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Why do masterplans fail?

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Heather J. Campbell, Henry W. A. Hanson, Umberto Janin-Rivolin,
Klaus R. Kunzmann, Vojtech Novotny

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Why Do MasterPlans Fail?

Umberto Janin-Rivolin, *Umberto.JaninRivolin@fastwebnet.it*
University of Torino

In 1979 Aaron Wildavsky found evidence enough to assert: "If planning were judged by results, that is, by whether like followed the dictates of the plan, then planning has failed everywhere it has been tried. Nowhere are plans fulfilled. No one, it turns out, has the knowledge to predict sequences of actions and reactions across the realm of public policy and no one has the power to compel obedience" (Wildavsky A.B., Speaking Truth to Power: the Art and Craft of Policy Analysis, Transaction, London 1979, p. 8).

Thirty years later we have to admit that planning systems are in general still addressed to make spatial projects conform to a plan, by assigning use rights in land through legally binding zoning maps and implementation rules, as it was possible to predict and impose sequences of actions and reactions in the realm of urban development. The cultural ideals of hierarchy and of dirigisme, based on the assumption that the State is the keeper of the collective interest, lie at the root of such 'conforming' setting of modern planning systems. Neither the reiterated evidence of failure nor the acknowledgment that collective interest is usually the primary victim of planning ineffectiveness have led to conceive true alternatives so far.

However, the exception of few countries where plans are non-binding and public authorities can evaluate which specific development projects are deserving new land use rights (the UK is one rare but prominent example), on the one hand, and the increasing experience of EU urban and spatial development programmes implying responsible evaluation mechanisms for co-funding projects, on the other, might let reflect about a possible model of 'performing' planning system.

Whether and how the public power has the right to 'compel obedience' across the realm of spatial development remains questions crucial to this track topic.

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