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## Conference Report

### *The 14th Annual Conference on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR), Czech Republic, 17–21 February 2020*

From 17 to 21 February 2020, the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University (UJEP) in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic, hosted the 14th annual conference of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR). This conference comes after the one held at Texas A & M University in College Station, USA, and enabled participants to debate the theme of fragmentation (of land, institutions and planning) while experiencing the reality of a post-socialist country. Professor Martin Balej (rector of the *UJEP*), Dr Jaroslav Koutský (*UJEP*) and Professor Richard K. Norton (PLPR president, *University of Michigan*) welcomed approximately 125 participants from 27 countries representing six continents (Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Australasia and Asia), challenging them to robustly engage in the conference's theme through the battle of ideas and reconciliation of different perspectives. The organising committee deserves recognition for its outstanding work in ensuring the successful delivery of the conference proceedings (parallel sessions, keynote speeches and round tables), as well as exciting excursions and social events.

#### **Full-day PhD workshop**

The fifth PLPR full-day PhD workshop took place on 17 February 2020 as the first activity of the conference, with a total of 14 PhD candidates in attendance. These PhD candidates benefited from critical analysis of their research questions, methodologies and projects in general by mentors such as Dr Andreas Hengstermann (PLPR secretary general, *Bern University*) Professor Stefano Moroni (*Polytechnic University of Milan*), Professor Francesco Chiodelli (*Gran Sasso Science Institute*), Professor Sonia Guelton (*University Paris Est – Lab'Urba*) and Professor Richard K. Norton. The workshop entailed the young researchers preparing and presenting posters summarising their research projects. The feedback from some of the PhD candidates reveals that the workshop was interesting, exceeded their expectations, and made them improve their research question, scope and methodology. This positive feedback would not have

been possible without the efforts of Dr Andreas Hengstermann and Lu Zhou (PhD coordinator, *Hong Kong University*) in making the workshop a success.

## **The problem of fragmentation (of land, institutions and planning)**

The conference addressed the post-socialist Central European reality dealing with the enormous fragmentation of landownership, as well as responsibilities and rules regarding the use of (public) spaces. The Czech Republic is one of the post-socialist European countries which offer excellent examples to debate the problem of fragmentation. This problem in the Czech Republic contributes to the creation of socially excluded areas with a high demand for housing for the poor, a struggling economy and various social challenges in some parts of the country. The exciting debate of the fragmentation problem in the conference extended to special sessions addressing discourses on public value-capture instruments; private land for flood management (land-policy instruments and strategies); access to land for rural regeneration; issues of planning, law and property rights; and blockchain (land registration and recording of real estate).

## **Excursions**

On 18 February 2020, conference participants, guided by Dr Pavel Raška (*UJEP*), went on an excursion to understand the geographical and socio-economic dynamics of the city of Ústí nad Labem. The tour enabled participants to experience and understand the density of chemical industries within the city's urban fabric as a consequence of industrialisation. The visit to the nineteenth-century 'small castle' Větruše offered a spectacular and perfect view of the city and the Elbe river valley. The tour of the Elbe river valley added value to participants through insight regarding the impact on the surroundings of the floods of 2002 and 2013. In addition, the morning tour included a popular site where a wall had been erected to isolate a neighbourhood of the poor from that of the well-off, giving birth to political debate around social exclusion in the Czech Republic. In the afternoon of the same day, the excursion to the Velké Březno local brewery, guided by Dr Lenka Slavikova (*UJEP*), was a learning tour for participants on the role of breweries in the economy of the city and a description of key infrastructure and processes in beer making.

## Parallel sessions

Over the four-day conference, participants presented a total of 110 papers in 24 thematic sessions addressing land, institutions and planning on the problem of fragmentation. Similar to the previous conference, the submitted and presented papers displayed the diversity of ideas and perspectives on the intersection of planning, law and property rights. Participants extensively discussed emerging issues and practices in housing, zoning, land for rural regeneration, green infrastructure, market-based instruments, wilderness and ecosystem services, informality, property and law, regulations, obsolete vacant property, revitalisation and land conflicts of energy transition, amongst others. For example, Professor Richard K. Norton presented on the zoning for coastal shorelands as an emerging issue, triggering a debate on the dynamic nature of shorelines. The debate on fragmentation, in particular on obsolescent and vacant property, provoked discussions among participants sharing experiences across various countries. In the special discussion sessions, participants on flood management highlighted not only flood retention measures but also transferable development rights, flood insurance and land-policy instruments in general as strategies for addressing flooding on private land. The special session on public value capture enabled presenters to reflect on the approaches and strategies for financing development and the practices of various countries. The third and fourth special sessions focused on access to land, property laws and rights, and blockchain (registration and recording). Participants addressed these two sessions, sharing the experiences of Germany, Australia, Taiwan, Turkey and Poland. The discussion of participants in the parallel sessions unpacked the fragmentation problem as a different issue that is not only a spatial but also a socio-economic challenge that requires an integrated approach in planning, law and property rights.

## Round tables

The conference had two round tables that expanded on the conference's theme with a debate on housing and government, and land-take in Europe. On 19 February 2020, Professor Jirina Jilkova (*UJEP*) chaired the round table on housing and government and was joined by Thomas Hartmann (*Wageningen University*), Professor Rachelle Alterman (*Israel Institute of Technology*) and Edward Sullivan (*Portland State University*) as panellists. Professor Jirina Jilkova opened the discussion by highlighting the effects of housing markets, social housing policy and government intervention in the Czech Republic. In responding to the question of whom the regulation of the housing market is protecting, Professor Rachelle Alterman underscored the importance of land and market regulations. At the same time, Thomas Hartmann stated that the regulations protect both landlords and tenants because such regulations intend to

protect investment and provide affordable housing. Lastly, in response to this question, Edward Sullivan reflected on the injustices of the USA housing regulations that benefit landlords at the expense of tenants. The implementation of housing regulations in any country should equally benefit landlords, tenants and ordinary people to realise the necessary objectives. With regard to the issue of social housing, panellists argued for diversity and people empowerment rather than pushing people with the prospect of ownership into rental housing.

The second round table, on land-take trends and land-take confinement strategies in Europe, took place on 20 February 2020, chaired by Dr Elisabeth Marquard (*UFZ-Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research*), joined by Dr Eliska Vejschodska (*Charles University*), Alice Colsaet (*IDDRI and CIRED*), Dr Jana Bovet (*UFZ-Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research*) and Thomas Hartmann as panellists. Land-take denotes the loss of agricultural and forest land to other land uses. Dr Jana Bovet shared Germany's experience on land-take, indicating that the target of reducing land-take by less than thirty hectares per day contributes to public awareness on land issues, resulting in land-take decrease while consequently influencing an increase in land prices. In debating land-take, Dr Eliska Vejschodska presented on the protection of the most precious agricultural land in the Czech Republic, considering the use of administrative instruments to protect agricultural land and tax for the conversion of agricultural land. Alice Colsaet reacted to the discussion with the experience of France on land-take. The panellist highlighted France as consuming over 200 hectares of land per day given the lack of binding restrictions regarding protected areas, inadequate mainstreaming of environmental issues into planning instruments, and late implementation of environmental assessment in projects. Thomas Hartmann reflected on research he had done with other scholars on land-policy instruments that revealed the application of policy instruments (i.e. land expropriation, land readjustment) to differ per country and to be context-dependent. He also shared a brief on a current research project regarding land thrift, housing and densification, which measures the influence of the problem, the cause and interventions on these three research focus areas. Both round tables provoked participants' reactions, allowing the sharing of worldwide experiences on housing and land-take.

## Keynote speeches

On 18 February 2020, Professor Jaroslav Koutský (*UJEP*) opened the conference with an interesting keynote address on Ústí nad Labem – 'The City in a Haze: The Story of Post-socialist Urban Planning and Governance'. He reflected on three developmental stages that formed the city, consisting of the Industrial Revolution and pre-war 'golden times' (the late 1930s); the Communist (socialist) regime (late 1940s–late 1980s); and post-communism (post-socialist) present (early 1990s–present). In opening the

parallel sessions on 19 February 2020, Professor Karel Maier (*Czech Technical University*) inspired participants with the keynote address that discussed legal frameworks and planning practice. He reflected on the various European spatial-planning modes that include land-use management, comprehensive and integrated planning, urbanism and regional economics as the foundation for Czech spatial planning. The address gave participants a broad overview of Czech spatial planning in relation to planning and planners, municipalities, bureaucracy and law from the Second World War period to the present, including its weaknesses.

### **General assembly and next PLPR**

This year's general assembly was once again time to elect a new PLPR Executive Committee. After two consecutive terms, Professor Richard K. Norton (former PLPR president) passes on his role as president to Thomas Hartmann (former PLPR vice president). During the conference, the outgoing president recognised the PLPR as a wonderful, voluntary and revenue-free organisation where international researchers annually meet up to share ideas. Two new vice presidents were elected, namely Dr Eran Kaplinsky (*University of Alberta*) and Dr Rebecca Leshinsky (*RMIT University*). Dr Andreas Hengstermann remained in his position as secretary general, while Sofija Nikolić Popadić (*University of Belgrade, Serbia*) was elected as the new PhD coordinator. The elected members were supported by all attendees through a vote together with the appointed ExCo members, including Professor Ed Sullivan (North American representative); Professor John Sheehan (Pacific Rim representative); Dr Linda McElduff and Professor Rachelle Alterman (*Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)* PLPR thematic group leaders); and Professor Jiřina Jílková, Dr Pavel Raška and Dr Lenka Slavíková (this year's conference hosts).

The 15th PLPR annual conference will unfortunately not take place in 2021 due to the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, but will take place in 2022, Ghent, Belgium. More details will follow this summer on the conference website (see [www.plpr-association.org](http://www.plpr-association.org)).

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