

# Editorial

## Special Issue: »Planning, land, and property: Framing spatial politics in another age of austerity«

Guest editor: Benjamin Davy

### Preface

by Benjamin Davy and Gerlinde Gutheil-Knopp-Kirchwald

The first special issue published by *Der öffentliche Sektor / The Public Sector* establishes a new format for special issues. Each article has been reviewed by two anonymous reviewers, selected by the guest editor. This had a disadvantage for authors because several articles submitted had to be rejected. This has an advantage, however, for authors because they have passed a double-blind quality control previously not applied by *Der öffentliche Sektor / The Public Sector*. The anonymous peer review will be an essential element also of future special issues – the next one, scheduled for June 2017, already has opened its call for papers: ‘Commons Reloaded. Potentials and Challenges in Urban and Regional Development’, with the guest editors Alexander Hamedinger and Lukas Franta (see [oes.tuwien.ac.at](http://oes.tuwien.ac.at) for further information).

But let us come back to the present special issue »Planning, land, and property: Framing spatial politics in another age of austerity«. All articles are written and published in English. This underlines the international aspiration of the collection whose authors are from China, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Writing in English is challenging for anybody whose first language is not English. Yet, if planning and property scholars wish to share their ideas with like-minded peers around the world, a common language is inevitable. Let’s call this language ‘audacity English.’ With this special issue, *Der öffentliche Sektor / The Public Sector* takes the risk of engaging fully with international conversations on land policy, some written in audacity English.

All articles deal with the political economy of owning—or not owning—a piece of land. Planning, land, and property contribute to this political economy in a variety of ways, and often under conditions that seem to justify another age of austerity. Between the articles, readers will find posters from the ‘Faces of Planning and Land Policy’ series by Ben Davy. The posters are not illustrations of the chapters, but merely food for thought for readers who enjoy eye candy. Everybody, who likes the posters, can download high-resolution versions from [www.bodenpolitik.de](http://www.bodenpolitik.de) for free.

- Paasch and Paulsson discuss standardization and cutting-edge technology in land administration. Still, the software for land surveys and land registration can rely on theories that have been developed quite a while ago (such as Hohfeld’s theory of fundamental legal conceptions).
- Dimelli contemplates the limits of the public sector and the private sector in Greek cities. In the face of the financial crisis, land use planning and land policy have to find a new balance between state intervention and private investments.
- Thiel investigates the impact of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) on domestic land policies. He confirms the fear of many commentators that TTIP might push land policies in European countries »over the edge.«
- Using empirical methods, Leschinski-Stechow verifies the degree of implementation of environmental standards through regulatory land-use planning. Although many environmental aspirations are, in fact, achieved by German planning authorities, there seems to be an invisible edge that inhibits full compliance.
- Lo Piccolo and Giampino explore formal property rights and the use value of rights with respect to housing rights of homeless people. Using the capabilities approach (Sen, Nussbaum), they assert that use rules for public spaces often are exclusionary and unjust to poor and homeless persons. Property rights frequently are an instrument of repression and marginalization.
- Henry, Lloyd, and Farnan illustrate the impact of walls in a town in Northern Ireland that became infamous during ‘the troubles.’ They assert that the quality of cities be considered as the result of tensions between ‘privatism’ and ‘publicness.’ This, of course, calls into question the prudence of town planning by establishing separation, where ‘[t]he past is a shadow, darkening our public

places to generate and maintain some segregated homogenised spaces.'

- Husar and Finka engage in understanding the impact of oil industries on local communities in the global South. The exploitation of natural resources exposes local communities to unnatural conditions of everyday life and raises serious questions about environmental justice.
- Yerramilli addresses land acquisition in India, politically an inflammatory issue. Based upon a careful examination of centuries of property theory and eminent domain doctrine, she finds that property rights in India are so unclear, indistinct and contentious that the taking of property might involve non-existent rights and is not a reliable instrument of land use control by the government.
- Huang asserts that land policy and land ownership constantly has been most relevant to the economic and social development in the People's Republic of China. Land rights and socialist welfare, in particular, have been instrumental in the co-production of political goals. Recent land reforms, however, have resulted in a complete loss of the socialist welfare nature of urban land and housing.
- The 'Bengaluru 8' (Pellissery et al.) present an exciting picture of the political economy of land markets and planning in India's third most populous city. Calling the driving force behind economic and housing development 'crony capitalism,' the authors create a frightening view of how corrupt planning can be combined with

greedy market forces. Politicians, realtors, and planners serving the need not of the community, but of capital!

- Krueger and Jacobs examine the virtues and vices of localism (defined as neighborly concern over land use) with regard to environmental sustainability. Comparing land use control in Kenya and the United States, the authors find a blurred boundary between reactionary and sustainable localism. Since neighborly concern would have its merits, the authors suggest a bigger institutional space for localist sentiment be created.
- B. Davy juxtaposes plural land values with a variety of social constructions of scarcity. Robust and credible property regimes would be those that respond to different rationalities, different voices. Spatial planners, who understand the complex relationship between land values and scarcity, will be more successful than monorational planners.

As managing editor and guest editor, we wish all articles in this special issue much attention, some controversy, and many citations. Austerity and budget cuts, limited supply and collective rationality often are used as justifications for taking from the poor and giving to the rich. Surely, not all planners are like Robin Hood (taking from the rich and giving to the poor). But understanding the spatial politics in another age of austerity will help planners and other policymakers understand better the disequilibrium of (in)justice.

Benjamin Davy

Gerlinde Gutheil-Knopp-Kirchwald