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# Analysing Contemporary Metropolitan Spatial Plans in Europe Through Their Institutional Context, Instrumental Content and Planning Process

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**ABSTRACT** *This article sets out to propose and apply a qualitative framework for thinking about how to analyse and compare metropolitan spatial plans in a milieu of divergent spatial planning traditions and discretionary planning practices. In doing so, the article reviews and develops an understanding concerning the institutional context, instrumental content and planning processes associated with four contemporary metropolitan spatial plans in Europe, namely those of London, Copenhagen, Paris and Barcelona. Through the results of a multiple case study and a subsequent cross-comparative analysis, the article stresses that contemporary metropolitan spatial plans tend to merge the characteristics associated with project-based and strategy-based spatial plans, thus contrasting with the typical land-use character of municipal plans and the often strategic, growth-oriented pursuit of regional plans in Europe. In this sense, the metropolitan scale is treated less explicitly as a planning scale per se; rather, it tends to emerge as a “concealed” scale between municipal and regional scales and also between local and regional knowledge in planning. Moreover, the analysis suggests that while metropolitan plans seem to converge in terms of their general themes, they cannot be ultimately “typified” in view of ad hoc variations related to their institutional contexts, instrumental contents and planning processes.*

**Keywords:** metropolitan planning; metropolitan spatial plans; institutional context; comparative planning; instrumental content; planning processes

## Introduction

In recent decades, some major European cities have acquired extensive planning experience at the supra-municipal (metropolitan) scale. Among others, the metropolitan areas

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of London, Copenhagen, Paris and Barcelona have emerged as important poles of innovation when tackling the socio-spatial challenges faced by twenty-first-century societies. These conurbations have succeeded not only in establishing the development conditions to locate themselves as part of a network of cities leading the global economy, but also in advancing relevant strategies dealing with aspects related to social cohesion and environmental improvements among other relevant challenges. In contributing to such endeavours, metropolitan spatial plans have served as key strategic tools in pursuit of directing spatial development and future land uses.

What particular lessons can be drawn from such distinctive yet diverse metropolitan spatial plans and strategies? More specifically, how can metropolitan spatial plans be qualitatively analysed and compared in the context of divergent spatial planning traditions and when confronted with discretionary planning practices within Europe? While there are no straight answers to these questions, this article sets out to suggest a qualitative framework for thinking about analysing metropolitan spatial plans comparatively by investigating their institutional context, instrumental content and planning processes. The rationale behind such a comparative and qualitative analytical approach is threefold. Firstly, while the planning literature has already paid attention to metropolitan planning, it has generally done so through individual case studies and not comparatively. For instance, this is evidenced in the analysis of Rome (Marcelloni, 2002; Piazzi, 1982), Paris (Fouchier, 2010), Amsterdam (Alexander, 2002) and London (Hall & Scargill, 1978; Simmons, 2000), among other studies.

Secondly, with a few exceptions, previous studies that compare metropolitan plans have paid less attention to what we regard here as the core of planning, namely the institutional framework, planning instruments and planning processes. Thus far, comparative metropolitan studies have been carried out for the most part on the basis of quantitative indicators (cf. e.g. ESPON, 2006; METREX, 2007), morphological aspects (Font, 2004; Hall & Pain, 2006; Susteren, 2005), sectorial aspects such as transport and service networks (Julia, 2006; TEN-T Programme), or sociological aspects that address the emergence of global cities (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Hall, 1984; Sassen, 1996; *inter alia*).

Thirdly, due to the inherent complexity of standardizing metropolitan planning in consideration of its random and ambiguous character as a “spatial scale”, there is only limited normative convention as to what concerns the strategic character, structure, scope and extent of metropolitan spatial plans. For instance, the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997) focuses on comparing EU Member States’ planning tools and instruments at different levels of planning administration (mainly in relation to land-use planning), but only briefly alludes to metropolitan plans as a type of strategic-level instrument. In other words, the rationale of metropolitan spatial plans remains somewhat open and vague as neither their thematic content nor their normative outreach are thoroughly defined in such Compendiums. This is reminiscent of why the evaluation of metropolitan matters in the past has been more frequently addressed at higher levels of planning administration, namely at regional and national levels (Faludi, 2000), despite the fact that metropolitan plans are commonly acknowledged as instruments aimed at strategically directing the spatial development of city regions.

Against this backdrop, this article attempts to shed light on how to go about performing comparative analyses of contemporary metropolitan spatial plans by focusing on their institutional context, instrumental content and planning processes. Particularly, the article sets out to identify and apply relevant variables through which metropolitan

plans can be analysed and compared in consideration of future spatial planning agendas. We regard the results of the comparative analysis as a contribution to professionals involved in the evolution of metropolitan agendas: technicians involved in the design of these complex planning instruments and scholars studying the evolution of regional design (for which metropolitan planning experiences constitute an exceptional laboratory, cf. Balz & Zonneveld, 2014; Hartman *et al.*, 2011; Meijsmans, 2010).

A comparative analysis of four European metropolitan spatial plans is carried out by considering the following selectivity criteria: (i) contemporary metropolitan plans prepared during recent and concurrent time periods; (ii) geographical and cultural diversity within western Europe, thus the selection and analysis include metropolitan plans from Scandinavia, northwest, central and southern Europe; (iii) the paradigmatic character of metropolitan plans in terms of relevance for the academic planning domain (Davies, 1994; Hall, 1996; *inter alia*) and (iv) coverage of the range of “ideal” spatial planning traditions put forward by the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997), namely land-use planning, comprehensive-integrated, regional-economic and urbanism. The four metropolitan plans to be analysed are presented in Table 1.

As Nadin and Stead (2008) point out, the term “tradition” is used to emphasize the way by which the forms of planning are deeply rooted in complex historical conditions of each place. The land-use planning tradition corresponds well with the British legal-administrative framework while both its purpose and range are somewhat restricted to regulate or modify land use. The comprehensive-integrated approach is linked to the Scandinavian legal framework, which implies that planning systems are intended to provide horizontal and vertical integration of policies across different sectors and jurisdictions. The remaining two planning traditions do not closely relate to legal frameworks. The regional-economic approach holds a top-down character that is in itself derived from the Napoleonic legal framework. Moreover, the urbanism tradition similarly subscribes to the Napoleonic tradition, but only for southern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of methods, the article attempts to combine the analysis of primary sources (documentation of plans) and secondary sources (technical reports, outreach and scientific articles that make up the theoretical framework).<sup>2</sup> The analysis of the cases is primarily based on three clusters of variables (see next section). Two types of analysis are carried

**Table 1.** Contemporary European metropolitan plans (representative of diverse spatial planning traditions) analysed in this article

Metropolitan area	Metropolitan plan	Date of adoption	Spatial planning tradition (CEC, 1997)
London	<i>Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London (LP)</i>	2011	Land-use planning
Copenhagen	<i>Fingerplan 2013: Landsplandirectiv for Hovedstadsområdet Planlægning (FP)</i>	2013	Comprehensive-integrated
Paris	<i>Schéma Directeur de la Région Île-de-France 2030 (SDRIF)</i>	2008	Regional-economic
Barcelona	<i>Pla Territorial Metropolità de Barcelona (PTMB)</i>	2010	Urbanism

Source: The authors.

out: the first is based on single case studies to identify the institutional context, the instrumental content and the planning process associated with each metropolitan plan, while the second is built on a cross comparison of the cases. As noted earlier, the phenomena of spatial relations and spatial dependence are progressively complex. Based on the actual circumstances associated with each territory, metropolitan planning instruments can thus have a diverse extent and scope as shown by the following four cases.

Following this introduction the paper is subdivided into three sections and a conclusion. First, the paper proposes an analytical framework to carry out a comparative analysis pertaining to the character of metropolitan spatial plans in Europe in light of three analytical clusters, namely institutional contexts, instrumental contents and planning processes. Second, the paper applies this framework to four contemporary metropolitan plans in Europe by providing a descriptive analysis of each based on nine analytical variables that constitute the abovementioned clusters. The paper then moves on to provide two syntheses, the first concerning an individual assessment of each plan based on the preceding section, and the second based on a series of common patterns obtained via the cross comparison of the four metropolitan plans. Finally, the conclusion provides some general remarks stemming from the analysis of metropolitan plans and also points out suggested paths for future research.

### Analytical Approach Towards Understanding Metropolitan Spatial Plans

Drawing from an array of authors (see later in this section) who have addressed the scope, extent and contents of spatial plans (both strategic and project-related) among other key features, this section suggests a series of analytical variables that aim to assess the character of contemporary metropolitan plans in Europe. In their canonical study regarding Dutch Planning Doctrine, Faludi and van der Valk (1994) place emphasis on two different types of planning intervention, namely technocratic and sociocratic (p. 11), which are associated with project-based and strategy-based plans, respectively. This distinction is based on a number of variables qualified by particular parameters in terms of either project-based plans or strategy-based plans (Table 2). Building on this distinction, we propose three broad analytical clusters (institutional context, instrumental content and

**Table 2.** Clusters of key variables and parameters to analyse metropolitan spatial plans

Analytical cluster	Variable	Parameter
Institutional context	Legal framework	Conforming vs. performing
	Participating institutions	Monolithic vs. coalition
Instrumental content	Thematic scope	General vs. selective
	Form/effect	Binding vs. indicative (or both)
	Spatial model	Monocentric vs. polycentric
	Fuzziness	Schematic vs. blueprint
Planning process	Time-element	Incremental (phasing) vs. optional
	Planners' role	Technocratic vs. participative
	Leadership	Public vs. private vs. PPP
	Evaluation	Continuous (means-ends) vs. intermittent

*Source:* Adapted from original sets of categories proposed by Faludi and van der Valk (1994).

Note: PPP, public–private partnership.

planning process) with the aim of developing an initial understanding concerning the character and scope of metropolitan spatial plans.

First, the institutional context of metropolitan plans is essentially characterized by a given country's legal framework and its participating institutions involved in plan-making and implementation. While, in principle, the legal dimension of planning systems is normally associated with spatial planning traditions (CEC, 1997; Newman & Thornley, 1996), here we opt to qualify this particular distinction in terms of "conforming" and "performing" planning systems as labelled by Janin Rivolin (2008). In this sense, metropolitan spatial visions would essentially reproduce the planning system models through which they are developed, namely "... a more traditional and widespread one, aspiring to 'conform' single projects to a collective strategy; and a different and less institutionalised one, promoting those projects capable of 'performing' a collective strategy" (Janin Rivolin, 2008, p. 167). Furthermore, participating institutions (originally labelled the "planning subject" by Faludi & van der Valk, 1994) could comprise either a monolithic (single) institution or a coalition of actors involved in the plan-making process (van Duinen, 2013; Faludi & van der Valk, 1994; Roodbol-Mekkes, van der Valk, & Korthals Altes, 2012).

Second, the instrumental content of metropolitan plans can be either general or selective in scope, the former being comprehensive by nature (i.e. encompassing the combination of a full array of sectorial themes in spatial terms) and the latter constrained to a limited number of sectorial themes with less spatial awareness and thereby disregarding spatially relevant policies (Hildebrand, 2006). Moreover, the so-called form or effect of metropolitan plans can be legally binding or indicative (normative), but could also fulfil both purposes simultaneously. The development pattern associated with metropolitan plans can be pursued through spatial models that can be either monocentric (e.g. following the traditional central place model of concentric land-use patterns surrounding the centralized metropolitan core) or polycentric (e.g. Green, 2007; Meijers, Romein, & Hoppenbrouwer, 2003; Neuman, 1996). In this regard, it is important to mention the central role of planning imagery or spatial concepts (i.e. words, images and visions) (van Duinen, 2004) in framing the inherently strategic character of metropolitan plans (Faludi, 1996; Neuman, 1998), a quality that other instruments associated with public policy generally lack.

Spatial concepts can be understood as the combination of words, images and visions used by planners and urban designers in representing selected features of a given area (van Duinen, 2004; Zonneveld, 1989). In particular, spatial concepts can be conceived as descriptive and normative constructs of place and space (van Duinen, 2004), thus merging "fact and value" in the representation of space (Rein & Laws, 2000, p. 96) while expressing visions of desired futures through which the spatial structure or land use of an area should develop (Zonneveld, 1989). As such, images are relevant because they capture phenomena that are difficult to express within planning praxis (e.g. polycentric metropolis, edge cities, peri-urban interface, etc.). The combination of words and images forms a research agenda that allows evaluating planning in innovative ways. A criterion of paramount relevance in analysing metropolitan planning lies in the concept of "powerlines": lines on maps that decide "who gets what, when, where and how" (Neuman 1998, p. 215). Powerlines fluctuate between schematic lines (aiming at seeking consensus) and "blueprint" lines (e.g. those appearing in zoning maps or sites plans, which generate controversy as the conflict is made evident).

Furthermore, Donald Schön (1983) made a similar point on spatial visions by suggesting that they should not be considered as theories that predict or explain urban phenomena, but rather as metaphors from which planners and politicians can build their own records of unique and dynamic situations. Schön calls these metaphors, which replace the spatial visions' "fuzzy proposals". According to the individual planner's approach in consideration of a specific territorial problem, spatial images, maps and visions tend to assume different degrees of "fuzziness" which varies according to their schematic or blueprint character. As such, the scale of the images or maps used in plan proposals also affects the degree of fuzziness. Some plan proposals can be general (i.e. covering the whole metropolitan region), while others might focus only on a fragment of the plan. Other proposals relate with sketches, unfinished drawings or rather abstract models.

Unlike the "visual representation" approach developed by Dühr and Lagendijk (2007), the aim of this analysis is not to uncover the underlying tensions that discursively occur between textual and graphic expressions of metropolitan spatial concepts. However, considering the proposal to treat "maps" as expanded concepts of text (Harley, 1989), the paper focuses on the different ways of expressing graphically complex spatial concepts and their relationship to different planning traditions. Since a comprehensive analysis of spatial concepts would demand single case studies (e.g. van Duinen, 2013), the paper places emphasis on the individual metropolitan spatial strategies in their diverse variants.

Lastly, in terms of planning processes, the "time-element" relates with Faludi's (2000) argument that plans can be either delivered incrementally (i.e. through phases in line with the exigencies of producing the final outcome) or optionally, thus leaving diverse implementation paths and choices open (p. 303). Furthermore, the planning process is highly dependent on the roles that planners adopt, which for simplification purposes we have limited to rather broad categories, namely "technocratic" and "participative" as originally portrayed by Faludi and van der Valk (1994). In terms of leadership, plans can be spearheaded either by public or private entities, a discussion intrinsically related to plan-led and market-driven styles as put by Brindley *et al.* (1996). At the same time, leadership can be assumed by public-private partnerships, which might end up generating plans of a hybrid character (Galland & Hansen, 2012). Finally, the planning processes can be evaluated in terms of plan performance as continuous or intermittent depending on whether (or not) plans are permanently revised and assessed (Faludi, 2000, p. 310).

In line with the above analytical clusters, the character of metropolitan spatial plans can similarly be grasped in terms of the "steering" and "strategic" roles that spatial planning has adopted at different levels of intervention within diverse European countries over the past few decades (Galland, 2012a). The steering role is intrinsically linked to the regulation of spatial development via spatial planning systems and policies aimed at land-use allocation, its geographical distribution, growth management and improving the quality of settlements (Healey *et al.*, 1997). On the other hand, the strategic role relates to logics of territorial innovation that transcend traditional land-use planning and spatial coordination tools and mechanisms. The strategic role of spatial plans is thus founded on visions that tend to emphasize place qualities, often promoted by spatial relations of territories (Albrechts, 2004; Meijsmans, 2010).

## Metropolitan Plans in Europe: The Cases of London, Copenhagen, Paris and Barcelona

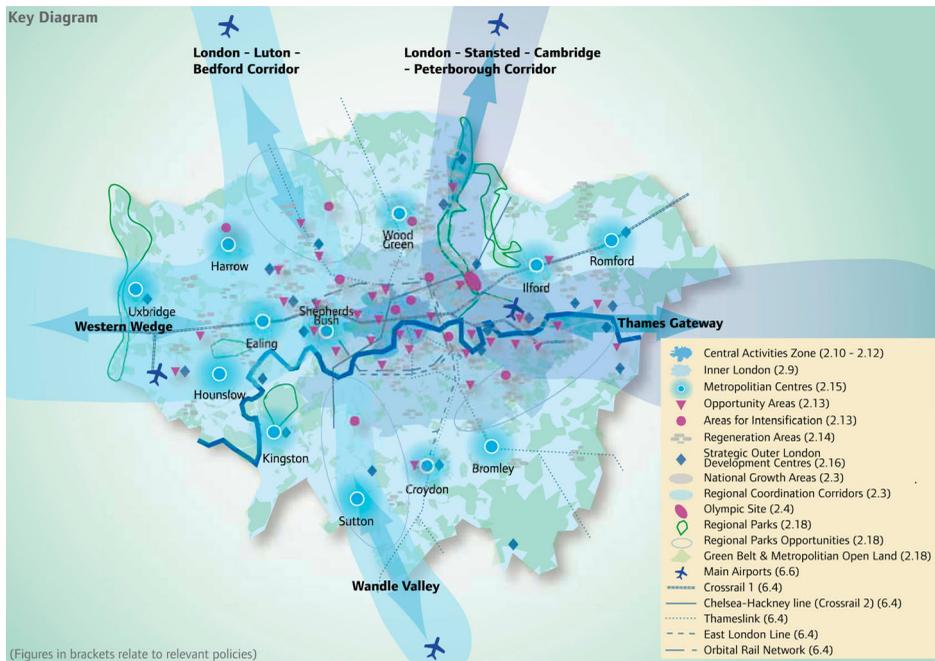
### *The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London*

Despite the lack of a national plan, metropolitan planning in London has always been a central government concern. From 1965 until 1983, the Greater London Council alongside 32 boroughs and jointly with the City of London Corporation was held accountable for planning and development matters for Greater London. After discrepancies with the UK government led by Margaret Thatcher, the Greater London Council was dissolved in 1983. The management of the metropolis was again under fragmented control by a total of 33 local councils covering an administrative area of 1572 km<sup>2</sup>. The conservative governments that followed during the 1990s made several attempts of private or mixed strategic planning (e.g. London First and London Pride). At the beginning of the 2000s, the New Labour government created the Greater London Authority in aiming to establish a more efficient supra-local framework for drafting the Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London (Greater London Authority, 2011).

Rather than prioritizing competitiveness, the London Plan redirects growth in coherence with ameliorating the environment through strategies such as the rehabilitation of the (few) empty areas within the central city and the improvement of the standards of services and facilities in the peripheral boroughs. In terms of content, the London Plan addresses conventional sectorial issues such as public transportation, environmental issues, residential growth and retail activities. An innovative aspect is the coordination of the various utilities' networks commonly under concession, such as electricity, water and gas, sewage supply and telecommunications. This environmental guidance for local policies allows improving energy production and self-sufficient waste management.

Although the London Plan is clearly a strategic tool, it provides quantitative and even qualitative determinations. In other words, it offers a flexible spatial development framework with some binding regulations (Leboreiro, 2009),<sup>3</sup> coherent with the discretionary approach that distinguishes the English planning tradition.<sup>4</sup> In this context, municipalities must draft their own development plans according to the metropolitan strategy. On the one hand, the metropolitan plan sets quantitative parameters for residential expansion, indicating the minimum housing supply and the articulation of transportation networks. On the other hand, it establishes qualitative standards including design guidelines for architecture and public spaces, and precise rules regarding urban fabric morphology. In particular, the plan proposes a density matrix and residential locations to be furthered depending on the level of accessibility and connectivity by public transportation. The plan also sets thresholds on new jobs as an engine for regional equilibrium, indicating strategic areas for inducing growth.

The plan presents its strategies on a map scale of 1:100,000. In this case, the schematic character of the plan is linked to the legislation: the plan cannot identify specific points, elements or areas as all these are of municipal competence. Despite its schematic maps and proposals, which are conditioned by a legal framework that protects land ownership in the first place, the London Plan implements a "Key Diagram" that expresses the spatial model through two structural elements: strategic enclaves and major proposals for public transportation (Figure 1). As with other strategic plans, the Key Diagram has a purely "tactical" character. Neither scales nor specific structural elements are identified, but relations and strategic targets (arrows, stars, rough boundaries) in line with the discre-



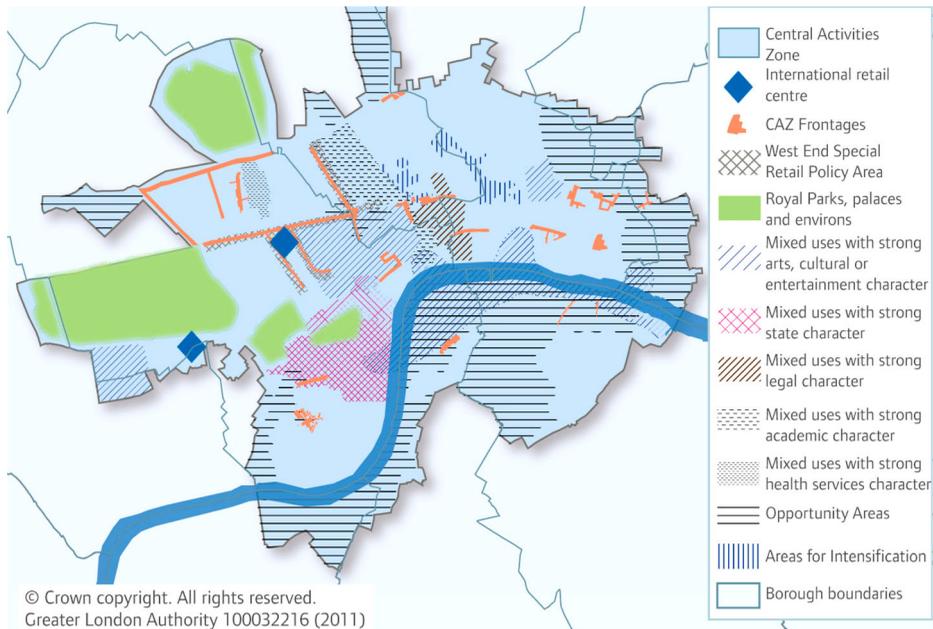
**Figure 1.** Key diagram.

Source: Greater London Authority (2011).

tionary English planning tradition. The law also establishes the schematic character: the metropolitan plan cannot identify specific points or areas because such features are competences associated with the local councils. However, the implicit “centripetal” tension of the model is evident in the location of the Central Activities Zones (CAZ), which function as platforms for arguing major plans and special projects such as the Olympic sites or the redevelopment of the Thames Gateway (Figure 2).

Although the London Plan is part of a unitary vision expressed by the Key Diagram, it does not have concrete implementation mechanisms. However, the plan is monitored by “supplementary organizations” to the Administration of Greater London that monitor budget allocation and expenditure, especially with regard to issues of transportation and urbanization. In addition, the London Plan seeks to engage all relevant groups and individuals within the processes of developing strategies, advancing priorities and making plan decisions, thereby ensuring accountability and effectiveness during its performance. For instance, among the leading actors considered in the Plan, it is worth mentioning the various local agencies, chambers of commerce, investment groups, trusts and various NGOs. In particular, the plan aims to involve various voluntary and community (public and private) groups to increase the financial autonomy of London, thereby simplifying the distribution mechanisms of the Central Government funding. The plan also seeks to innovate financing techniques, such as tax over areas for intensification, allowing future tax revenues to be invested in local infrastructure and urban renewal.

As regards the plan-making process, a so-called examination in public is conducted by a state organization, but independent from National Government. Its function is to



**Figure 2.** Central Activities Zones.  
*Source:* Greater London Authority (2011).

synthesize individual claims and, above all, to ensure the consistency of the metropolitan spatial strategy with other local and regional plans. As for the approval of the plan, the final decision is made by National Government, despite the open and horizontal character of the drafting procedure.

Besides the influence of the state, the urban development of London is predominantly driven by the private sector as long as development criteria do not contradict metropolitan spatial strategies. Nevertheless, the London Development Database implements continuous monitoring of planning applications, permissions and reforms. Moreover, the London Development Database issues an annual report to communicate emerging trends, expressed through multi-sectorial indicators, and discusses future actions in collaboration with local councils.<sup>5</sup> Based on the annual reports, there is a review of the metropolitan plan every 2 years, which is only aimed at modifying the critical issues.

#### *Finger Plan Directive 2013 for the Greater Copenhagen Region*

The Greater Copenhagen Region is characterized by an extensive regional planning legacy. Advanced in 1947, the “Finger Plan for Greater Copenhagen” (*Fingerplan for Storkøbenhavn*) was foundationally influenced by international planning ideas and visions advocating a regional and decentralizing approach to the city in response to scaling urban issues at the time. In this respect, the key actors behind the Finger Plan such as Peter Bredsdorff and Steen Eiler Rasmussen were inspired by the regionalist perspective advocated by Mumford’s (1938) work. Danish planners were also familiar with Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan and thus also influenced by the Garden City paradigm

insofar as adapting the notions of new towns and greenbelts, which not only attempted to reshape the relationship between city and region, but also that between city and nature (Howard, 1898/1946).

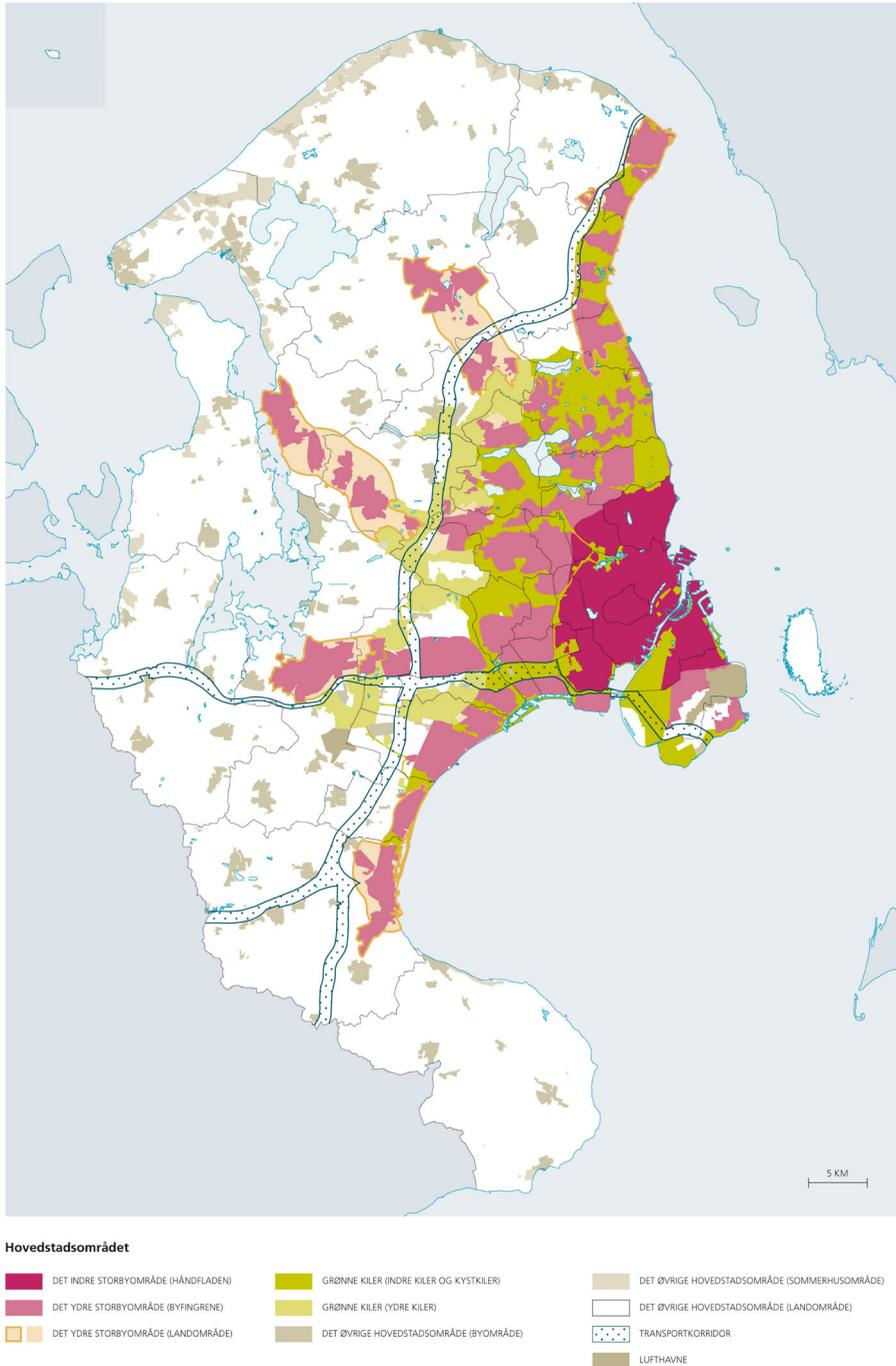
The original Finger Plan is a classic example of rational comprehensive and positivistic planning, which reflects the optimism of the post-war era based on oversized expectations and predictions in terms of economic growth and population forecasting. Similarly, it represents an attempt to shape the spatial form of the metropolitan region while preserving open space by limiting urban growth through the coordination of land development with public transportation. In this sense, it follows a “regionalist” spatial logic based on the concentrated dispersion of population and functions from the city to outspread regions extended over five articulated fingers that form a radial suburban railway network originating from the core urban area (the palm) (Figure 3).

Although the Finger Plan was not legally adopted at any point during the twentieth century, its rationale and spatial principles played an essential role in the spatial development of Greater Copenhagen from its inception. It is based on two fundamental spatial principles, the so-called principle of proximity based on the spatial logic of locating activities (such as various public institutions, retail centres and large social housing complexes) in close proximity to suburban rail stations. The idea behind this principle is based on reducing transfer time towards the city centre to a maximum of 30 minutes (i.e. from the urban settlements located at the fingertips). Second, the “principle of green wedges” aimed at protecting and preserving green areas and open spaces located between the radial extensions (fingers). In its latest versions, the Finger Plan not only uses this principle to preempt these wedges from development but also to foster a greener metropolitan structure geared towards better urban quality within specific neighbourhoods (Ministry of the Environment, 2013a, 2013b).

Amidst a series of political shifts as well as the implementation of local government reforms that brought about political-administrative and territorial reconfigurations all over Denmark (Galland, 2012b; Galland & Enemark, 2013, 2015), the institutions in charge of governing Greater Copenhagen have been subjected to structural shifts in terms of planning functions and powers (Galland & Ferdinandsen, 2015).<sup>6</sup> One of the key changes relates to the abolition of the Metropolitan Council of Greater Copenhagen (*Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd*) and the upward rescaling of its functions and competences to the Ministry of Environment (Galland & Elinbaum, 2015). As such, this shift enabled the Ministry to generate an unprecedented binding directive, “Fingerplan 2007”, aimed at establishing a spatial development framework for Greater Copenhagen based on the enforcement and “strengthening” of the aforementioned spatial principles (Ministry of the Environment 2007, 2013a).

In terms of scope, the “Fingerplan 2013” directive is both strategic and operative. In contrast with its predecessors, its binding character implies steering urban development via phases (i.e. balancing between land and building supply and expected demand in the medium and long terms) whereby only specific areas can be developed within 12-year time frames (i.e. the municipal plan) and, in several cases, provided that political agreements are reached with respect to siting ad hoc infrastructure facilities (e.g. a rail station). In this sense, the binding character of the “Fingerplan 2013” limits municipal development ambitions although it also allows them to prioritize development objectives.

The new “Fingerplan” takes up the main spatial concept of the metropolitan plan of 1947, but in a rather mechanical and linear fashion. The proposal of the physical–spatial



**Figure 3.** The Greater Copenhagen Area in Fingerplan 2013.  
 Source: Ministry of the Environment (2013a).

structure does not distinguish the main elements of the territorial model of 1947, such as the functional role and identity of the five linear urban subsystems or the interrelationship between the urban and rural interface. Instead, the plan presents an extreme “centrifugal” vision, with its main features being the zoning of the urban expansion as well as the demarcation of protected areas (green wedges between and across the fingers). The “Fingerplan per se” in this directive is presented on a map scale of 1:500,000 (Ministry of the Environment, 2013a, pp. 13–14) and its graphic code is based on accurate boundaries for the classification of land uses as well as more schematic boundaries for new areas of centrality and supra-local facilities (Figure 3). The plan also contains several fragments on map scales ranging from 1:100,000 to 1:25,000, which allow distinguishing land-use classification through schematic boundaries (Figure 4).

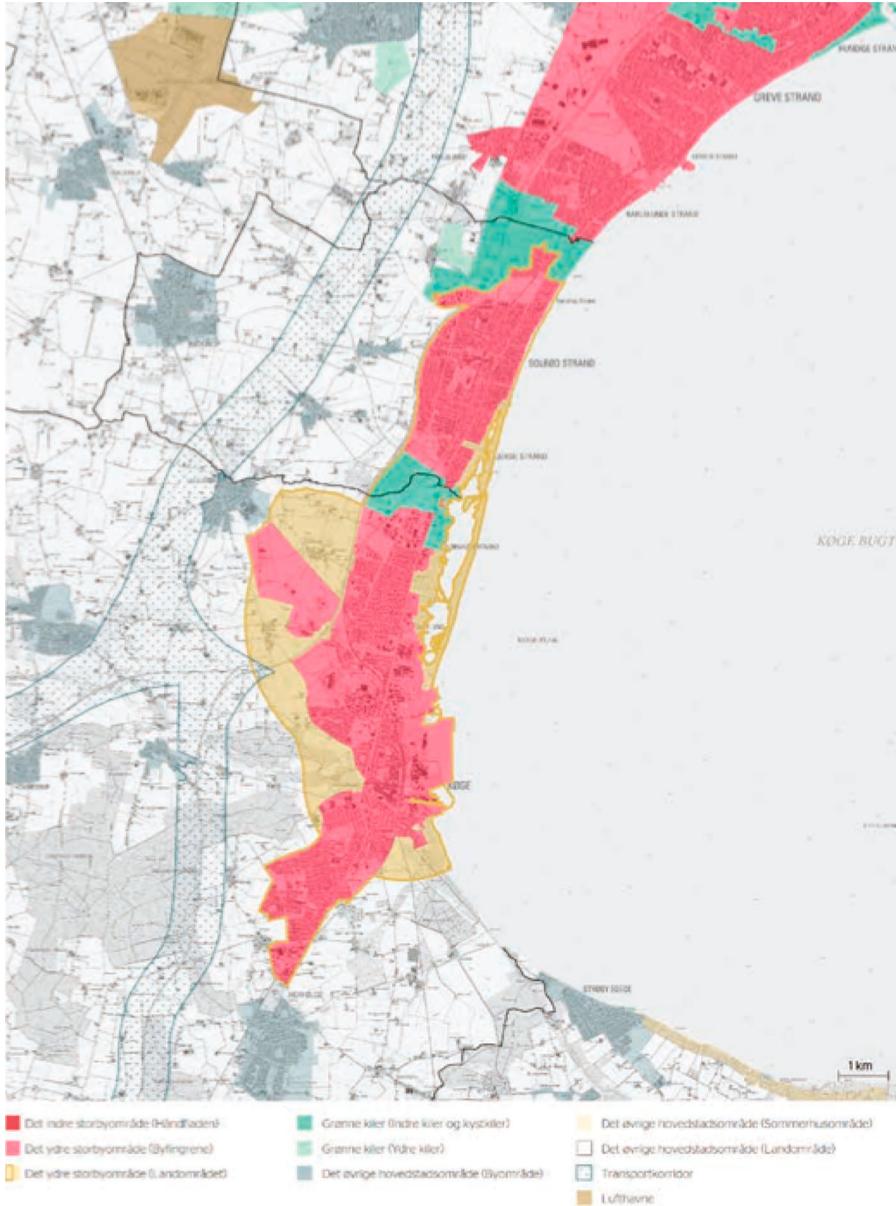
Another relevant feature associated with the “Fingerplan 2013” is that urban development primarily takes place as redevelopment per se, with only 20% land take-up in the form of greenfield development. By implementing the proximity-to-station principle, redevelopment is prioritized within former industrial areas along a projected orbital light rail with interconnections to the five radial suburban train stations (the so-called Ring 3). In such cases, municipal plans for brownfield redevelopment along Ring 3 must also include a coordinated plan for green wedge structures across municipality borders (Ministry of the Environment, 2013a). Ultimately, the directive’s main concern with “phased” urban redevelopment alongside the enhanced protection of green wedges serves to reinforce the polycentric structure as well as the “concentrated decentralized” logic of the original Finger Plan.

### *Schéma Directeur de la Région Île-de-France*

In 1965, the French state drafted the first metropolitan plan for the Greater Paris (*Schéma Directeur* (SD)), which was revised quite regularly for adapting it to changing territorial dynamics. In 1995, this responsibility was transferred to the region Île-de-France, although the National Government continued to hold the competences to commission, approve and revise the plan by decree of the State Council. Therefore, the territory of the Greater Paris remained an institutional conflictive arena of about 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> affecting about 1300 municipalities.

In 2008, the National Government created the Ministry of Development of the Capital Region to constrain the scope of the new SD of the Île-de-France, and drafted a “counter-plan” called *Le Grand Paris*, introduced by the ex-president Sarkozy (Figure 5). Today the state and the regional administration argue for competences in the same territory. However, both visions agree on the same general themes and strategies (housing, employment, transportation, quality of life, etc.) thereby allowing the approval of the plan.

The SD of the Île-de-France considers the economic and social approaches as a global process to achieve three broad goals: invest in sustainable public transportation, reduce social segregation and maintain international positioning in terms of economic growth. The development of these general objectives requires the joint action of four agencies. Two committees established for political leadership and decision-making, and two technical committees created with the purpose of coordinating sectorial services at the national and regional levels, as well as urbanism—*Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme Région Île-de-France* (IAURIF) were founded in 1960.



**Figure 4.** The “thumb” (Køge Finger) in Fingerplan 2013.  
 Source: Ministry of the Environment (2013a).

Regarding the content of the SD of the Île-de-France, the plan includes standard planning themes such as environment, transportation, housing and industrial growth. These themes are expressed through the concept of the compact and dense city as a model to transform the Île-de-France in the first “eco-region” of Europe. Another relevant



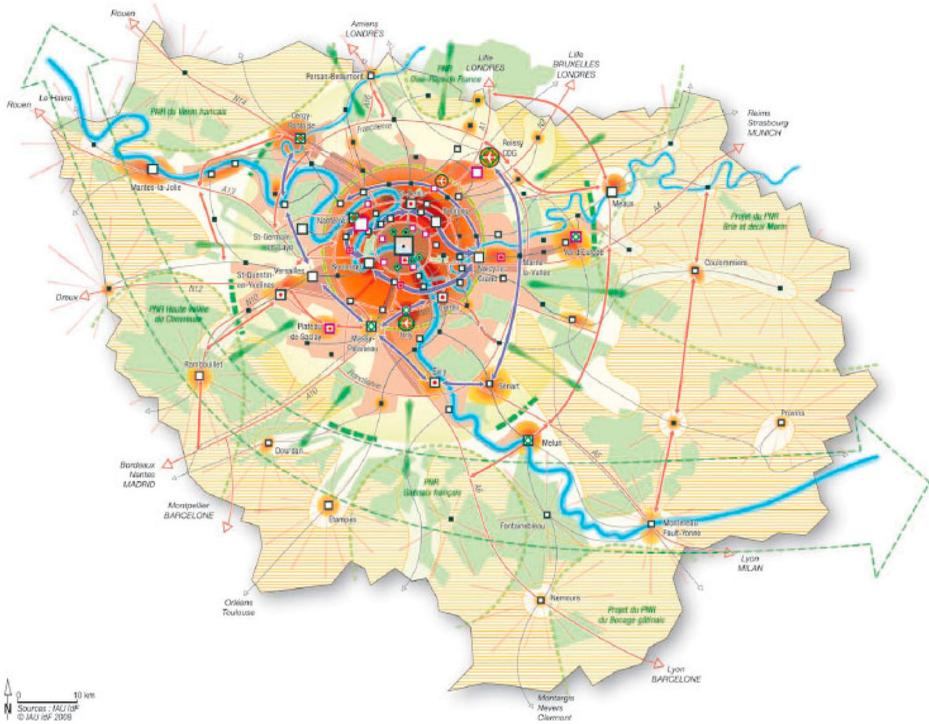
**Figure 5.** Cover of the planning consultation *Le Grand Paris(s)*. Overview of the proposal by Christian de Portzamparc.  
*Source:* Drevon (2009).

exposed challenge is to develop a dynamic cosmopolitan metropolis as the backbone of Central Europe and as the national economic engine.

In order to achieve these challenges, the SD implements a comprehensive and binding instrument for the coordination of municipalities. It complements existing local plans and assumes the character of a general plan for municipalities that lack urban planning. These policies focus on environmental issues and are aligned with the principles of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). For example, the plan aims to influence inter-municipal equilibrium by fixing a maximum density of 50 dwellings/hectare. To ensure the efficiency of the plan, the editors firstly addressed the proposals on the urban scale to “test” the conflict that would potentially arise with each municipality, although such proposals were presented on a map scale of 1:50,000. Thus, the SD of the Île-de-France is the case where the relevance of subsidiarity in metropolitan planning is more evident.

The SD of Île-de-France proposes a territorial model for addressing the pluri-municipal coordination that maintains the radial pattern of the three previous plans reinforcing the centrality of the capital city. The “Regional Spatial Project” aims to articulate the three main goals of the plan, which are to promote compactness in response to housing shortages and climate and energy requirements, improve urban quality based on economic potentiality and international attractiveness, and protect biodiversity ensuring the coherence of the open space system. Coherent with the tradition of French physical planning, the map of the Regional Spatial Project superimposes icons of the main physical components (open spaces, settlements and big infrastructure) together with symbols of conventional strategic spatial planning such as arrows, dots, and spots. The Regional Spatial Project is a mechanical exercise that shows a metaphor of an “integrated strategy” rather than a structural proposal (Figure 6).

As regards the schedule for implementation, the SD of Île-de-France provides guidelines for incremental development that, rather than a policy, comprise a strategy for explaining the priorities of the plan. To this end, the plan identifies areas for “strategic and priority interventions”, such as the Arc Express (a railway bypass network that



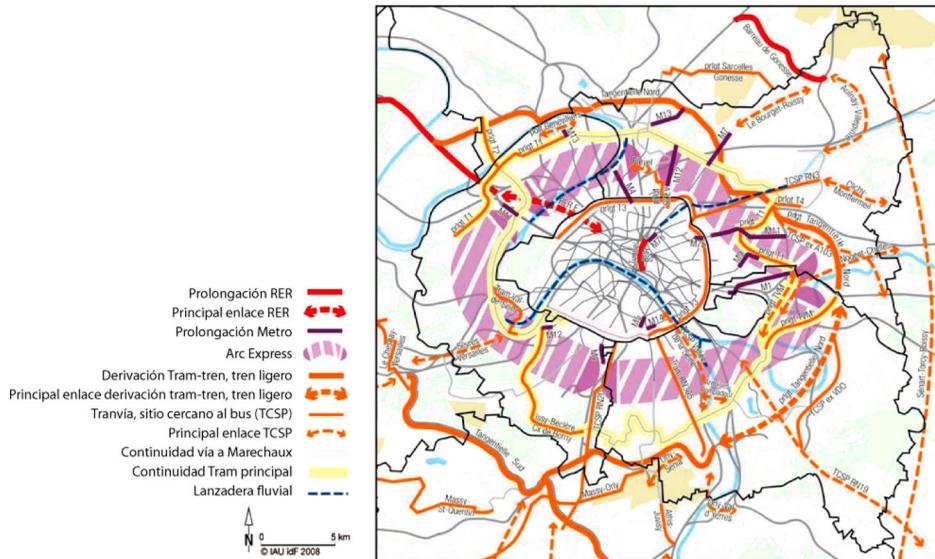
**Figure 6.** Regional Spatial Project.  
Source: IAURIF (2008).

articulates the high-quality services of Central Paris with the peripheral areas) for concentrating resources and areas for guaranteeing an integral metropolitan spatial project (Figure 7).

The public administration is the main agency responsible for executing the metropolitan spatial project. The regional government has a wide range of binding instruments, such as the regulation of housing prices by buying and selling land, and a law enacted in 1999 that requires the creation of inter-municipal associations when carrying out certain major development projects. These local associations can develop their own planning as long as they reach enough “urban weight” for achieving common goals according to regional determinations.

Although the SD of Île-de-France must be reviewed every 10 years, it also presents different evaluating and monitoring procedures for analysing the evolution of local planning, reporting trends of urbanization at the metropolitan level and specifying the interests of municipalities within a highly fragmented political context.

In June and July 2006, before drafting the plan, the government conducted a survey on alternative scenarios for regional development and various general or thematic participatory workshops (i.e. “tables”), guided by specialists in charge of the briefing. By early 2007, based on the results revealed by such initial surveys, public officials from the Ministry of Environment and other national agencies revealed their views on the plan.



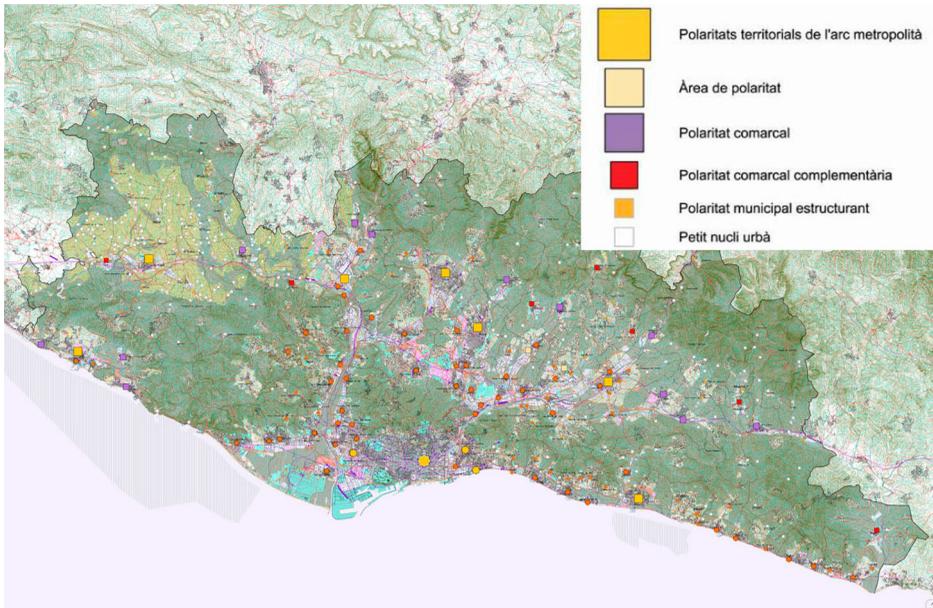
**Figure 7.** Outline of public and intermodal transport network.  
 Source: IAURIF (2008).

Afterwards, the government published the progress of the plan on the official website and answered requests for modification. After various consultations, the Regional Council approved the plan unanimously in June 2008.

### *The Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona*

Barcelona has an outstanding historical background in supra-local planning, which dates back to the city's expansion [*ensanche*] based on the block plan designed by Ildefons Cerdá in 1859. For over half a century, Barcelona and its metropolitan area have continued being an exceptional field for supra-local planning experimentation. In 1983, soon after the restoration of democracy in Spain, the new Catalan Autonomous Government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) implemented a law to allow for multiple levels of planning, which had been ignored for nearly 20 years.<sup>7</sup> However, when the Socialist coalition won the elections in 2003, a renovated regional planning conviction emerged. The creation of the Territorial Planning Programme in 2004 marked a political and technical turn to reschedule the delayed territorial planning, which culminated in the adoption of the Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona (MP of Barcelona) in 2010.

The metropolitan area of Barcelona is managed by three organizations, namely the Association of Municipalities of Barcelona, a second one created for addressing mobility (*Transports de Barcelona, SA i Ferrocarril Metropolità, SA*), and a third organization for waste, water and sewage management (*Empresa Metropolitana de Sanejament, SA*). Despite administrative complexity, the existing overlap between these organizations contributes to providing stability and political capacity to the metropolitan area. Moreover, due to this institutional situation, the National State funds the associated municipalities in proportion to the population of the entire metropolitan area.

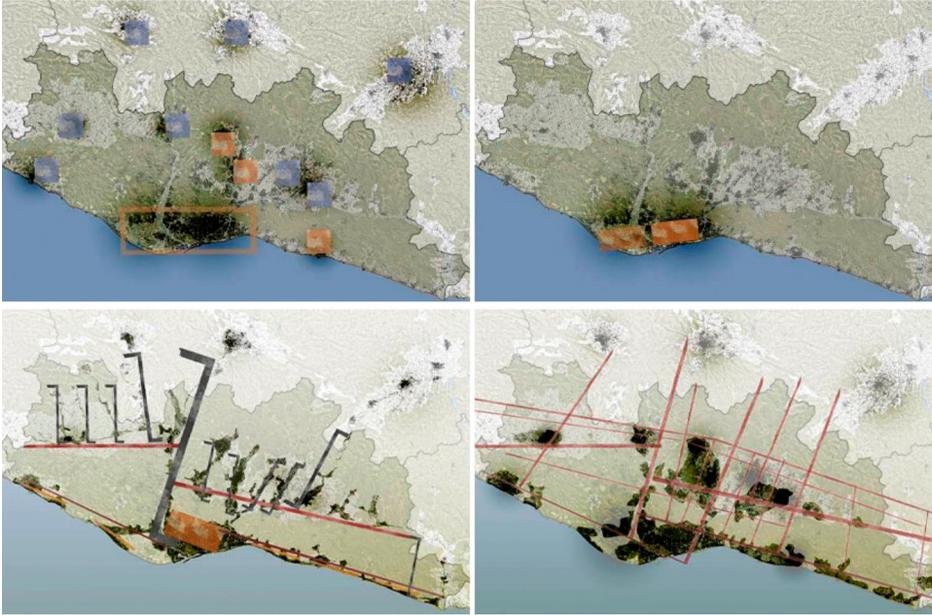


**Figure 8.** Urban system. Nodal structure of the metropolitan area.

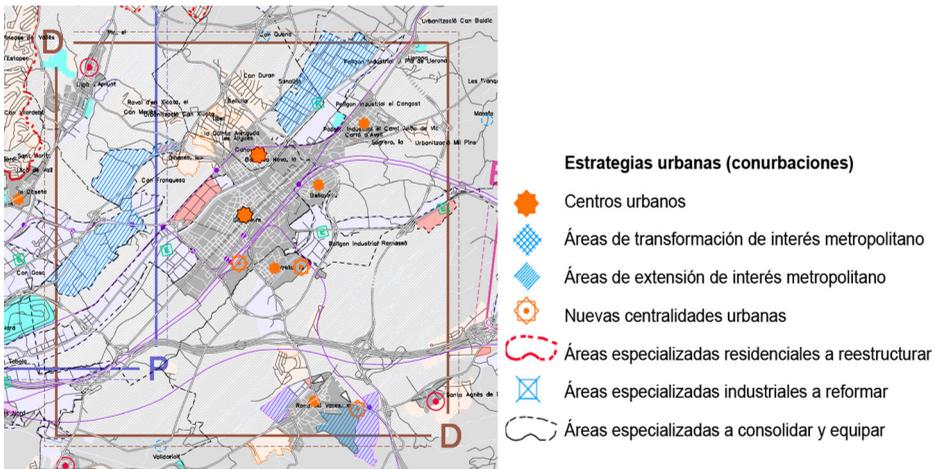
*Source:* Generalitat de Catalunya (2010).

Unlike the strategic approach pursued by previous cases, the drafters of the MP of Barcelona focused on prioritizing the physical form of the territory in guiding future actions and policies. Thus, the metropolitan plan is deemed an “exercise of realism” aimed at reducing its operational scope, thereby lowering expectations that could lead to failure (Esteban, 2012). The project-based discourse of the MP of Barcelona is limited to three basic territorial systems (open spaces, urban settlements and mobility infrastructures) to avoid the omni-comprehensive approach of general local plans. Each theme has specific strategies that are framed within a “possible territorial model” (Figure 8).

Based on the study of the three basic systems and after considering four alternatives for the overall management of the region (i.e. central, orthogonal, digital and nodal), the drafters of the MP of Barcelona opted for a nodal model (Figure 9) that builds on the polynuclear and polycentric nature of the metropolitan region (Carreras, 2012). The nodal model allows developing dense and compact cities, efficiently connected, but with the necessary separation to enable the preservation of open spaces and natural corridors. Also, the nodal model identifies urban cores with enough capacity (i.e. enough facilities, services, productive infrastructures, etc.) to concentrate new growth, as evidenced, for example, in the proposed management of the urban area of Riera de Caldes (Figure 10). As with the SD of Île de France, the map of the metropolitan spatial structure of the MP of Barcelona presents the conventional topics or “layers” of physical planning (mobility infrastructures, growth areas and areas for the protection of large open spaces). However, coherent with the tradition of urbanism, this plan represents physical features with a fairly precise definition on a scale of 1:50,000. This means that it is possible to identify the shape of a physical structure, but also to quantify it, thereby increasing the commitment of planning “promises”. Despite covering a regional administrative level,



**Figure 9.** Alternative metropolitan spatial models.  
*Source:* Generalitat de Catalunya (2010).



**Figure 10.** Strategic project for the urban area Riera de Caldes.  
*Source:* Generalitat de Catalunya (2010).

the plan proposals rely on the comprehensive study of the “form of the territory” on a map scale of 1:5000.

As regards its implementation, the MP of Barcelona does not emphasize stages of investment, but rather pursues a spatial logic of development. The plan aims to enable rational and operative planning, assessing the available resources in each financial year.

For this purpose, the officials of the Territorial Planning Programme intend to monitor the territorial dynamics for adjusting or redefining the territorial model in medium and long term (Baulies, 2010).

In addition, the MP of Barcelona is also based on its concise content for speeding the approval process. To this end the government constituted a Metropolitan Commission (*Comissió Metropolitana Territorial d'Ordenació*) to guarantee that participation is equally representative between the *Generalitat* and the local governments during plan drafting phases. In this context, the Commission implemented the Technical Report to extend the participation to various local coalitions, thereby attempting to increase efficiency during design, participation and approval phases. In addition, the Commission implemented a dual stage of preliminary design and blueprint prior to the initial approval of the plan, to reiterate the consultation on the plan content to each department of the government and every municipality.

In view of the “administrative lightness” at the intermediate level, the government reinforced and expanded the strategic scope of the plan by engaging various private and public agencies. Among the wide range of actors it is worth mentioning the role of the so-called state-owned company, which is a legal entity created by a government to undertake commercial activities on its behalf. A paradigmatic case is the Catalan Land Institute (INCASOL) that has competences for buying land and developing residential areas through a wide range of executive planning instruments like general and detailed master plans.

### **Variables and Key Themes in Metropolitan Spatial Planning: Cross-comparative Analysis**

The introduction to this article asked the question of what particular lessons could be drawn from the distinctive metropolitan spatial plans and strategies in Europe. This section sets out to answer the question by comparing such metropolitan plans and strategies based on the variables and parameters suggested in Table 2. The individual analysis of the four metropolitan plans ratifies the significance of instrumental flexibility in adapting to specific situations. At the same time, the analyses allow the definition of the specificity of their scope and contents. In what follows, a synthesis of the institutional context, instrumental content and planning processes associated with each of the four plans is put forward via a cross-comparative analysis (Table 3). It should be noted that this synthesis does not exhaust the range of these metropolitan plans; rather, the synthesis below is ascribed to specific planning episodes and traditions. The outcome of the analyses brings forward a classification pertaining to the scope of the plans in terms of 10 dependent variables as shown in the following matrix:

Based on the above comparison, the following 10 points provide a synthesis of common patterns, while also suggesting a series of normative considerations.

- (a) Conforming vs. performing: Despite the absence of a national planning strategy (except for the case of Copenhagen), the shaping of metropolitan areas as emerging cities seems to respond to opposing political interests or spatial strategies. On the one hand, the institutional context of metropolitan plans follows a top-down (conforming) implementation according to national or central governments' objectives aimed at the spatial development of their capital cities. On the other hand, such a context similarly responds to a bottom-up (performing) implementation as a result of the existing local

**Table 3.** Analysis of metropolitan plans based on their institutional context, instrumental content and planning process (X+: increasing tendency?)

Analytical cluster	Variable	Parameter	London	Copenhagen	Paris	Barcelona
Institutional context	Legal framework	Conforming	X	X	X	X+
		Performing	X+			X
Instrumental content	Participating institutions	Monolithic	X	X	X	
		Coalition				X
	Thematic scope	General			X+	
		Selective	X	X		X
Form/effect	Binding		X	X	X+	
	Indicative	X	X	X	X	
Planning process	Spatial model	Monocentric	X		X	
		Polycentric		X		X
	Fuzziness	Schematic	X+	X	X	X
		Blueprint		X	X	X
Planning process	Time-element	Incremental (phasing)		X	X	X
		Optional	X			
	Planners' roles	Technocratic	X	X+	X+	X+
		Participative	X+	X	X	X
	Leadership (implementation)	Public		X	X	X+
		Private	X+			
	Evaluation	PPPs	X	X		X
		Continuous			X	
		Intermittent	X	X		X

Source: The authors.

Note: PPP, public–private partnership; X, the variable is met; X+, the variable is met with an increasing tendency.

system in each of these regions. In the face of municipal and sectorial territorial fragmentation, and between coordination and cooperation, metropolitan plans are operational platforms for public and private initiatives and similarly comprise a common agenda for supra-local development.

- (b) Monolithic vs. coalition-based institutions: The common agenda for metropolitan planning organizations demands more coalition-based or ad hoc entities capable of implementing efficient and flexible mechanisms such as guidelines, strategies and, above all, inter-municipal agreements, oftentimes more influential than incumbent legislation. Therefore, in the constitution of metropolitan platforms, planning processes should be deemed more discrete rather than rigid outcomes.
- (c) Despite different instrumental orientations, metropolitan plans usually group their contents in accordance with four major spatial themes: settlement, infrastructure, activities and open spaces. However, the addressed issues support very different approaches, as particular territorial complexities tend to “impose” a specific theme or themes. In this sense, both the comprehensive character of local/municipal planning and the fragmented character of sectorial planning are hindered, emphasizing both the covered and excluded topics associated with the plan.
- (d) In addition to thematic selectivity, metropolitan plans “calibrate” their decisions based on complex administrative and subsidiary competences. In this sense, policy objectives

may have an operational character, binding on the municipalities, or may have a more strategic and holistic approach, providing a framework for sectorial policies at the regional level. The opportunity offered by metropolitan plans is that they can take advantage of the operating instruments of other plans (urban and sectorial) to place them in a global project that can improve the efficiency of regional development.

- (e) This metropolitan project is usually formalized through the adoption of territorial models in which spatial and territorial dynamics are synthesized. In practice, spatial models are used to induce an intentional spatial structure, thus confirming the political and technical guidance of metropolitan plans via two basic schemes: (i) a monocentric and centripetal (vertical) scheme and (ii) a polycentric and nodal (horizontal) scheme.
- (f) Despite the complex framework of government as well as public and private actors, metropolitan plans allow the narrowing of the gap between the spatial models, spatial strategies and the phasing through metropolitan spatial development strategies. More than the representation of final results, metropolitan plans anticipate a line of reasoning illustrated by the prioritization of objectives and the consideration of incremental phases or optional choices that allow for the opportunity to seize particular situations in each territory. Also, the structural nature of the plan allows the metropolitan objectives to have a more prolonged effect.
- (g) In addition to the spatial development strategies, the instrumental flexibility of metropolitan plans allows the incorporation of innovative mechanisms to reduce their technocratic character and to increase the representativeness of the plan. Consultative and deliberative “tables”, the implementation of a dual pre-project and project stage, the formation of committees to expedite the processing of plans and the use of spatial projects as a means of negotiation and communication are used.
- (h) The graphic documentation of metropolitan plans is necessarily ambiguous and varies depending on the chosen strategy for communicating the objectives and commitment of the actors involved in plan implementation processes. In addition, metropolitan plans use different map scales (one for disclosure and another for survey purposes), which should be more detailed to verify the urban arguments of regional strategies. It is for this reason that both the graphical code and the scale constitute variables that shed light on the used criteria as well as the intentionality behind metropolitan planning methodology.
- (i) After the adoption of metropolitan plans, their implementation admits at least three directions, which are either polarized or complementary. Implementation can be privately driven according to market logics, or public-led, through investment in housing, services and infrastructure and the regulation of activities. Between the two approaches joint bodies are formed, such as trusts or public–private partnerships for the management of specific goals within particular time frames.
- (j) Finally, metropolitan plans anticipate monitoring planning instances through the creation of observatories and the preparation of annual reports (this is seen specifically in the cases of London and Paris). In brief, the innovation of recent metropolitan plans lies in their thematic and normative “selectivity”, in which both the results (strategic and end objectives) and the processes (programme definition and implementation and monitoring mechanisms) are relevant.

## Conclusions

This article has proposed and applied a series of key analytical variables aimed at analysing and comparing the scope and extent of contemporary metropolitan spatial plans in Europe. Such variables have been used as a means to comparatively highlight the substantive and procedural aspects of these plans. The qualitative analysis of the four paradigmatic cases shown earlier suggests that while metropolitan spatial plans tend to converge in relation to their general themes, the plans themselves cannot be ultimately “typified” in view of ad hoc variations concerned with their unique institutional contexts, instrumental contents and planning processes. Even while metropolitan plans might resist typification, the cross-comparative analysis does shed light on the broader scope, extent and performance of these types of plans. Moreover, the flexible character of these plans similarly produces a series of regulatory gaps, ambiguities and discretions as regards the principle of subsidiarity, which may adversely affect their operation. Such flexibility allows exceeding the scope of standardized plans oftentimes modulated in rather old-fashioned administrative arenas with respect to the incidence of real urban and metropolitan phenomena.

Furthermore, after determining the distinctive variables in accordance with Faludi and van der Valk’s (1994) dichotomy between project-based and strategy-based plans, the analysis showed that contemporary metropolitan plans are an expression of hybridity as far as their institutional context, instrumental content and planning processes are concerned. The fact that metropolitan spatial plans in Europe merge the qualities and characteristics associated with (former and current) project- and strategy-based plans makes them diverge from typical municipal plans (mostly land-used-based) or regional plans (mostly strategic or growth-oriented).

In short, the management of metropolitan areas does not correspond to a specific map scale. The cases analysed address multiple scales for the same planning problem or territorial phenomenon (between 1:5000 and 1:500,000) to set guidelines and regulations for pluri-municipal areas which, as we saw, can range from 1500 km<sup>2</sup> (London Boroughs) to almost 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Île-de-France). Thus, as for the accuracy of the proposals, the risk of overlapping design competences with municipal plans requires a careful calibration of the scope of metropolitan planning. It is worth mentioning that the ambiguity of scale poses challenges for planners, who often develop generic documents for the urban scale, in which regional decisions are made, or, in contrast, they value as a specificity a phenomenon that is insignificant.

In light of the above, the metropolitan level is not treated explicitly as a planning scale per se; rather, “the metropolitan level” tends to emerge as a “concealed” scale between the local (or municipal) and regional scales and also between local and regional knowledge in planning. This trait reinforces the hybrid approach exhibited by metropolitan planning, which is similarly reflected on their distinctive and synergic capacity to address both strategic and operational approaches in planning. When common interests are not evident, metropolitan plans not only serve as a guide for operational initiatives but also as an invitation—and sometimes an obligation—for introducing local actors in a new territorial regime.

To conclude, this article is only a first contribution towards embarking on a greater attempt at understanding metropolitan spatial plans through comparative, qualitative modes. Metropolitan planning is a practice that should continue to prevail in the face of

the imperative urbanization dynamics that could jeopardize the territory embraced by metropolitan areas, directly affecting the quality of life, natural systems and productive development. Future research could focus on the actual performance of recently approved metropolitan plans and explore whether the implemented instruments effectively influence the fragmented territorial management via municipalities and sectorial initiatives, or whether informal mechanisms are rather created as part of the system. The reflection from the European casuistry is a reference for instrumental innovation in metropolitan spatial planning, but above all, an argument for the creation of future instruments aimed at directing metropolitan planning towards the consolidation of solid urban regions.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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### **Notes**

1. It is worth noting that there are considerable limitations in the use of these ideal classifications (see Nadin & Stead, 2008).
2. Among relevant secondary sources, we underscore the usefulness of a series of interviews conducted by Leboreiro (2009) with an array of planners responsible for preparing the metropolitan plans of London, Paris and Barcelona. Moreover, the cases of Copenhagen and Barcelona build on recent semi-structured interviews and analyses conducted by the authors.
3. Kevin Reid, senior planner, Greater London Authority, interviewed by Leboreiro (2009), op. cit.
4. Unlike planning systems in southern Europe, where plans are meant as laws, the English planning system comprised plans that must respect guidelines unless developers hold sufficient grounds to suggest alternative proposals (CEC, 1999; García-Bellido, 2001).
5. Among the 20 indicators included in the annual report, it is worth mentioning the following: density optimization for the edification of new housing, inequality reduction in health benefits, employment improvement in the suburbs of London, decrease of the individual car dependency increasing the modal distribution of travels, and the increased supply of new housing (Greater London Authority, 2011, p. 259).
6. Various national projects and spatial strategies have resulted in the emergence, decline and resurgence of different institutions and metropolitan policies in the GCR. Since 1947 the development of the GCR has thus been governed by specific organizations that have interpreted the Finger Plan from the perspective of various political ideologies. The structural reform referred to above can be considered as a new spatial project in which the state has encouraged a top-down strategy for regulating the spatial development. Also, in contrast to many other cases of metropolitan planning in Europe, as well as urban and regional planning in Denmark itself, the Fingerplan 2007 can be understood as a case of rescaling in which the state has been favoured to the detriment of the municipal level.
7. During the years of Franco's dictatorship, various plans—mostly unfinished—were drafted for managing the metropolitan area of Barcelona, such as the so-called Regional Plan 1953, the Plan for the Greater Barcelona of 1966 and the General Metropolitan Plan of 1976, which anticipated the “localist” tendency of the Catalan planning approach of the 1980s and 1990s.

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