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A Slender Land Use Plan in a Comprehensive Environmental Planning Process

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In nearly every country in continental Europe land use plans emerged as main instruments in the earliest periods of organic planning legislation. So far, these plans have managed to survive by adapting successfully to contemporary needs. Impressed by their robustness, policy makers in closely related policy domains such as for instance environmental policy, nature conservation and cultural heritage policy, have legally linked their own sectoral assessment tools to the approval process of land use plans. Despite the integrating character of planning, this strategy has led primarily to a formal overload of land use plans with sectoral policy goals what has made current land use plans 'obese'. As a consequence, in Flanders (Belgium), these overloaded land use plans have become very vulnerable in court what leads to frequent annulments and, more in general, to a systemic crisis in land use planning.

The authors were involved in a 'comparative' research project in Flanders on potential concepts for framing and tuning various policy instruments within a (spatial) planning process. Comparing the current Flemish approach with these in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Finland has led to the definition of different scenarios for a more robust relationship between land use plans and important political decisions on for instance nature, environment or water management. A reconceptualization of land use plans is necessary, especially now spatial planning seems to be turning into broader environmental planning.

The paper will elaborate on the principles of a promising concept that puts the current overloaded (and thus 'obese') land use plans on a diet by reducing them to their essence, namely offering a legal framework for the assessment of building permits. Today however, land use plans losing weight is possible only if these land use plans become one of many elements in a more comprehensive legally binding political decision that is the result of a holistic environmental planning process. In other words, based on the comparative research, the paper ends with a plea to acknowledge the comprehensive character of environmental planning and, at the same time, to revalue the original ambition of land use plans to regulate urbanistic development.

CLAEYS, M. & LEINFELDER, H. (2015). Land use plans: long live the crocodiles, p. 391-400. In: SCHRENK, M., POPOVICH, V., ZEILE, P., ELISEI, P. & BEYER, C. (eds.). Plan together-right now-overall; from vision to reality for vibrant cities and regions. Real Corp 2015 Proceedings. Competence Center of Urban and Regional Planning, Wenen.

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