of knowledge addressing how to design and govern cities that develop in, are conditioned by, travel through, connect, and shape various spatial scales, networks, policy communities, and institutional contexts’ (McCann, 2011, p. 109). Particularly McCann’s (2011) conceptualization of the relation between fixity and motion is certainly relevant in the context of urban governance change. As for most of the above mentioned scholars also for McCann (2011) Harvey’s idea of the dialectic between fixity and motion (Harvey, 1982) serves as a starting point for getting a clearer picture about the processes of neoliberal urbanization. McCann (2011, p. 109) mentions the following elements of urban policies, which are locally fixed: ‘longstanding policy paradigms, path-dependencies, ideologies, and frames of reference and/or by external forces’. Unfortunately, what is meant by these terms is neither theoretically nor empirically explained. In his endeavour to see cities as ‘global-relational nodes’ and to catch the role of urban policy mobilities in directing contemporary urbanization he partially neglects the importance of political cultures for an explanation of the relation between fixity and motion. Although he strives for a detailed empirical analysis of the mobilization of policies (e.g. through the identification of certain actors like ‘local policy actors, global policy consultocracy, and infor-

mational infrastructures' (McCann, 2011, p. 109)) and institutions involved in this process in the case of Vancouver, this research suffers from a clear understanding of the processes of local embedding of policy models in certain planning cultures.

In their analysis of the making of Whistler (Canada) as a 'sustainable city' Temenos and McCann (2012) are more precise in this regard as they analyze the 'local politics of policy mobility'. However, what is partially missing is an idea of how local politics, which means actors, institutions and relations between stakeholders, are framed by historically developed common understandings of the values and goals of urban development, of the role of the state in steering development and the relation between the local state and civil society. Likewise it should have been empirically researched, which factors of local politics are favourable for the importation of certain policy models. To envisage these issues would have meant to dwell on planning and political cultures, which could explain the process of the mobilization of urban policies to a certain degree. Consequently, what is needed is to create a more detailed idea of what is contested within the local politics of policy mobility.

In approaches under the heading 'policies in motion' (Gonzales, 2011; Peck, 2002; Ward, 2006) the ambition prevails to unearth the local conditions that form the recognition of certain policy models and to reconstruct the 'trajectories' of these policy models (Ward, 2006), and hence, the above mentioned critique only partially holds for this way of analyzing the mobility of policies and the making of cities. Most of all, Ward (2006, p. 69) explicitly points to factors, which refract the adoption of the BID-model in UK capital cities: 'structural orientation of the two nations' welfare regimes (US and UK, note of the author), scalar division of the state, and urban political-economic trajectories'.

Finally, Jennifer Robinson (2011) has brought the idea of 'spaces of circulating knowledge' into this discussion. From a postcolonial perspective, she dwells on city strategies, their development and implementation in cities of the global North and the global South. Consequently, for her city strategies are not homogenous policy models sketched out only in the global North and simply taken up by cities in the global South. Rather policy actors in some large cities of the global South are eagerly taking part in the formation of these models, likewise intruding the global flow of these policy models with new insights from the global South. City strategies should be viewed as a 'global urban policy technique' (Robinson, 2011, p. 20), which is inextricably linked to changes in power relations when it comes to their application and implementation in certain urban contexts. In her theoretical argumentation Robinson (2011) drafts how 'spaces of circulation', all the sites and tracks, channels and landscapes, which are part of 'international policy learning and innovation', could be analyzed more precisely. Robinson (2011, pp. 26–27) concludes that what is urgently needed is to figure out the 'spatial and power-laden processes', which produce 'proximities or distancing' in international policy

learning and exchange. Furthermore, she makes a plea for the analysis of power relations, and hence, local politics involved in the mobilization of globally flowing policy models on the local level. To discover the ‘hidden agendas’ of policy actors, who want to invent some new or innovative policy models, which have been successfully tested in other cities, in their domestic arena, could be one way to better understand these power relations. Understandably, Robinson (2011) is more positive concerning the possibilities of urban actors to appropriate or even slightly change global policy models compared to the scepticism characteristic for urban scholars, which strongly refer to the inescapability of neoliberal urbanization (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010). But again, what exactly is meant by ‘local specificities’ (Robinson, 2011, p. 19), which shape the way of how policy models are screened, downloaded and adopted or appropriated at the local level, is not explored in more detail.

To sum up, a theoretically well informed explanation of the questions why and how globally circulating and mobile policy models are altered on the local level is relatively obscured in the above mentioned literature about policy mobilities, policies in motion or circulating knowledge. Most of these conceptualization concentrate on the more ‘visible’ elements of ‘local specificities’ (like e.g. ‘scalar division of the state’). This is due to an under-theoretization of the relation between actors and institutions, the lack of a clear idea of the constitution of actors from a sociological point of view, and, more importantly with regard to planning cultures, the lack of considering the role of taken-for-granted values, norms and routines (cf. Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009), which make up certain planning cultures and which are really specific for certain socio-spatial formations. Peck (2011, pp. 19–20) defines some of the policy mobility approaches and precisely underpins that point:

These intensely contested and deeply constitutive contexts, which have their own histories and geographies, shape what is seen, and what counts, in terms of policy innovations, preferred models, and best practice. They also frame those narratives of “policy failure” that establish the premises and preconditions for policy experimentation.

This seems to be a good starting point for considering the role of planning cultures in these framing processes more precisely.

3. PLANNING CULTURES – UNDERSTANDING THE FIXITY OF URBAN AND PLANNING POLICIES?

Since decades conceptualizations of ‘planning cultures’ have been brought to the fore and scholarly discussed within the discourse about planning theories (see DISP, 1993; Friedmann, 2005, 2011; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Sanyal,

2005).² Most of them offer an analytical grid for a thorough comparative analysis of different planning cultures, though with a certain focus on the more ‘visible’ parts of planning cultures (e.g. institutional frameworks; a critique also formulated by Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009). Furthermore, not all of them are based on a clear theoretization of the interplay between structure, agency and spatial structures, of the duality of fixity and mobility involved in changes of planning cultures, and of the path-dependency of planning cultures. Only Friedmann (2005) explicitly dwells on the fixity – mobility relation with regard to the impact of globalization on different, though national, planning cultures. For him planning cultures are deeply rooted in historically developed political cultures, but they are not ‘engraved in stone’ (Friedmann, 2005, p. 184). According to him, what we need to develop is a more precise picture about what is ‘in movement’ (Friedmann, 2005, p. 211) within planning cultures and how shared interpretations and perceptions of reality of planning actors as well as institutional settings determine the context – specificity and immobility of planning cultures. What follows from this argument is the claim that comparative research, which addresses planning cultures, should have to be grounded more clearly in wider social and spatial theories.

In a recent paper Reimer and Blotevogel (2012) also argue for a ‘cultural sensitization’ for a better comparison of different planning systems. They clearly favour to go beyond the classical approaches applied in studies comparing planning systems, which basically rely on a comparative analysis of structures of administrative and legal systems. For them these approaches should be considerably complemented by an analysis, which builds on a detailed analysis of planning practices, of the perceptions and interpretations of actors involved in planning policies, hence on planning cultures. Also in contrast to planning and governance theories, which emphasize the trend towards a smooth harmonization or homogenization of planning systems in the course of processes of European Integration (or ‘Europeanization’, cf. Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2010), Reimer and Blotevogel (2012) very conclusively exhibit in their paper that ‘cultural differences’ matter and that the concept of planning cultures should be used as an analytical instrument for a better understanding of planning practices on the local level.

Generally speaking, what they are ambitiously trying to do is to reconcile the classical ‘planning systems’ concepts with a certain ‘planning cultures’ approach. They show that this most of all means to theoretically grasp the interplay between structure and agency before constructing an analytical grid for empirical research. Giddens’ (1984) conceptualization of the duality of structure as well as the often mentioned approach of ‘actor-centred institutionalism’ (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1995) serve as a vantage point for Reimer and Blotevogel (2012) in this regard. Furthermore, in order to better describe the context-dependency of planning ac-

² A broad discussion of these different conceptualizations is not done in this paper, but in other contributions of this special issue.

tion Reimer and Blotevogel (2012) introduce to concept of institutional milieus developed by DiGaetano and Strom (2003), a concept, which explicitly offers an integrated approach to analyze planning cultures empirically. Institutional milieus are ‘the complexes of formal and informal political and governmental arrangements that mediate interactions among the structural context, political culture and political actors’ (DiGaetano and Strom quoted by Reimer and Blotevogel 2012, p. 17). Taking this conceptualization further Reimer and Blotevogel (2012, p. 18) propose the following elements to be considered for a comparative analysis of planning cultures:

[...] locally and regionally entrenched traditions of action, processes of both individual and collective self-perception, of constructing reality, and of agenda setting on the part of local and regional elites, adaptation and learning processes, and established power structures and the restrictive and empowering impacts they exert on planning action.

More importantly, the authors explain the context-dependency of planning cultures not only through routines deeply inscribed in planning actions and the involved tacit knowledge, but also through existing spatial structures. These are ‘local specificities’, which really influence the mobilization of policy models and the ways of screening, adoption and implementation of these models in certain cities ore regions. So, this operationalization of the concept of planning cultures for empirical and comparative-oriented research seems to be quite promising for cushioning the above described deficits of the diverse urban policy mobilities approaches.

4. CONCLUSIONS

‘Between fixity and motion’, these are the first words of an article by Neil Brenner (1998), in which he elaborates the idea of a ‘scalar fix’. For him a ‘scalar fix’ builds the multiscalarly organized territorial basis of different rounds of circulation of capital, which could nevertheless be re-organized in next rounds of capital circulation. Alluding to Harvey’s theoretization of fixity and motion, in which this relation is described as a ‘contradiction’ or ‘tension’ inherent in capitalism, Brenner (1998) consistently argues that processes of globalization are always accompanied by processes of ‘re-scaling’. Cities are upgraded or downgraded in these processes of re-hierarchization of spatial scales. But more inspiring for this paper, Brenner (1998) pinpoints three issues, which could guide the answer to the second question, which is raised in the introduction to this paper, namely the question concerning the explanation of governance change:

– Tensions between fixity and motion could not be resolved; accordingly, fixity and motion are two sides of the same coin, which is capital accumulation.

– What is fixed and what is mobile cannot really be separated analytically as fixes are simultaneously a result, a precondition, but also medium of the contradictory process of capital accumulation (Brenner, 1998).

– The relation between fixity and motion is socially contested and characteristic for certain historical and socio-spatial formations.

The question how conceptualizations of planning cultures and policy mobilities can be combined in order to enrich our scientifically acquired knowledge about changes in planning policies (and urban governance) has been addressed in this paper through a description of some shortcomings of recent approaches in both discourses. While most of the conceptualizations, which fall under the rubric ‘policy mobilities’, ‘policy in motion’, ‘urban assemblages’ or ‘circulation of knowledge’, have a bias towards emphasising the ‘mobility-side’, but also the visible sides of urban and planning policies, the above mentioned concepts of planning cultures mainly underline the deep embeddedness, and hence, relative fixity of some part of planning cultures (with a focus on the ‘invisible’ cognitive elements of planning cultures). The main characteristics of both discourses are roughly shown in table 1.

Table 1. Some differences between concepts of ‘policy mobilities’ and ‘planning cultures’

Dimensions	Policy mobilities	Planning cultures
Conceptualization of space	relational	socially constructed
Relation between fixity and motion	blurring of this dichotomy	no clear conceptualization
Local ‘specificities’	power structures, habits of practice, ways of doing things, policy paradigms, ideologies, welfare regimes, scalar division of the state	power structures, shared interpretations and perceptions of reality, traditions of actions, routines of planning practice, individual and collective self-perception of planners, learning processes, administrative and legal structures, taken for granted values and norm systems, traditional role of the state in society, spatial structures

Source: authors’ elaboration.

The conceptualization of planning cultures developed by Reimer and Blotevogel (2012), who offer a structurally and actors sensitive approach (‘institutional milieus’), are promising for bringing more light into the ‘local specificities’ of planning policies and urban governance, which probably hinder governance change

induced by imported policy models. Particularly, their dimensions of planning cultures, which are planning actions, constructions and interpretations of reality, learning processes, established power structures and institutional frameworks as well as spatial structures, could really add to better understand how and why planning policies developed in certain cities are modified when applied in other cities. Four issues, which also give an idea for future research on urban governance and planning policy change, have to be highlighted in this respect:

– First, constructions and interpretations of reality, which are based on shared taken-for-granted values and norms of planning action, seem to be obstacles in processes of adaptation. These constructions fundamentally guide the screening of planning policy solutions to certain planning problems, the process of selection of certain policies out of the flow of globally circulating policy models, and the processes of implementation. Consequently, future urban and planning research should more seriously concentrate on deciphering the constructions and interpretations of reality (and space) made by urban planners and other policy actors. This aspect taken from the planning cultures approach could also contribute to better grasp the ways of mobilizing urban planning policies, a question also formulated in the introduction.

– Second, in order to explain the processes of adaptation of certain policy models to ‘local specificities’, in future research it should be disclosed to what degree and in which respects learning is possible. Succinctly, this also means to know more about the adaptability and flexibility of institutional structures, an aspect which also could be taken over from the above mentioned approach to planning cultures.

– Third, mainly because of the strength of historically developed planning cultures the global mobilization and circulation of urban and planning policies will not completely lead to a kind of convergence or homogenization of governance structures.

– Fourth, and in conclusion, this means to elucidate the always socially contested processes of the production and reproduction of cities (Lefebvre, 1991), which is simultaneously based on ‘fixities’ and ‘mobilities’, more clearly.

Really understanding (but not explaining) changes in planning policies and urban governance more generally necessitates a theoretically well developed analytical framework, which is both sensitive to what is fixed and what is changeable or adaptable in historically produced governance arrangements. Inextricably linked to that, comparative urban and planning research needs a clear picture about the relation between structure, agency and space. Otherwise, it misses to fully reconstruct the processes of the (re-)production of cities or the making of cities in an increasingly interconnected world, and the context-dependency of urban governance change. As a final conclusion to this aspect and to this paper the inspiring words of John Friedmann (2005, p. 228) have to be mentioned:

It could be argued that the current era of globalization and the insertion of cities into the ‘space of flows’ of global finance, information, and cultural exchanges will eventually lead to a greater homogenization of practices, and that the profession of city and regional, or spatial planning will exhibit more and more common characteristics. But even if this were the case on the technical side, actual planning practices must still respond to the particular conditions under which they operate, conform to the prevailing political culture, accommodate to its institutional setting, adapt to limitation of resources for local development, battle with entrenched interests and traditions, and so gradually evolve its own national and even local style.

According to Novy, Coimbra-Swiatek and Lengauer (2013, p. 45), further conceptualizing the relation between structure, agency and space could only be done through ‘working with time-space dynamics [...] and relating structural dynamics (including power relations) to strategic and collective agency through institutional and cultural mediation’. In order to understand the interplay between fixity and motion involved in urban governance change the relation between actors adhering to different spatial scales, their practices and perceptions as well as interpretations, structures (institutional and discursive) and space has to be further developed on a theoretical and empirical level. Furthermore, the ‘making’ of cities has to be explored more precisely through a sober empirical analysis of urban planning cultures, their differences to policy and planning models downloaded from a global or European wide flow of policy and planning practices, and the processes as well as strategies of politically coping with these differences. Finally, on a meta-theoretical level this also means development a clearer conceptualization of a theory of urban politics, which is more space-and-place-sensitive and relational.

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