

Why do masterplans fail?

Original

Why do masterplans fail? / JANIN RIVOLIN YOCCOZ, Umberto. - STAMPA. - (2010), pp. 6-6. (Intervento presentato al convegno Landscapes of planning tenutosi a Prague nel 8-12 February 2010).

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2307451 since:

Publisher:

Czech University of Life Sciences

Published

DOI:

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Publisher:

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
Faculty of Environmental Sciences

Landscapes of Planning

Guessing What It Is All About...

4th AESOP YoungAcademics' Meeting Prague 2010

Kostelec n. Černými lesy

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Why Do MasterPlans Fail? Umberto Janin-Rivolin, <i>Umberto.JaninRivolin@fastwebnet.it</i>	6
What Can Be Termed 'Good' in Planning? Heather Campbell, <i>H.J.Campbell@sheffield.ac.uk</i>	7
Does Heritage Matter? Klaus R. Kunzmann, <i>klaus.kunzmann@udo.edu</i>	8
Can Planning Be Eco-Logic? Henry Hanson, <i>HHanson@hdg-ltd.com</i>	9
Affective relationships with a place in the participatory approaches: a new tool Nathalie Audas, <i>NathalieAudas@msn.com</i>	10
What role for planning in the Western Balkans? Cyril Blondel, <i>CyrBlondel@yahoo.fr</i>	11
Urban design and the planning system in Izmir Isin Can, <i>laxic2@nottingham.ac.uk</i>	12
Utilization of Archeological Landscape in the Processes of Urban Planning. Experience of Turkey – Case of Izmir Ayşegül Altınörs Çırak, <i>Aysegul.Altinors@deu.edu.tr</i>	13
Learning from urban growth management in the Pacific Northwest. A Danish perspective. Christian Fertner, <i>ChFe@life.ku.dk</i>	14
Immigration and territories. The Italian case beyond social cohesion rhetoric Carlotta Fioretti, <i>Carlotta_Fioretti@hotmail.com</i>	15
Regional cultural heritage: new vision for preservation in Sardinia (Italy) Chiara Garau, Valentina Pavan, , <i>CGarau@unica.it</i>	16
Conservation under occupation: conflictual powers, meanings and values Feras Hammami, <i>Feras.Hammami@infra.kth.se</i>	17
Analyzing the costs of Urban Sprawl in China –A Case Study of Jiangning County, Nanjing City, China Ti Feng, Adaku Ebenezer, <i>erma1014@gmail.com</i>	18
Public participation in response to some problems of regional planning in the Czech Republic Eva Klápšťová, Petr Klápště, <i>evaklapstova@centrum.cz</i>	19
Formal planning system vs. informal planning: three cases from Slovenia Simon Kusar, <i>simon.kusar@ff.uni-lj.si</i>	20
"Yet Another Plan?" Management Plans for Natura 2000 Sites as Non-Compulsory Conservation Measures to Implement the Habitats Directive in Sardinia. Sabrina Lai, <i>SabrinaLai@unina.it</i>	21
Institutionalising insurgent claims....Towards 'good' planning? Melissa Garcia Lamarca, <i>Melissa@sustainabilitysolutions.ca</i>	22
Toward Joint Relationship of Green Infrastructure and Urban Regeneration in Historical Urban Quarter Ting-I Lee, Philip Bell and Adam Barker, <i>Ting-i.Lee@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk</i>	23

The landscape as a planning issue.

Landscape perception as a tool: limits, perspectives and potentialities through an experimentation in a contemporary mountain landscape
Cristina Mattiucci, *Cristina.Mattiucci@ing.unitn.it* 24

Planning for Sustainable Development after Earthquake (with overview of Bam Experience)

Manoochehr Moazzami, Azadeh Aghalafiti, *ManoochehrMoazzami@yahoo.com* 26

Knowledge – the key element for “good” planning

Verena Peer, *Verena.Peer@boku.ac.at* 27

Complex hazardous events: which challenges for future urban planning policies in Italy?

Andrea Profice, *Andrea.Profice@unina.it* 28

Creating a theory for effective citizen action in plotically challenging landscapes

Antonio Raciti, *AntonioRaciti@gmail.com* 29

The Future of Historical City Centers in the Globalization Era

Naema Rezaee, Asmae Rabiei, Mina Fallahzadegan, *NRezaee76@yahoo.com* 30

Contested space: management of public space in case of London’s historic markets

Sang-Hee Kim, *popicon127@hotmail.com* 31

Voting on Good Transport?

Just Sustainability after the Greater Manchester TIF Referendum
Graeme Sherriff, *Graeme.Sherriff@manchester.ac.uk* 32

Integrated urban development strategies

Andrea Suvák, *Suvak@rkk.hu* 33

Planning without Plan: Process Design and Participative Urban Development at Musicon

Nicolla Tollin, *Tollin@catunesco.upc.edu* 34

Integration of urban planning and transportation planning under the canopy of a holistic plans?

An argument for procedure over plans
Patrik Tornberg, *Patrik.Tornberg@infra.kth.se* 35

Exhibition center development in Europe: a multidimensional historical analysis

Rick Vermeulen, *RVermeulen@fmg.uva.nl* 36

Is there an effective way to preserve and develop China’s urban landscapes in contemporary China?

Chengzhi Yin, *zgyz001@hotmail.com* 37

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.



Name/ Název publikace:	Landscapes of Planning, book of abstracts of 4th AESOP YA Meeting
Eds./ Editoři:	Heather J. Campbell, Henry W. A. Hanson, Umberto Janin-Rivolin, Klaus R. Kunzmann, Vojtech Novotny
Grafics/ Grafika	Vojtech Novotny
Publisher/ Vydavatel:	Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
Printed/ Tisk:	DTP Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences
Copies/ Náklad:	100
Pages/ Počet stran:	43
Published/ Rok vydání	2010
ISBN:	978-80-213-2049-9