

Abstract

The shaping of a city and its future relates to official decisions made in city planning meetings, where daily planning matters and decision-making processes adapt to changing societal circumstances. The interest of this research lies in how planning is officially established, managed and practiced in the setting of a Jordanian city, and its local districts. This interest leads the research to observational studies of the mechanisms of municipal council meetings and of the institutional setting of official city planning. One important backdrop for this research are the conditions of the study context tied to rapid changes that have been made to planning objectives due to changing geo-political circumstances and large numbers of migrants. More directly, the research has the basic purpose of improving the understanding of the manifold aspects that surround and make up a decision process, by including actors or relations of various kinds that can have an influence on the procedures.

Through participant observations and drawing on actor-network theory (ANT), this research looks closely into how decision-making agency can be both formally and informally delegated to human actions, to material objects, to technologies, and to the rules and modes of institutional ordering. These heterogeneous aspects are studied in relation to, but also derived from, empirical investigations of the planning culture that, as I see it here, encompasses the norms, values, and historical significance that may influence and define how planning is practiced. I investigate the conditions on which the meeting – as the most common decision-making body – depends to proceed in normal and destabilised situations. The observations are presented as narratives that convey situations of destabilization that were observed and selected through applying a ‘lens of controversy’ as a methodological tool. The analytical discussions that follow these narratives bring new insights by reflecting on the observed meetings, actions, and institutional environments with the help of architecture- and design-oriented actor-network-theory and relational planning theory, as well as organisation theory, decision-making studies and meeting studies.

The detailed and situated studies in this thesis focus on the important role of the material and spatial components of the planning setting. They also highlight the importance of the setting as a flexible network that supports decision-making processes with various types of delegation from inside and outside the meeting room. This has for instance led to views on the temporal territorial productions that are created in interaction with the setting of the planning institution. The results also highlight the heterogeneity of actors with influence, and how time-related features such as timeliness and durabilization in meetings can influence the decision-making process. The research concludes in elevating several networked mechanisms and principles of influence. Principles like ‘redundancy delegation’, ‘transistor tactics’ and ‘recovering destabilizations’, and concepts such as ‘temporal institutional territorialisation’, and ‘state of predisposition’ represent such significant figures of thought that are found to be of interest, and that could be given further attention in the theoretical as well as practical analysis of planning and planning settings. This research hopes also to contribute to discussions regarding how to cope with emergent situations using long- and short-term planning in the development of policies and means for future modes of planning.

Keywords: decision-making, planning culture, city planning meetings, Jordan, destabilizations, heterogeneity, participant observation, controversy, actor-network theory, influential moments, narrative