

Book Review

International Manual of Planning Practice

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International Manual of Planning Practice
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This new edition of the *International Manual of Planning Practice* (IMPP), unique on a number of aspects, builds on and expands the previous 2008 edition, providing new data and increasing the number of countries covered, 135 now and 101 in the 2008 edition, the result of an extended collaborative work of numerous contributors around the world and of an excellent coordination and synthesis by the editors. The book, published to mark the 50th anniversary of ISOCARP - International Society of City and Regional Planners, offers the most complete and updated overview of the context of planning, based on country descriptions, following a template defined by the editors, and on a comparison of planning systems around the world. From it emerges clearly a vision of planning systems and practices marked by diversity and rapid changes. It will be certainly a mandatory reference for all those interested in comparative planning studies worldwide and for anyone willing to learn about specific issues in planning practice in a wide range of countries in Africa, America, Asia, Pacific, and Europe. The book not only provides key and essential information regarding the structure of the spatial planning system in each country surveyed, highlighting the diversity in planning systems and in planning practices, as it also explores key themes confronting spatial planning: sustainability, governance, use of ICT, among other relevant dimensions for the study of planning. The communalities and the differences in planning systems and practices among the countries surveyed are examined and discussed in the book. This edition includes also a USB card with the country profiles, which will certainly prove useful.

The book is structured into two main parts. The first is an introductory essay - 'The world of planning and its future' (pp. 9-74), in which the editors offer an overview of the context of planning, similarities and differences found in planning systems and planning practices in these 135 countries, in different regions of the world. The second part - 'Planning systems at a glance' (pp. 76-219) traces briefly the current status of individual planning systems in each of the 135 countries examined.

In the first part - 'The world of planning and its future' - the editors show that despite the globalization process, economic, social and cultural processes are quite uneven worldwide, and that these differences have complex impacts in the planning process and in the respective outcomes. The essay is divided into three main sections. In section 1 ('Context of the spatial development process') the editors deal with geo-political transformations, economy and inequality, the changing role of

planning, recent evolution of planning and its context, shift of emphases within planning, and informal cities and planning responses. In section 2 ('Common ground of planning and practical and innovative departures') the editors refer what the countries have in common in terms of context, competence and institutional arrangements for planning. The third and last section of this introductory essay presents the conclusions. Planning tends to be primarily focused on urban areas, giving much less attention to rural areas, and being increasingly complex, planning systems tend to be ineffective in practice, leading to the idea that planning is in crisis, due to a series of barriers. Among other reasons, the lack of planning skills and education in numerous countries, the insufficient number of professional planners, and the scarce public resources applied in the planning field are in part responsible for the perceived inefficacy of planning in most of these countries.

In the second part of the manual - 'Planning systems at a glance' - the editors offer an analysis of planning issues with which the 135 countries surveyed in Africa (28), America (25), Asia and Pacific (34), and Europe (48) are confronted with and the extent to which their approaches to planning differ. Diversity emerges as a constant feature in all aspects surveyed in this study (e.g., extensive and rapid urban growth versus slow urban growth, or areas still predominately rural; spatial planning systems with different degrees of formality; or old and consolidated planning systems versus recent ones, among many other differences or dualities). For each of these main world regions considered, the book has a short introduction that deals with the following issues: independence and constitution; general characteristics of the continent (demography, economy and urbanization); administrative competences in planning; main laws related to planning; planning instruments and development control; sustainable governance; use of ICT; and planning practice. Each country in the respective continent is then described according to a common structure in five main sections, although in some cases there is no information for all points: general country information; planning framework; planning process; sustainability and governance; and planning system in practice. In other words, these country profiles provide an overview of the context of planning in each country, discuss the complex interrelationships between formal planning systems and planning practices, as well as the importance of informal development processes in these countries and the impact of the continuous transnational flow of planning ideas.

From these country descriptions emerges the idea, confirming previous evidence, that there are significant differences between the formal planning systems and the respective practices. It comes out also the idea that the context of planning changed in most of these countries, for instance, from traditional and hierarchical forms of government to networked governance, namely in the implementation stage of the planning process, accompanied by a general trend towards increasing decentralisation or devolution to sub-national tiers of government or political regionalization. Citizen participation in planning seems to continue below what is in the law in some if not in most of the countries surveyed. Concerns with the environment tended to increase and became a central focus in most planning systems. Linked with some of these less positive or negative patterns is the lack of adequate professional training, a fact also noted in many of these countries.

On the contrary, the evidence provided in the book reveals also a number of continuities with previous analysis of planning systems and practices. While the debate around the political or technical nature of planning seems to have moved in favour of a vision of planning as an inherently political endeavour, other dualisms in the planning debate seems to continue in similar terms as before. Common to many countries is the attempt to create or reinforce sub-national tiers of government, again an uneven process around the world as the evidence collected shows, with federal and unitary states revealing important differences in this respect. Public participation is a widely-accepted principle although its practice is far from acceptable in several cases examined in the book. National spatial planning and even supranational planning perspectives are increasingly seen as important and necessary components in spatial planning systems. In addition to these, many other issues remain open and are subjected to continuous debate, as is the case of the role and responsibility of planners and the effectiveness of citizen participation.

In sum, the book offers a unique and updated overview of planning systems worldwide. Confronted with so numerous changes and new trends in planning practice, it seems necessary to introduce also changes in planning education, in lifelong learning, among other reforms. For all these reasons, the *International Manual of Planning Practice* (IMPP) will be of interest for students, researchers and policy makers interested in comparative planning studies, including all those working in the field of urban e-planning.

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