

Hungarian Urban Planning and the Challenge of Integrated Planning A Sociological Analysis¹⁶

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Abstract

The paper takes the first steps to analyse changes concerning Hungarian urban planning in the recent years, focussing on the implementation and challenges of the integrated urban planning in Hungary in the light of planning traditions, arguing for the need of a better understanding of such traditions to understand current planning practices. It provides a sociological analysis on the effects of the political and economic context on urban planning, with specific regard to public participation, in different eras, like the state socialism, the period following the 1989/1990 transition and recent years. It presents how urban planning operated in very different and changing 'faces of power', under continuously strong external resource-dependency with varying key agents. It discusses the constraints of public participation rooted in contextual factors and in planning traditions. Finally, it also summarises existing research and presents hypotheses for a recently launched new research project.

Keywords: urban planning, integrated urban development, public participation

16 The paper was written in the framework of a research funded by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH) grant number 124940 (The sociology of urban planning – urban planning and society).

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I. Introduction

Integrated urban planning is widely perceived as a solution for urban challenges posed by globalised economy, environmental and social problems versus fragmented governance, and also as a methodology to handle the

complexity, ever-changing nature and inter-relatedness of problems, and the need for flexible and coordinated responses between policy fields and actors (HOLDEN, M. 2012)¹⁹. In the

19 The same source provides comprehensive critical examination of the concept of integrated urban planning.

European Union cohesion policy, principles of integrated urban planning – defined in the Leipzig Charter as the co-ordination of spatial, sectoral and temporal aspects of key areas of urban policy, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and the pooling of knowledge and financial resources (EC 2007) – obtained a key role in guiding urban development in the past decade. In Hungary, principles of integrated urban planning were first introduced in planning practice in the 2007–2013 programming period. Development of Integrated Urban Development Strategies – based on guidelines and methodology provided by the relevant ministry, with professional guidance and quality control exercised by the ministry – became compulsory for cities to apply for Structural Funds for urban rehabilitation. Thus, the principles of integrated urban development were first introduced with a strong intervention focus (TERRA STÚDIÓ 2016). Later, such strategies were formally incorporated in the planning system, municipalities became legally obliged to develop Integrated Settlement Development Strategies. Related to the 2014–2020 EU programming period,

municipalities had to revise their integrated development strategies.

The paper takes the first steps to analyse changes concerning Hungarian urban planning in the recent years, focussing on the implementation of, and challenges posed by integrated urban planning in Hungary in the light of planning traditions, arguing for the need of a better understanding of such traditions to understand current planning practices. First, it overviews key changes in politics and economy, as the most significant ‘systemic powers’ affecting urban planning in different eras: state socialism, the period following the 1989/1990 transition and recent years. Then it provides a sociological analysis on the effects of such different political and economic contexts on urban planning, with specific regard to public participation, presenting existing research and further hypotheses for a recently launched new research project²⁰. For the pre-2010 period the analysis is based on a series of research conducted in the framework of

²⁰ Research funded by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH), grant number 124940 (The sociology of urban planning – urban planning and society).

the Urban and Regional Research Centre of ELTE, Faculty of Social Sciences (focussing mostly on physical planning), for the post-2010 period it uses literature review.

II. Political and Economic Context of Urban Planning in Different Eras

Systemic powers affecting urban planning underwent significant changes in the past decades. In the state socialist era urban planning operated in a political framework characterised by a subtle party-state structure with complex horizontal and vertical, as well as cross-cutting dependency strands (CSANÁDI M. 1995). Policymaking and public administration was strongly centralised, local autonomy limited, with local councils acting mostly as local bodies of the state administration. The economic framework was that of a planned economy based on state ownership, with the state as key actor of local development²¹. Following 1989/1990 the political

and economic context changed dramatically, characterised by plural democracy, a system of local governments with strong autonomy in the local level accompanied by fragmented administration and service provision, privatisation – including the privatisation and fragmentation of many planning organisations – and the development of a market economy, an increasing role of EU funds in spatial development and local municipalities ‘back in space’ (NEMES NAGY J. 1997), exposed to global economic trends. Most recently, the political and economic context of planning is subject to further changes, with renewed centralisation of administration and service provision, a changing set of key private actors (including national and international actors), the emergence of project-based redistribution with a determining role of EU funds in spatial development, and the rise of the ‘project class’ and also of ‘recombinant’ redistribution (KOVÁCH I. 2017), as well as the increased activity of the state as a specific force in spatial development through large investments.

21 Both the political and economic context was subject to smaller changes in the decades of state socialism, for the purposes of the present paper we summarise their key features.

III. The Impact of Changing Systemic Powers on Urban Planning

III.1. Politics

As our summary shows, Hungarian urban planning operated in very different and changing ‘faces of power’²² in the past decades. Under state socialism, the autonomy of urban planning was determined by factors such as the institutional embeddedness of large state planning companies in the subtle party-state structure, the strong procedural and substantial definiteness arising from political programs such as mass housing construction, and the lingering bargaining mechanisms of the planned economy (KŐSZEGHY L. 2007). Nevertheless, compared to the post-1989/1990 period some of the interviewed urban planners (retrospectively) evaluated the influence of politics on their work as having been less. A proposed explanation for this is partly the lack of planners’ involvement in political debates regarding the framework conditions of planning (in other words, planners were deprived of involvement in such

decisions thus in related political conflicts), partly the possibility of planners with good knowledge of formal and informal power relations to assert some political influence (KŐSZEGHY L. 2007). Following 1989/1990 planners had to face the fact that they inevitably work ‘in the face of power’ (FORESTER, J. 1989) – a plethora of interest groups, conflicts, local arenas often mirroring national party politics, also subject to temporal changes. They had to define themselves in such a political arena to be effective, yet, they still sustained specific opportunities for influence based on their professional knowledge (e.g. through guiding the conceptual framework, the definition of key problems and alternatives for lay politicians). Recent research regarding urban planning practice (TERRA STÚDIÓ 2016) shows that local government staff and institutions are the most active actors of planning processes, with a significantly lower level of activity by local entrepreneurs and neighbouring settlements as well as limited public participation (see also below). According to our hypothesis, to be tested in our recently launched research, recent centralisation processes further rearrange the power relations in urban planning, by posing a need for further vertical co-ordination

²² Following the concept of ‘face of power’ by Forester (FORESTER, J. 1989).

they may render integrated urban planning more difficult, however their actual effects strongly depend on the cooperativeness of centralised bodies.

III.2. Economy

Urban planning practice in the past decades shows a continued, strong resource-dependence, with varying key agents. Prior to 1989/1990, the task of urban planning, operating within a planned economy based on state ownership, was mainly the setting of a spatial framework for the state-controlled redistributive economy. Being such, it had only very limited arena for independent actions. A strong pressure on physical planning to adjust itself to state-driven development planning led, *inter alia*, to over-planning, frequent alteration and ignorance of plans. Further factors determining urban planning can also be identified, such as a significant quantitative pressure, and a strong dependence of the whole planning system on the construction industry (KŐSZEGHY L. 2010). In the post-1989/1990 era the strong dependence of physical planning on development driven by external agents did not change, but instead of state sources, now settlements competed for private, and to increasing extent, EU-

sources. The effects of private economy on planning varied, strongly related to respective local governments' strategies, based not only on the economic attractiveness of the certain locality but also on local decision-makers' attitudes (CSANÁDI G. et al. 2012). Empirical research in the end of the 2000s (KŐSZEGHY L. – ONGJERTH R. 2009) shows more differentiated local strategies regarding economic actors compared to the beginning of the decade. However, according to planning experts' perception, economic actors possessed excessive powers in planning, and many of those interviewed declared 'keeping them at check' an important task for planners. Planners' dilemmas regarding this issue somewhat reflect international planning theory discourses concerning the 1970s, the era of neoliberal economic policies (e.g. FAINSTEIN, S. S. – FAINSTEIN, N. 1997). Recent research on the practice of urban planning shows the effects of continued strong resource-dependency, this time from EU funds (BARTHA GY. 2009; FÖLDI Zs. 2009; TERRA STÚDIÓ 2016). Integrated development strategies are often used instrumentally, solely for resource acquisition, sectoral integration is the highest where requirements explicitly enforce it (in case of urban rehabilitation), substantial requirements are

formally met but implementation is uneven (e.g. the implementation of anti-segregation plans are often ignored, in case of rehabilitation projects the implementation of ‘hard’ components are emphasized while ‘soft’ components are rather implemented as a ‘compulsory exercise’) (TERRA STÚDIÓ 2016). Our hypothesis for further research is that due to local governments’ continued resource scarcity, resource-dependency continues to be a key feature of Hungarian urban planning, and besides the attraction of EU funds – which also serve as a potential source of ‘recombinant redistribution’ thus gaining additional importance – local governments develop specific strategies for attracting new types of private investors. Also, according to our hypothesis, the increased development activity of the state through large investments, and the related negotiation practices may challenge the logic of integrated planning both procedurally and substantially, however, such effects are still mediated by local governments’ ability for strategic planning. We further hypothesise that the ‘project class’, as a new power with specialised knowledge, specific values and interests has independent and specific impact on the procedure and substance of urban planning.

III.3. Public participation

Prior to 1989/1990 public participation appeared only on a very limited scale in Hungarian urban planning: in planning-related thinking the issue was present since the 1970s, but in practice it was exercised only with ‘security brakes’, measures that guarantee that the views of the ‘participating public’ do not alter from the official standpoint. Both in planning theory and practice, public participation became a significant issue only after 1989/1990. However empirical results show that public participation in the physical planning of cities appeared in a strongly professional and bureaucratic planning system, at a relatively late stage of the planning process (by when the conceptual framework of problem definitions and preferred solutions was already set, significant resources were invested, therefore other actors were disinterested in major changes). It posed a ‘high threshold’ for participation, offering chances for participation for only those NGOs and residents who were able to adjust themselves to these circumstances, obtaining relevant knowledge and skills for participation. (No significant adjustment mechanisms from the

‘system’s side’ were detected, such efforts usually derived from personal attitudes of planners and local officials). This was one of the grounds of NGOs’ professionalisation and coalition building efforts, and also of concerns related to the poor chances of lay citizens, especially disempowered population groups, but also of non-professional NGOs to participate (KŐSZEGHY L. 2010). Examining the Hungarian practice in different models of public participation (including Sherry Arnstein’s ‘ladder of citizen participation’ (ARNSTEIN, S. 1969/2000), and other gradual and more complex models) we argue for the utilisation of models which are able to handle a differentiated set of stakeholders, in different relations with the power centre, bearing in mind that such relations may change over time, such as the concentric circle model developed by Karl Maier. (MAIER, K. 2001; CSANÁDI G. et al. 2010) Communication in Hungarian urban planning processes can rather be interpreted in a Foucauldian than a Habermasian model, partly linked to its aforementioned strong bureaucratic regulation and

the lateness of public participation (FLYVBERG, B. – RICHARDSON, T. 2002; KŐSZEGHY L. 2010). Recent research (BARTHA GY. 2009; FÖLDI Zs. 2009; TERRA STÚDIÓ 2016) shows a continued low level of public participation, with participation still strongly linked to plans (not continuous) and a scarce use of effective participation methodology. As to more recent changes, according to our research hypothesis, the process and language of urban planning is still determined by professionals with a lack of effective intermediators, resulting in weak NGO and resident involvement, and especially the underrepresentation of interest groups with weak potential for interest articulation.

IV. Closing Remarks

The paper intended to highlight that current planning practices cannot be understood without understanding the changing context of planning in the past decades and its effects on planning traditions. Also, such an understanding may also help to change planning practices to make urban planning more integrated.

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