

## **Sustainable urban development in Bordeaux: politics, policies and spheres of practices**

Jenny Lindblad, PhD Student

*Division of Urban and Regional Studies*

*KTH – Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden*

*[jenny.lindblad@abe.kth.se](mailto:jenny.lindblad@abe.kth.se)*

UN's agenda to achieve the seventeen goals of sustainability for 2030 has been praised for emphasizing the need of the whole globe –north and south– to step up the transformation toward sustainable development. While also criticized for its vagueness and risk of missing the target, it provokes reflection on how issues of sustainability are dealt with in city regions across the world, where much of the work for a resilient future is to be done. My contribution to this track will be an initial tentative analysis of material from my fieldwork in Bordeaux, where I inquiry into planning processes aiming at turning ambitions for sustainable urban development (SUD) into practice. In this paper I first introduce my attempts to grasp these implementation processes in a specific development project driven by a coalition of actors and policies, to give the frame for my inquiry. Second, I connect my study to ongoing research on urban sustainability policy that aims at dealing with governance in planning practices as they are carried out by sociotechnical and political formations.

Three years before the recent UN agenda for sustainable development a webpage with the heading 'Bordeaux 2030' was launched. Urban development initiatives in the French city are communicated through this webpage, which is managed by the division of the city administration dealing with land use. The administration is the loci of my ethnographic research. I follow links from the work of the administration as a core governing institution, to policies from different institutional levels that partake in steering the implementation of SUD. The international agenda established by UN is one such framework that intermingles with, among other, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the national initiative "La ville de demain", and the city's comprehensive plan with additional policies adopted to enforce sustainable

development. These policy objects are transformed as they become translated across overlapping spheres of practices involved in the planning process, including policy-makers, planners, politicians, officials, private stakeholders and resident interest groups. By tracing such translations I attempt to map how, in the case of planning processes aiming at SUD in Bordeaux, things do add up, though not necessarily into coherence, and keep track of what happens with the different values adhered to in different spheres when efforts are put into action to coordinate and align sustainable development. Following linkages and connections between heterogeneous practices and spheres and is a mean to track practices across domains often analytically separated into discrete ontological categories in social scientific research.

In a review of existing research on urban sustainability policy, Bulkeley (2010: 231) argues that “taking these issues into account requires a more nuanced concept of the city as a site within which climate governance is taking place, one which recognizes the complex interaction of the social, material, economic, technical and political within and between different spheres of authority”. Rutland & Aylett (2008) can be mentioned as an important account in this regard. My study of how conflict and politics play out in SUD planning in Bordeaux aims at tapping into this request by exploring the complex and interwoven ecologies of commingling and sometimes conflicting practices cutting through the city administration, and operating at difference spatial scales, often overlapping and crossing territorial jurisdictions, in the process generating a mesh-work of policy and decision-making structures. The approach is similar to the empirical research in city managements done with an ethnographic sensibility by Czarniawska (2002). It offers an entry point into how planning processes unfolds in “the political institutions of city-region governance” (Harrison and Hoyler 2014: 2263). The term is useful to point to the organisational structure of SUD planning in the city of Bordeaux which occurs in coalitions, formalized to various degrees, with neighbor municipalities, the national government, non-departmental public bodies and civil society interest groups. My ethnographic engagement with planning practices does at best bring about some suggestions about the conflicts and negotiations taking across policies and spheres of practices that tackle with global environmental, social and economic challenges toward horizon of a sustainable 2030. While in extension

touching upon the fundamental question, for whom?, I will in this paper focus at the one closely linked when it comes to urban planning governance; by whom is the city being constructed?

## References

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