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Cooperative planning



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Cooperative planning is the result of a changed perception of the state, whereby hierarchical administrative action is supplemented by cooperative elements. An essential characteristic of cooperative planning is coordination through the reconciliation of interests and compromise. This requires skills in moderation and process management to complement the qualification profile of urban and spatial planning.

1 Terminology

What is the difference between cooperative planning, communicative planning and ▷ *Public participation*? How can cooperative planning be distinguished from regional cooperation (▷ *Cooperation, intermunicipal and regional*)? The questions indicate that the terms are in part rather similar, and the demarcation is not always clear.

Cooperative planning comprises forms of ▷ *Planning* that are characterised by the cooperation of various public and private stakeholders in the planning process on a more or less equal footing. The aspect of equal opportunities or of being 'on equal footing' suggests that cooperation is based on the idealistic assumption that no participant has a higher or lower standing than the other participants. This distinguishes cooperation from other forms of communicative planning, for example, information or ▷ *Participation*, where policymakers and the administration (▷ *Administration, public*) are generally in a position of greater power compared to other stakeholders. In the case of cooperative planning, on the other hand, the stakeholders consider themselves to be on an equal footing; this means that decisions can only be taken by majority or – depending on the agreement – by consensus (Bischoff/Selle/Sinning 2005).

Cooperative planning is not a new concept; in fact, the administration's activities offer numerous forms of cooperation, e.g. in the form of preliminary negotiations, arrangements, agreements or public law contracts with project developers. These forms serve to shape sovereign administrative processes (Kostka 2001). Cooperation has, however, taken on a new quality with the evolution of ▷ *Spatial planning* towards ▷ *Spatial development* and is more closely associated with the implementation of plans. To this end, it is necessary that the stakeholders concerned take part, because hierarchical steering is no longer sufficiently effective in view of the growing countervailing power of those concerned, and because changed views of the responsibilities and role of the state have made the public sector dependent on resources contributed by the non-public sector. This gave rise to new forms of cooperative administrative action for spatial development (Benz 1994).

Variants of cooperative planning can, therefore, be distinguished according to (1) the cooperating stakeholders, (2) the phase in the planning process at which the cooperation takes place, (3) the level of action – neighbourhood, municipal, regional, state or federal level – at which the cooperation takes place, and (4) the forms and methods that are used (Bischoff/Selle/Sinning 2005). As far as the cooperating stakeholders are concerned, there are key players or protagonists and team players or participants. In most cases, the public sector, i.e. the authority traditionally responsible for spatial planning, is the key player. The impulse to modify traditional planning processes towards cooperation and to involve other stakeholders in a spirit of partnership usually stems from the public administration and/or policymakers in order to respond to changing circumstances, e.g. to legitimise projects, to activate private stakeholders or to collaborate on public spaces or tasks (▷ *Public space*). However, this also indicates that the public administration and policymakers do not necessarily have to act as a homogeneous public stakeholder in cooperative planning processes. The team players are members of interest groups from the economic or commercial sphere, science and civil society. As far as the economic and commercial sphere is concerned, they may also include businesses and companies, as well as chambers, guilds or business associations, trade unions and employee representatives. The

sciences are represented by universities and research institutions located in the respective planning area or which have a link to this area or to the planning task in question. In the civil society sphere, the populace may be directly invited to cooperate and participate. However, cooperation can also relate to organised initiatives and associations, such as environmental organisations, social associations or citizens' initiatives/action groups.

Looking at the progression of a cooperative planning process, cooperation can occur at various stages. In analogy to early-stage public participation, forms of cooperation can be employed before the actual formal planning process gets underway. But cooperation is also possible during the discussion or critical review of the plan, or at later stages during the implementation of the plan, e.g. when alliances for the implementation or majorities to support planning or individual projects are needed.

As far as the levels are concerned, cooperative planning is conceivable at all levels of action, i.e. both at the municipal and regional level, and at the state, federal or European level, and has become an established feature at the various levels in recent decades for a broad range of themes. As in the case of civic participation, a broad range of experience from the cities and regions is available, as more specific planning tasks must be accomplished at this level and the populace as a cooperative partner can be reached directly and more easily. At the level of the Federal State Spatial Planning Programmes, however, there have been at best initial attempts at cooperation; if innovative processes are tested at this level, they are rather forms of public participation. At the state, federal or European level, cooperation involves primarily organised stakeholders.

2 Theoretical classification

The notion of cooperative planning is best understood with reference to explanatory models from the social and planning sciences. In the field of political science, cooperative administrative action relates to considerations on the changed understanding of the state, where the prevailing hierarchical model of state control and steering has been expanded by cooperative elements (Axelrod 1984; Benz 1994). It was mainly discussions about failures on the part of the state (Scharpf 1991) that formed the starting point, turning the spotlight on non-hierarchical forms of steering, which are the subject of reflections on governance and interaction theory (▷ *Governance*).

In regard to the constellation of stakeholders in cooperative action, different patterns can be distinguished from an innovation theory perspective (Carayannis/Campbell 2012). While cooperative planning approaches used to involve primarily the public sector, partners from the commercial sector and the scientific community (the 'triple helix' model), cooperation also involving civil society (the 'quadruple helix' model) has now become the rule in many cases. A dilemma may result, however, when cooperative negotiation processes collide with tasks of public interest (▷ *Common good*) undertaken by the public sector, or if the competencies of the local councils or parliaments, e.g. in regard to budget law, are concerned. In this case, decision-making powers may be reserved for public stakeholders, a notion which is also called the 'shadow of hierarchy' (Scharpf 1991; Kilper 1999; Börzel 2008). In addition, there is a risk of blurred interests in the context of cooperative planning, e.g. when public stakeholders are subject to the influence of private partners ('agency capture') (cf. Knieling/Othengrafen/Preising 2012).

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In the academic planning literature, cooperative planning is closely associated with the ‘communicative turn in planning’, which is derived from Habermas’s (1981) theory of communicative action, and the associated shift in paradigms towards communicative and development-oriented planning forms (Healey 1992; Innes 1996; Selle 2006a, 2006b). This gave rise to the development of new processes for planning communication, with a greater focus on cooperative elements in addition to the established forms of information and participation (Diller 2016). This change is part of an overarching process, in the course of which spatial planning has expanded or modified towards spatial development (cf. Table 1).

Table 1: From spatial planning to spatial development

From spatial planning ...	to spatial development
In regard to the function of planning	
from the regulatory function	to the development function
from safeguarding locations	to safeguarding locations to ensure quality of life
from the development of settlements	to the development of settlements and open spaces
In regard to behavioural patterns of planning	
from technical planning	to the moderation of participatory decisions
from interventionist planning	to cooperative planning
In regard to methods of steering	
from control through law	to negotiations and paradigmatic steering

Source: the author based on Knieling/Fürst/Danielzyk 2003: 17

Cooperative planning can in this regard draw inspiration from the discussion about coordination, which is one of the core functions of spatial planning (Fürst 2014). Coordination can take place in a hierarchical manner. In spatial planning, however, this approach frequently reaches its limits due to the comparatively weak steering capacity that spatial planning provides. Non-hierarchical methods of steering can thus offer a useful addition. However, in any event, spatial coordination needs influence or power to motivate the coordinating stakeholders to move towards joint action and to build a positive cooperation culture. Persuasive, utilitarian and

normative power, as well as contextual steering, e.g. through an exchange of resources or in the form of instructions based on planning and approval powers, can contribute to this. In line with this trend, the notion of planning has changed, and there is increasingly talk of ‘coordination managers’, whose sphere of competence includes cooperative forms of spatial planning and development.

3 Cooperative planning in practice

Within the field of planning, numerous forms and processes have been developed in recent decades, which satisfy the requirements of cooperation in different ways. The overview in Table 2 should not be understood to be conclusive, as new forms and processes are continuously being developed.

Table 2: Forms of cooperative planning

Forms and processes of cooperative planning
- Advocacy planning
- Workshops
- Forums
- Round tables
- Mediation/conflict mediation
- Open space
- Intermediary organisation
- Local partnerships

Source: the author based on Bischoff/Selle/Sinning 2005: 172 et seq.; Knieling/Fürst/Danielzyk 2003

The mediation conducted during the extension of Frankfurt/Rhein-Main Airport, the arbitration processes in connection with ‘Stuttgart 21’ (the major rebuilding of Stuttgart’s main train station), forums and round tables as part of the conflict management for the railway routes in Northern Germany (hinterland connection of the Fehrman Belt fixed link or the Y-route section between Hanover, Bremen and Hamburg), mediation processes for environmental conflicts (land fills, gypsum mining, etc.) as well as various types of forums and workshops as part of municipal and regional development strategies are prominent examples which feature elements of cooperative planning to a greater or lesser extent.

The forms and processes are consistently characterised by the fact that they create a framework in which negotiation and decision-making processes can be conducted in a cooperative manner, i.e. with the stakeholders involved being on an equal footing. In shaping the process, there is some room for discretion, e.g. as regards the composition of the stakeholders, the publicity of the process concerned, the objective (shaping opinions, decision-making), the binding nature of the results or the role of external moderation and/or mediation (▷ *Moderation, mediation*). The individuality of the forms is emphasised by the fact that diverse methods and techniques may be used to shape each process (i.a. Bischoff/Selle/Sinning 2005: 205 et seq.).

4 Conclusions and discussion

In line with the modernisation of administrative action towards non-hierarchical forms of steering, a change in spatial planning towards the increased importance of cooperative planning has been noted for some years now. Spatial planning is striving to fulfil its coordination mandate more effectively by organising the cooperation of stakeholders more constructively and aiming for positive rather than negative coordination.

Cooperative planning, however, is exposed to the risk that the transition from the interests of the common good to particular private (commercial) interests ('corporate spatial strategy') can be indistinct (Knieling/Othengrafen/Preising 2012). Hence, cooperative planning must ensure that it does not turn into a Pandora's box, which grants advantages to self-serving interests at the expense of the general public. For this reason, transparency about potential interfaces between public and private stakeholders can prevent unilateral influence or advantages. More extensive forms of formalised cooperation with private stakeholders in municipal or regional steering bodies, on the other hand, should be viewed with a certain measure of criticism, as they may entail the risk of 'agency capture', i.e. undue influence being exercised on the institutions by the stakeholders to be coordinated.

A more fundamental criticism interprets cooperative planning as a strategy of the ruling elites, which favours the neoliberal model of society and thus the pursuit of economic interests rather than social concerns. As such, conflicting interests are integrated, but without granting them the necessary weight or influence (Roy 2015). In this way, cooperative planning and the corresponding governance strategies could contribute to a creeping evolution towards post-democratic structures that hollow out democratic structures and processes (Harvey 2005; Swyngedouw 2005).

In a more pragmatic sense, cooperative planning is limited in practice by a series of restrictions, e.g. a generally large and heterogeneous number of stakeholders, the limited power of the planning stakeholders in dealing with antagonistic stakeholders and interests, as well as weaknesses in regard to their own resources and qualifications. Efforts at the superordinate levels should therefore aim to eliminate the institutional weaknesses of spatial planning, e.g. by strengthening the formal planning function, and by providing adequate personnel resources or access to funding. In addition, spatial planning itself should expand its competencies and remit to include cooperative planning. This concerns in particular moderation and communication skills, which should be given a more important role in planning training. At the same time, public planning's understanding of its role is currently being challenged to the extent that cooperative

planning should be considered a responsibility of decision-makers to shape contemporary policies. This requires that public planning continues to professionalise communication with and between the decision-makers in spatial planning and development processes (Fürst 2014).

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