Transformative spatial governance

New avenues for comprehensive planning in fragmented urban development

Özoğul, S.

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3. Conceptualising transformative spatial governance

3.1 Introduction

Recent years saw the emergence of heightened discussions in planning and governance literature surrounding transformation (Healey, 2018), transformative practices (Albrechts, 2010), transformability (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2012), transformative planning (Song, 2015), transformative planning practice (Steele, 2011), urban transformative capacity (Wolfram 2016), and transformative change in governance (Chaffin et al., 2016), to name a few. In one way or another, these accounts share a common dissatisfaction with neoliberalising conditions as a point of departure, which, among other things, led to growing discrepancies between social and spatial interventions, and deep contradictions in the governance of cities (Tasan-Kok and Baeten, 2012). A new body of emerging literature is created by scholars who aim for a radical transformation in existing planning and governance systems. As Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno (2018: 4) declare, “the transformative agenda is a modern term for structural change.” I criticise the fact that many accounts remain vague about the explicit meaning of structural change and lack operationalisation methods.

This chapter serves several purposes. It provides a synthesis of the recent but scattered literature on transformation, outlines differences and commonalities in employed approaches and uncovers the elements that scholars have highlighted that play crucial roles in the envisaged transformation itself. Furthermore, embedding myself in the existing discussions, I conceptualise my own notion of transformative spatial governance based on my understanding of structural change, with which I aim to capture institutional transformation in overarching spatial governance based on city-building endeavours as concrete area-based spatial governance activities. According to Hernes (1976), any model of structural change needs to account for three ‘levels of structures’, and I follow this differentiation to legitimise my approach.
The first level is the output structure which encapsulates the “output of a process in temporary equilibrium” (Hernes, 1976: 544). I equate my basic understanding of spatial governance as output structure. The second level represents the process structure, which accentuates the specific form of the process (ibid.) creating the output structure in the first place. I consider the coexistence of various city-building endeavours as process structure and employ an institutional perspective to move beyond their existence as an aggregation of actors and organisations to an analysis of the rules and patterns by which they interact. The third level is the parameter structure. Parameters govern the process and “take on definite values in concrete situations” (ibid.: 519). I approach parameters by focusing on elements of transformation that may play a role. Ultimately, structural change is “caused by a discrepancy between the extant structure and the processes which are responsible for creating that structure” (Ryder, 1964: 461 in Hernes, 1976: 518).

I begin this chapter by defining spatial governance and differentiating between governance in an analytical and empirical sense, while underscoring the crucial interplay between the built environment and social life. I then discuss the benefits of an institutional perspective to understand city-building endeavours and reflect on different neo-institutionalist schools of thought. This is followed by an overview of potential elements affecting processes through which overarching structures may change, as highlighted in existing literature on transformation. I conclude by delineating transformative spatial governance and emphasise the need for a more conscious, detailed and nuanced analyses of private sector participation in processes of transformation.

### 3.2 Defining spatial governance as ‘output structure’

Transformative spatial governance captures the interaction between city-building endeavours and spatial governance. In Hernes’s (1976) terms, I consider the latter as output structure, representing dominant governance arrangements at a particular moment in time. As ‘governance’ has different meanings in the literature, it requires some clarifications. Two of the most commonly adopted meanings of governance are analytical and empirical (Schmitt and Wiechmann, 2018). Indeed, both play a role in transformative spatial governance and are addressed in the context of this thesis, but it is essential to differentiate between the two. First and foremost, I use governance from an analytical perspective to understand “the process of co-ordinating actors, social groups, and institutions to attain particular goals discussed and defined collectively in fragmented, uncertain environments” (Le Galès, 2002: 15).

With the prefix spatial, I underscore the intricate relationships between social and built environments, and intend to encompass particularly those governance
processes that are affecting the linkage between social and spatial interventions. I follow theorisations which consider space as more than “the dead, the fixed, [...] the immobile” (Foucault, 1980: 177). Instead, as Martin, McCann and Purcell (2003: 113) argue, space is a “complicated set of interlocking physical and social relations, patterns, and processes.” I consider space on the one hand as structured and enacted by social actors, hence expressing power, and on the other hand as structuring human relationships, and hence producing power (Foucault, 1984).

The theoretical connection between power and space concretises when approaching spatial governance in its empirical sense, which is closely tied to the underlying rationale of this dissertation. It has been widely recognised that neoliberalisation mobilises urban space into a place of “market-oriented economic growth” (Sager, 2011: 149), and correspondingly influences spatial governance arrangements. In this respect, changing power relationships between actors and their consequences for urban development are a major concern in planning literature (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2019). Scholars discovered the changing relationships, particularly since the 1980s, with Harvey (1989) for instance discussing ‘entrepreneurial governance’ which emphasises the diminishing scope of state actors through the adoption of entrepreneurial strategies in urban development prominently. He argued that local state actors, who find themselves in constant competition with each other, increasingly adopt market principles, collaborate with real estate interests and take over the risks of private investments (ibid.). More recently, Allmendinger (2016) posed that planning in the English context has become part of ‘neoliberal spatial governance’ in which public sector planning serves as an instrument to facilitate economic growth targeted at the interests of a few rather than the many. Despite numerous academic analyses going in similar directions, as Adams and Tiesdell (2010) argue, the fact that planners are market-actors, is widely disregarded in spatial governance discussions and planning is still generally perceived “as opposed to the market” (Healey, 1992: 13).

Thus, while the main objective of spatial governance is to provide a neutral perspective on the diverse processes at hand, discussions on governance in its empirical sense give hints on its potential nature as output structure. The key position that is ascribed to private sector actors in spatial decision-making processes is generally connected to the disenfranchisement of social planning frameworks and the empowerment of those that enhance economic growth (Tasan-Kok and Baeten, 2012). It stands in stark contrast to the reconciliation of social policies and those that affect the built environments advocated, for instance, by spatial justice theorists (Harvey, 2009). In fact, this discrepancy represents a point of departure for most scholars who engaged with notions of transformation in planning and governance systems in recent
years. Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno (2018: 2), for example, lament that “the rollout of neoliberalism as hegemonic urban narrative privileges urban and regional competitiveness, mainly through the subordination of social policy to economic policy.” MacCallum et al. (2009: 1) start by discussing “the neoliberal réveil”, and Eraydin and Tasan-Kok (2012: 2) begin by addressing “increasing economic and social vulnerabilities in the neoliberal era.” Correspondingly, the importance of profound changes, fundamental regime shifts and counter-hegemonic practices are highlighted (Wolfram, 2016; Filion, Kramer and Sands, 2016; Chaffin et al., 2016; Song, 2015). According to Albrechts (2016: 5), “transformative practices must be imagined as being radically and structurally different from the present reality.”

Despite the frequent focus on transformative practices, many accounts target overarching governance arrangements by considering transformation in, for example, complex adaptive systems (de Roo and Rauws, 2012), socio-technical systems or governance regimes (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). Similarly, in my own understanding of transformative spatial governance, the focus lies on wider changes in spatial governance. This focus might raise questions concerning longstanding discussions on structure versus agency in social theory, but Hernes’s (1976) approach to macrostructures provides a constructive basis in this respect. He argues that macrostructures have two traits. First, a set of institutions which include everything from formal to informal norms and rules, reward structures to the “material structure in the form of tools, transportation system, products available, etc. - in short, it consists of structural constraints on available alternatives” (ibid.: 516). And second, it entails the aggregation of ‘choices of alternatives’ that are to some extent subject to conscious choices made by individuals, and to some extend unintended outcomes without obvious intentions (ibid.).

3.3 Adopting an institutional perspective on city-building endeavours as ‘process structure’

Hernes (1976) understands structural change as the discrepancy between output and process structure, which I adopt for transformative spatial governance to clarify my own approach. The problem with many existing notions of ‘transformation’ is that they are rather explicit in their objectives, but less clear in their operationalisation. Some scholars express explicit environmental objectives and foci, for example, on sustainability and climate change (Chaffin et al., 2016; Birkmann, Bach and Vollmer, 2012; Steele, 2011), while some focus more explicitly on unequal power relationships and community needs in urban development (Song, 2015; Healey, 2010; MacCallum et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2007). Others adopt broader frames such as Albrechts (2016: 4) who is concerned with “major challenges in Western societies and cities [...] ranging from... complexity (diversity, globalisation, change of production process)
problems of fragmentation, population aging, environmental issues”, or Healey (2010: 5), whose work concentrates on the “social project for shaping the development of places and their futures, to promote better and more sustainable conditions for the many.” Healey (2018) is among the few scholars who explicitly conceptualises her approach as ‘transformation in place governance’. According to Flyvbjerg (1996: 384), it is a common problem of planning theorists to “know where to they would like to go” but to be less explicit about the actual operationalisation.

In transformative spatial governance, city-building endeavours represent the process structure. As “cities are full of potentially disruptive social practices [...] transmit their properties to other practices” (Savini and Bertolini, 2019: 5), an institutional perspective to understanding city-building endeavours proves beneficial in generating insights on the process of change. According to March and Olsen (2006: 4), institutionalism is “a set of theoretical ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance and change”, with different neo-institutionalist schools of thought putting forward different perceptions on the role of actors in these processes.

The schools of thought can be broadly categorised into individualist and holistic approaches (Jessop, 2001). Individualists focus on how “emergent institutions react back on individual behaviour” (ibid.: 1215) and are often connected to ‘calculus’ explanations based on the logic of efficiency (Davoudi, 2018). Examples are normative institutionalism which considers institutional change as rule-bound, and rational choice institutionalism which is strongly tied to an institutional economic theory of behaviour in which individuals exhibit calculative behaviour (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Generally, the process of institutional change is considered as the result of collective choices (Kingston and Caballero, 2009) and the deliberate creation of institutional relations (Alexander, 2005).

Holists, on the other hand, rather seek to interpret “phenomena in terms of macro level laws, logics, functional needs, or other macro properties [...] how such macro properties affect institutions” (Jessop, 2001: 1215). They are often more closely related to cultural approaches (Davoudi, 2018), highlighting that institutional forms and practices are adopted for legitimacy in a “logic of social appropriateness rather than a logic of instrumentality” (Alexander, 2005: 212). Sociological institutionalism, for example, emphasises the role of cognition, discourses and symbolic meaning, and historic institutionalism considers change as more incremental and evolutionary, particularly accounting for unintended consequences (Kingston and Caballero, 2009).

The key difference between these collective choice and evolutionary perceptions
is “the selection process which determines which rules emerge” (Buitelaar, Lagendijk and Jacobs, 2007: 893). The former poses that change can be consciously and collectively induced through a collectively organised approach transforming rules, while in the latter “new rules of behaviours (mutations), which may be either randomly or deliberately generated, undergo some kind of decentralised selection process” (ibid.). However, as Buitelaar, Lagendijk and Jacobs (2007) argue, in planning practice this differentiation is difficult to do, as in reality a mix of both forms probably occurs, for instance with centralised legislative changes on the one hand, and adoptions of specific sets of behaviour in a decentralised way on the other. Following this argument, and while considering different approaches and neo-institutionalist schools of thought as helpful to reflect on processes at hand, I decided not to limit transformative spatial governance to either a collective choice or evolutionary approach.

Rather, my intention is to highlight the general value of institutional perspectives and the many different paradigms and approaches which this field offers. Particularly relevant for transformative spatial governance is the fact that an institutional perspective does “not start in the purposive framework of planners, who are in search of solutions to the problems at hand” but embeds “possible roles for planning agencies and other subjects” (Salet, 2018: 36) within wider positions and patterns of relationships. Furthermore, an institutional perspective has the advantage to incorporate both formal and informal norms and rules, which may provide, for example, valuable insight into a divergent ability to influence beyond the micro scale between two seemingly similar city-building endeavours. And lastly, “privileged actors have more influence on existing institutions and may use them to uphold their positions” (Fligstein, 1997: 3). In this respect, neoliberal conditions, for example, are often considered as an impediment to institutional transformation (Filion, Kramer and Sands, 2016). However, “all actors can use existing institutions to found new arenas, can use existing rules in unintended ways and create new institutions” (Fligstein, 1997: 3).

3.4 Approaching elements of transformation highlighted in existing literature as ‘parameters’

Parameters set the conditions of the process structure’s operation and possess their own structure, which is the most challenging level to understand in Hernes’s (1976) argument on structural change. However, he (ibid.: 519) explains it using a simple example, namely the composition of a population (output structure) as “the outcome of a birth and death process” (process structure), governed by “age-specific fertility and death rates” (parameters). Thus, “the population composition may change even when the fertility and death rates remain constant” (ibid.). Therefore, it is important
to consider the structure of parameters too, as parameters can either change or remain stable. “Social parameters affect the choices of individuals; individual choices of action also change the parameters of choice by opening or destroying alternatives” (ibid.: 517). I turn to the existing literature on transformation to uncover potential parameters which I describe as elements of transformation.

Transferring Hernes’s line of thinking to transformative spatial governance, the overall process of city-building endeavours consists of the process structure and the parameter structure (Figure 15). The parameters take on concrete values and govern the process. They are influenced by the wider spatial governance, but possess the ability to exert influence on it as well. Parameters can remain stable or undergo change. Similarly, parameters can disappear and others can emerge. “Parameter values may also change as a result of changes in exogenous variables” (ibid.: 521), which may create a disruption in the parameter structure and in turn influence both the process and output structure. “After a change in or of parameters - in or of the structure of the process - the system performance may be more [...] optimal for some groups and less so for others” (ibid.: 523).

![Figure 15. Three levels of structure in transformative spatial governance](image)

Conducting inductive research, I did not pre-define parameters or systematically test them in the case studies to follow. However, in line with the dissertation’s hermeneutic underpinnings, I used the existing literature on transformation to gain insights, inspiration and to orient myself on what scholars have previously highlighted as crucial elements in their envisaged transformation processes. Table 2 presents an overview of these parameters in selected literature. I extracted the information from
the literature by selecting recurring elements mentioned by scholars and grouped them into five categories. The overview illustrates the concentration on elements pertaining to public sector processes and characteristics, as well as the strong focus on civil society initiatives and particularly counter-hegemonic movements. Elements pertaining to private sector actors turned out to be scarce.

The first category refers to elements in relation to the public sector (Table 2). A majority of authors emphasise the need for change in the usage, allocation and distribution of resources. Moreover, regulatory changes are frequently mentioned (Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno, 2018; Wolfram, 2016; Chaffin et al., 2016). Another aspect is that public sectors and public sector actors need to adapt in their ways of working, particularly in terms of enhancing their flexibility. Expert knowledge and the access, use and dissemination of adequate information is underscored in order to be able to make informed decisions. And the last element concerns the political side of things, in terms of electoral politics, with public administrations being steered by political decisions and agendas. Authors argue that in order to transform existing governance arrangements, this type of support and political commitment is indispensable (Filion, Kramer and Sands, 2016; Chaffin et al., 2016; Alexander, 2005).

The second category encompasses elements connected to civil society. Various authors discuss the central position and role of grassroots initiatives, and in many cases counter-hegemonic movements, to transform prevailing arrangements (Song, 2015; Albrechts, 2010; MacCallum et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2007). Furthermore, the importance of situated, context-dependent struggles is emphasised which need to be translated into wider changes, but based on explicit and concrete experiences. The different abilities of these initiatives, movements and struggles is recognised and the ‘success’ to initiate these wider changes is particularly linked to the capacity and leadership of local actors engaged in these efforts (Wolfram, 2016; Albrechts, 2016; Kennedy, 2007).

The third category focuses on elements in the private sector, and in fact, not much information could be found. Some authors (Wolfram, 2016; Song, 2015; Albrechts, 2010) vaguely mention the participation of private sector actors, and some others (Birkmann, Bach and Vollmer, 2012; Alexander, 2005) emphasise the importance of the private sector to provide accurate data and contribute knowledge. Overall, this category is scarcely discussed across the different accounts and remains fairly generic.
In contrast to the first three categories, the fourth one centres around elements that are highlighted in terms of relations between different actors. The formation of new relations between different groups presents a frequently mentioned element, as well as the creation of alliances and the strength of collective mobilisations (Albrechts, 2016; Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2012). Moreover, several scholars emphasise the need for inter-scalar relations, particularly to link situated struggles to higher levels, within a predominantly bottom-up decision-making environment (Chaffin et al., 2016; MacCallum et al., 2009). Interestingly, while a lot of discussions also refer to notions of co-production between actors and groups, most accounts see the public sector’s role in leading and steering this process (Wolfram, 2016; Steele, 2011; MacCallum et al., 2009). Furthermore, experimentation, closely connected to creativity and the potential of ‘trial and error’, are highlighted.

The last category is subsumed under cognition, with which I want to draw attention to mental actions and processes of understanding, acquiring knowledge and expressing ideas, and capturing recurring elements underscored in the existing transformation literature. First of all, the importance of changes in belief systems and implementing new ways of thinking is highlighted (Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno, 2018; Birkmann, Bach and Vollmer, 2012; Steele, 2011; MacCallum et al., 2009), as well as changes in discourses and framing ideas. Furthermore, the notion of normative long-term vision is seen as important, and so is the ability of actors to critically reflect on their actions. And lastly, learning has been emphasised.

Table 2 Elements of transformation highlighted in existing literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public sector</th>
<th>Civil society</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Relations</th>
<th>Cognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changes in usage, allocation and distribution of resources</td>
<td>regulatory changes</td>
<td>flexibility</td>
<td>expert knowledge and adequate information</td>
<td>political support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno, 2018
2. Birkmann, Bach and Vollmer, 2012
3. Steele, 2011
4. MacCallum et al., 2009
5. Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno, 2018
7. Steele, 2011
8. MacCallum et al., 2009
9. Table 2
both in terms of individuals and at a wider system level, for instance when “new conceptions and their implications ‘travel’ to other arenas just through processes of ‘snowballing’ individual learning experiences” (Healey, 2006: 305), or institutional learning yielding insights to strategic urban agendas (Steele, 2011).

According to Hernes (1976), and as illustrated in Figure 15, the different levels of output structure, process structure and parameter structure are all interrelated. In order for ‘transformation’ to happen, all three levels including the parameters, need to change (ibid.). He differentiates four types of change (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>TYPE 1</th>
<th>TYPE 2</th>
<th>TYPE 3</th>
<th>TYPE 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the output structure change?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the spatial governance change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the parameter values change?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do parameters or parameter values in terms of elements of transformation change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the process structure change?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do city-building endeavours as concrete spatial governance activities change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Four possibilities for change or stability at three levels, adopted from Hernes (1976: 524)*

If all levels remain unchanged, Hernes talks about simple reproduction (*Type 1*). In some cases, the output structure can change while the process and parameters governing the process remain stable. In this case, Hernes describes change as extended reproduction (*Type 2*). Transition occurs when parameters and output change (*Type 3*), and lastly, transformation occurs based on “change in the functional form of the process structure or operator, generally leading to a change in output structure and its time trajectory” (ibid.: 530; *Type 4*). I adopt this scheme in modelling my understanding of transformation in *transformative spatial governance* by contending that spatial governance becomes transformative when concrete city-building endeavours exhibit discrepancy with the prevailing spatial governance and based on this discrepancy initiate wider institutional transformation through a change in parameters, the elements of transformation.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter intended to conceptualise *transformative spatial governance*, provide an overview of how others approach similar topics, and underscore my stance that even though private sector actors are widely addressed as key actors steering
urban development practices, they are often neglected in recent discussions on transformation and structural change. *Transformative spatial governance* captures structural change based on discrepancies between prevailing spatial governance and area-based city-building endeavours, and provides an approach to identify elements, conditions and processes through which some spatial governance activities, as concrete area-based development constellations, exert influence beyond the micro-scale by instigating institutional change. The understanding of space as complex interplay of social and physical environments draws attention to governance arrangements which constitute or form the basis of both independently, as well as the linkage between the two.

This approach differs from most existing notions on transformation in terms of outlook: instead of designating specific practices as ‘transformative’ from the very beginning, *transformative spatial governance* avoids pre-defined assumptions and, for example, a sole focus on presumed counter-hegemonic initiatives. It draws attention to spatial governance in a specific setting and critically reflects on the institutions governing actor relations. This approach does not preclude the development of normative directions in planning, which is a key issue in existing literature on transformation. I do believe, however, that the ambition to bring norms and values back into planning, and abstract goals of structural change to enhance big concepts such as sustainability or justice, need to be supplemented by in-depth empirical knowledge to make these ambitions more operationalizable.

As most scholars engaging with transformation take the neoliberalisation of urban development and spatial governance as a point of departure, it is all the more surprising that the role of the private sector in these discussions is largely neglected or stays at a superficial level. Not only does it emanate a certain bias and stereotyping, but I see a flaw in the logic of these accounts: if private sector involvement in urban development disenfranchised both public sector interventions and civil society efforts in the first place, how can changes in the public sector and civil society spheres alone lead to the envisaged radical changes?

Lastly, and connected to the previous point, while recognising the immense value of reinvigorating discussions surrounding norms and values in planning, I see a risk that existing accounts remain too abstract for public sector planning practitioners to incorporate into their work. In their realities, planning and other public sector interventions often depend on interactions and negotiations with private sector actors. I am not advocating for perceptions that ‘there is no alternative’. Instead, in line with a growing number of scholars in recent years, I argue for an in-depth and more nuanced understanding of the diversity, processes and mechanisms of private sector actors in urban development. In *transformative spatial governance*, institutional
transformation through a specific city-building endeavour in which private sector actors exert strong influence can indeed also be negative, depending on one’s point of view. It strongly invites critical research and reflections and at the same time tries to avoid the pitfalls of over-generalisations. In this way, it can provide knowledge, building the foundation for concrete actions to steer planning practices in the intended direction in the quest to bring ‘substance’ into planning.
References


PART II: ANALYTICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK


