

Rezension / Book review

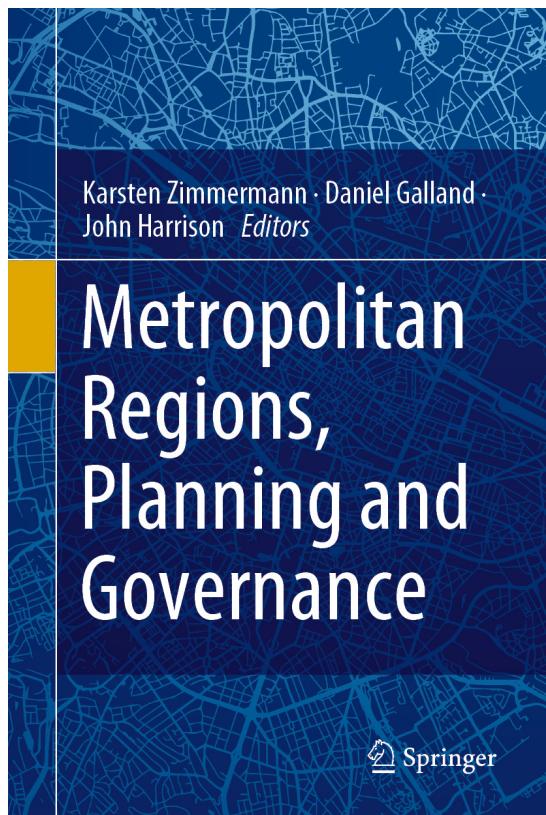
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Book Review: Zimmermann, Karsten; Galland, Daniel; Harrison, John (eds.) (2020): Metropolitan Regions, Planning and Governance. Cham: Springer-Verlag, 270 pages

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At a time when more people than ever live in cities, metropolitan regions – as functionally condensed spatial urban-rural configurations – have gained a lot of attention.

First, as a spatial phenomenon, the causes and transformations of which are scientifically and empirically analysed. In addition, however, in a normative political-planning context, in which changes should be directed and managed. In metropolitan regions, planning and political control face specific challenges. Metropolitan regions are often not administratively delimited areas, but have developed over time through functional interrelations. Thus, the spheres of responsibility of the various institutions are frequently not clarified, and disparities or parochial thinking can prevent effective regional politics and planning within the often large regions.

The editors of the book "Metropolitan Regions, Planning and Governance" have set themselves the goal of illuminating current planning and governance processes in metropolitan regions. They furthermore aim to develop an analytical framework, revealing different facets of current planning and governance processes and helping to analyse and understand changes in metropolitan regions. The second goal in particular should be emphasized in this assessment of the book. The goal and its successful implementation distinguish the present volume from a series of books that also deal with planning and governance processes in metropolitan regions.

The analytical framework (TTP framework) comprises three dimensions: thematic (T), temporal (T) and phronetic (P). The thematic approach (T) aims to identify connections between a large number of drivers of metro-

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opolitan change. The temporal approach (T) incorporates historical context to deepen understanding and analysis of the contemporary situation. The third approach, called the phronetic approach (P), relates to developing a comprehensive understanding of what should be done and how power relations and values should be challenged to achieve “alternative metropolitan futures” (Galland/Harrison/Tewdwr-Jones 2020: 245).

The four thematic approaches (Institutions and Institutional Shifts, Policies and Ideas, Spatial Imaginaries, Planning Styles) enable specific perspectives on planning and governance processes. For each of these thematic approaches, aspects are mentioned which can be used to understand changes in “post-war metropolitan planning and governance” (Galland/Harrison 2020: 4). For the thematic approach “Institutions and Institutional Shift”, for example, changes from “Governmentalized” to “Less governmentalized”, from “Uniformity” to “Piece-meal”, from “Promoting” to “Enabling” and from “Public” to “Public-private” are highlighted. The selection of the four thematic approaches is explained by the authors stating that a significant proportion of the literature deals with at least one of these approaches.

The four thematic approaches also divide the book into four parts. After the introductory first chapter, explaining the analytical framework, there are four parts, each dealing with one of the thematic approaches. The book closes with a fifth part, consisting of a concluding chapter addressing the question “What Is Metropolitan Planning and Governance for?” This final chapter reflects on the application of the TTP analytical framework. The application of the TTP analytical framework is discussed in the context of different scales and the framework is assigned to the meso level. While on the macro level framework conditions showing a generality about time and space are analysed (e.g. globalization, capitalism, urbanization), the micro level focuses on comparative approaches and empirical case studies emphasizing differences in space and time. The TTP analytical framework, however, combines these two scale levels at the meso level by focusing on generalizable aspects of specific, empirical changes.

The book is easy to understand and clearly structured. The development of an analytical framework for planning and governance in metropolitan regions is successfully implemented. The well-organized structure allows the book to be read as an introduction (for students, for example) or parts of the book to be used to deepen the various thematic approaches (e.g. in research work). The individual chapters also contain regional case studies, illustrating the analytical perspectives.

The attempt to create a link at the meso level between the macro level (globalization etc.) and the micro level (empirical analysis of case studies focusing on differences) succeeds well with the TTP analytical framework.

Against the background of the very convincing strengths of this publication, however, one weakness of the approach should also be mentioned here. The two Ts (the thematic and temporal approaches) are presented convincingly in the book and worked out in the chapters. In my view, the phronetic approach (P) remains too diffuse – for an eponymous approach. This approach is not further elaborated in the chapters and is distinctively mentioned only in the first and in the final chapters. It remains unclear what the specific advantage of this approach for the analytical framework is. The final chapter states that “a phronetic approach is essential for developing a rigorous understanding of what should be done, and how relations of power and values must be challenged to achieve alternative metropolitan futures” (Galland/Harrison/Tewdwr-Jones 2020: 245). The idea of enlightenment (practical wisdom) based on scientific analysis and contributing to the implementation of an alternative future is somewhat reminiscent of the phase of planning euphoria in Germany in the 1960s, where – based on scientific calculations and projections – the intention was to develop one comprehensive planning solution. Doesn’t the question “what should be done” depend on the perspective and logic of the different actors? What kind of wisdom can summarize different logics and the associated desired futures in one alternative future?

The phronetic approach thus outlines one of the central challenges in planning and governance processes very abstractly, however, there is a lack of specification. For example, in the thematic approach “Planning styles” a change from “Regulatory planning” to “Strategic spatial planning” is mentioned. The evaluation of this one change is likely to differ between actors, ranging from an assessment of “Regulatory planning” as outdated, slow, inflexible and bureaucratic on the one hand, to an assessment of “Strategic spatial planning” as ineffective in control and facing protection issues on the other hand. It would be interesting to discuss how the phronetic approach and related practical wisdom relate to conflicting target constellations like the one outlined. Further elaboration of the phronetic approach would certainly be interesting.

References

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