Conference paper for the *Joint PhD Symposium on South East Europe*
London School of Economics and Political Science, 18 June 2010.

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Title: Spatial planning, institutional diffusion and the politics of space in Albanian cities after Socialism. Evidence from Tirana and Korca.

**Abstract**
The collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe after 1989 gives way to remarkable changes on a political, economic and social level, with a direct spatial impact. This paper presents the wider context of spatial planning in Albanian cities, during the era of the post-socialist transition. In line with the socio-political transformations in Eastern Europe, the paper uses the notion of institutional diffusion that refers: first to the transfer of responsibilities from the national to the local level and the administrative decentralisation; and second to the rise of multiple local and international actors in the political stage. Subsequently, the paper links the concept of institutional diffusion to spatial planning, focusing on the shift from comprehensive to strategic planning and the new parameters for urban development as set by the introduction of the free market. The second part of the paper brings evidence from Tirana (the Albanian capital city) and Korca (the major urban centre of Albania’s southeast), by presenting the wide variety of studies and plans that have been elaborated, over the last years, through the cooperation of local and international actors. The paper concludes by connecting the initial theoretical considerations to city-specific evidence; pointing at the instrumental role of the international organisations in defining the context of planning and identifying institutional diffusion as generator of fragmentation and uncertainty in spatial planning.
1. Introduction

The collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe after 1989 gives way to remarkable changes on a political, economic and social level, with a direct spatial impact. Although academic literature has extensively explored the social, political and economic transformations of the post-socialist era, the spatial aspects of this process have only recently started to attract relevant interest (Herrschel, 2007, Stanilov, 2007). In principle, the transition from the centrally planned economies to the free market societies entails the direction towards a western-type, democratic, political system. However, the democratisation of many of these societies has proved to be a highly contested process that would require much more than the shift from the single-party to the multi-party system and the electoral reform (Kipas, 2004). In the context of global socio-political and economic transformation, the disintegration of the socialist state and its subsequent restructuring, along with the widening up of the political stage in order to involve a multiplicity of international and local actors, opens up a dynamic political space that hardly fits under the concept of governance. This paper uses instead the notion of institutional diffusion as an analytical tool and traces down its impact on space and spatial planning, in a post-socialist urban context and specifically on Albanian cities.

One of the evident features of the post-socialist transition in East European cities is the remarkable differentiation in directions, paces and outcomes (Hamilton, 2005). The evolution of cities after Socialism has relied on their different starting points, their spatial and historical particularities, the free market forces, the role of international organisations, the abilities and the quality of the new leadership and the dynamics of the local society. The investigation on the Albanian cities, in particular, along with their historical and spatial specificities offers useful insights into the ‘southeast European city’, the ‘post-socialist city’, the ‘less developed city’ and more generally into the contemporary city in a global context. In turn, the examination of the ways that space is regulated and planned in order to fit in the wider socio-political and economic context of
the transition from the socialist to the capitalist system can provide useful theorisations on the wider dependencies between space and society in contemporary cities.

The wider topic of my research develops along a tripartite structure: first, the context of planning; namely how the planning field is set, by whom, how and on what purposes. Second, the process of planning; namely the plan-making with the various actors involved and the ways that these actors interact with each other and relate to the planning processes. Third, the product of planning; the outcome of the process, which is the plans themselves. This paper will deal with the first component of the research, by presenting some initial theoretical considerations and some evidence from two Albanian cities, focusing on the context of spatial planning during the era of transition. In the first part (chapter 2) the paper will explore the concept of institutional diffusion, addressing specific notions on issues of political restructuring, administrative decentralisation and the rise of multiple actors on the political stage. Subsequently, the paper will use the concept of institutional diffusion in order to examine how the post-socialist transition relates to planning and the politics of space (chapter 3). The second section of the paper (chapters 4, 5 and 6) will present the context of planning in two Albanian cities: Tirana (the capital city) and Korca (the major urban centre of Albania’s southeast). The final section (chapter 7) will conclude with some initial thoughts on the links between the theoretical considerations and the city-specific evidence and will give way to the future development of the research.

2. Institutional diffusion in Eastern Europe after 1989

By the term institutional diffusion we mean the complicated process of hollowing out the socialist state, by transferring political power (in terms of authority, jurisdiction, responsibilities) from the one, singular actor (the state) to lower-scale elected authorities or others, non-elected local and international actors. In the context of the wider socio-political transformations in Eastern Europe, the institutional diffusion refers: first to the transfer of responsibilities from the national to the local level and the administrative decentralisation; and second to the rise of multiple local and international actors in the political stage.
It is evident that the major socio-political transformations in Eastern Europe after 1989 are nothing but irrelevant to the political restructuring that takes place on a global scale during the same period. Indeed, over the last decades the state sovereignty has been challenged on a global scale, due to globalisation and the information and communication technologies (Knox & Taylor, 1995, Borja & Castells, 2007). The inability of the nation-state to respond to the global political restructuring is counterbalanced by the rise of cities as sites of enforced political power (Taylor, 1995); a process directly related to the global economic restructuring and the salient role of cities, as generators of economic growth.

2.1 Administrative decentralisation and the political status of East European cities

The institutional diffusion means first the transfer of responsibilities and resources from the central to the local level, often in a context of new administrative divisions and structures. During Socialism, in all the East European countries local and regional authorities had restricted responsibilities. In the framework of a highly centralised, hierarchical model, the political and economic decision-making about planning was guided by the central state and the Communist Party (French & Hamilton, 1979). Soon after the collapse of the socialist regimes, the new legal framework more or less deconstructed state power and gave increased responsibilities to the city level, most often by overcoming the regional one. This process of administrative restructuring followed different paces and gave way to different outcomes (Tosics, 2005). In most cases, however, the central government transferred most of its property to the local level (the remaining from the extended privatisations), as well as a series of responsibilities, such as the operation and maintenance of public services, or the provision of social housing. As should be expected, many problems occurred through this restructuring; most notably the overlapping of responsibilities, gaps in coordination, administrative fragmentation, or lack of funding at the local level (ibid.).

The process of administrative decentralisation strengthens the role of cities, and in particular the capital cities, which rise as the most suitable site to exercise political power and promote economic efficiency. The fact that cities become much more independent on a political, administrative and economic level to control their development provides suitable political space for the rise of dynamic mayors (Stone,
1998) that through plans, studies and projects aim to attract investments, to accumulate economic and political capital, to establish economic and political links or even to promote personal ambitions and visions. Perhaps the most telling case is Mayor Yuri Luzhkov of Moscow, who since 1992 has been actively involved in the urban restructuring of the Russian capital, by promoting mega-projects, new infrastructures and strategic developments. Similarly, Mayor Edi Rama of Tirana, since 2000 and through a series of urban renewal and beautification projects has promoted internationally a new image and a new identity for the Albanian capital.

2.2 The rise of multiple international actors

In the context of the new global political geography, the states are called to share their power with other political bodies. Hence, the institutional diffusion refers here to the new actors of the political stage as well as to the processes that do not work any more at the national level (Sassen, 2006, Ferguson & Jones, 2002). National and local governments, local organisations, public or private institutes, international bodies and NGOs create strong networks of global governance (Beck, 2005). This process gives way to the salient role of the international organisations, such as the UN, EU, the World Bank, the UNDP, the IMF, the USAID etc., who acquire an instrumental role in the processes of development and planning. For the cities of Eastern Europe, as well as for the cities of the global South, spatial planning and the regulation of space in general are instrumental tools for the integration of those cities; politically into the ‘West’ and economically into the new world economy.

In Albania, as in all Eastern European countries since the early 1990s, international organisations, European governments, religious, educational and cultural bodies, political institutions, NGOs, multinational enterprises, international experts; all coexist and promote the (de-)regulation of space, cooperating -or not- with central state, local authorities and other actors. Along with the diverse studies and plans, a significant factor is also the reports of the international organisations, whose data, recommendations and guidelines directly contribute to the formulation of the framework of planning. As can be noted, not all actors exercise the same power nor do they promote similar agendas. Nonetheless, they influence more or less local, national and international decision-making processes.
3. Spatial Planning in Eastern Europe after Socialism

The transition from the centrally planned economies to the market economy leads not only to a significant spatial restructuring, but also to significant changes on the context and the normative content of spatial planning. On an ideological level the mentality and the practices of socialist-era planning are rejected, as incompatible to the free market and a neo-liberal approach prevails that strongly opposes to state intervention (Dimitrovskaya-Andrews, 2005). Even the concept of state control over the private realm is seen as an obstacle to economic growth and remnant of the past (Stanilov, 2007). In here also lies the desire of the various local or central authorities to overpass what was seen as the restriction of the socialist legacy and to align to the practices, doctrines and trends of planning applied on the Western city.

One of the fundamental features in this process is the shift from macro-scale planning structures, land use zoning and a rational sequence of planning scales, towards the absence of national or regional plans and the quest for comparative advantages and local economic development. It is evident that this process is highly relevant to the administrative decentralisation, as presented in chapter 2.1, but most importantly to changes that have been taking place in Western cities at the same period. Indeed, already since the 1980s the Western world of cities has witnessed a shift from a managerial towards an entrepreneurial approach in the field of urban governance (Harvey, 1989); and in planning terms a shift from a comprehensive model of urban planning, towards strategic planning. These changes were often accompanied by changes on an institutional level; namely the redrawing of administrative structures and boundaries and the introduction of new political and administrative bodies.

Strategic planning, in general, promotes flexibility and urban competitiveness and aims to promote entrepreneurship, to create a favourable climate for businesses, to attract investments and to reduce business risks. Furthermore, strategic planning is oriented towards action and implementation, by linking plans with programmes and projects, in order for the local authorities to have a specific framework upon which to articulate urban development and attract local or international investments (Tsenkova, 2007). The processes of public consultation that are often followed, are directly linked to the involvement of multiple actors in the planning process as presented in chapter 2.2;
namely the Municipality, international experts, planners, NGOs, academics, ministries, agencies and businesses. For the cities of Eastern Europe, strategic planning has evolved as a parallel instrument to statutory General Urban Plans or even as a substitute. In many East European cities – among which in most capital cities - General Urban Plans and/or Strategic Plans have been elaborated since the late 1990s, most often with the involvement of international experts or under the aegis of international organisations (Tsenkova, 2007, Stanilov, 2007).

Apart from the shift from comprehensive planning towards strategic planning, spatial planning for the cities of Eastern Europe faces significant challenges that are relevant to the transition from a centrally planned economy towards the free market economy. Among them, the most fundamental one is private property. Indeed, planning is subsequently confronted with the uncertain balance between public and private, in a context of restitution of former private ownerships, extended privatisations, the over-appraisal of private ownership and an extreme neo-liberal ethos. In order to efficiently exercise development control, the new planning system of these countries has required a new regulatory framework able to define ‘who plans what and how’ and introduce among others: implementation mechanisms for providing public infrastructures and services, modes of partnerships with the private sector and land policy instruments (Dimitrovska-Andrews, 2005). Furthermore, spatial planning of the new era needs to face the extended urban restructuring, the new land uses, the development trends and problems; including: the commercialisation of the city centres, the disintegration of industry, the extended suburbanisation and the large-scale business, commercial and recreation developments, just to mention a few of them (Stanilov, 2005).

4. Albania: post-socialist transformations and regulatory framework

Albanian cities present certain particularities in the context of the East European space, due to their historical evolution and their spatial features, but also due to the dramatic collapse of the political, economical and social structures, in the early 1990s. They have in most cases followed a model of unregulated development that consists of: limited official investments, the crucial role of the informal and illegal economy and the lack of control over the land market, planning and construction processes. Moreover, features of
the Albanian society of the transitional period include: high percentages of poverty and unemployment, increasing social polarisation and rapidly differentiated incomes, and uncontrolled external and internal migration (Vickers & Pettifer, 1997, 2007).

Regarding the regulatory framework of urban planning in Albania, a series of laws, by-laws and amendments have been issued since the early 1990s. The most relevant law at the national level is the Law 8405 of 1998 On Urban Planning (together with all the bylaws and amendments). This Law is valid until September 2010, when the Law 10119 On Territorial Planning will replace it. Furthermore, the decentralisation of infrastructure and public services has followed the Law 8652 of 2000 On the Organisation and Functioning of Local Governments. Additional regulations at the national level that have a direct impact on spatial planning, include the Law 7652 of 1992 On the Privatisation of State Housing, the Law 7698 of 1993 On the Restitution of Property and the Compensation for the Property Owners and the Law 9482 of 2006 On the Legalisation, Urban Planning and Integration of Unauthorized Buildings.

At the local level, the regulatory framework of the major Albanian cities includes a Regulatory Plan from the socialist era. In the context of a centrally planned economy, the state provided for all the national, regional and urban plans, following the principles of ‘scientific planning’. The plans were aligning to a rational sequence of time, space and resources and were based on functional and demographic needs. Both the plans of Tirana and Korca have been elaborated in the late 1980 and issued in 1989 and 1994 respectively. Although these plans are more or less typically valid until present, they have proved themselves incapable of dealing with the dynamics, trends and problems of the contemporary city and exercising development control. In the following chapters, the paper will present the wide variety of studies and plans that have been elaborated in those two Albanian cities, over the last years. The comparative analysis of the two case studies will constitute one of the axes of future research development.

5. Tirana

Tirana rises in the context of the post-socialist transition, as a dynamic laboratory of planning interventions, various studies and plans. Geopolitical restructuring of the post-
1989 Southeast Europe and the redrawing of political boundaries in Western Balkans, place Tirana in the centre of a wider area. Furthermore, the emerging metropolitan entity Tirana-Durres becomes instrumental in the context of the ‘Corridor 8’, one of the major road axes promoted by the European Union, which will in the future connect South Italy, Tirana, Skopje and Sofia, to the Black Sea. Taking into consideration that Tirana serves as the base for all the international organisations that operate in Albania, as well as embassies, foreign correspondents and the headquarters of the multi-national companies, the capital city emerges as the focal point of the country’s connection to the rest of the world. In this context, Tirana absorbs the bulk of the planning activity, on the one hand as the capital city and the most important demographic centre of Albania and on the other hand due to the city’s dynamic urban development, as a result of massive internal migration, the development of an extended informal periphery and the vertical explosion of the City Centre.

5.1 Studies and plans of the early transitional period

A series of studies and plans for the city of Tirana, conducted during the early transitional period, were the outcome of the cooperation between the Albanian governments, the Municipality and various international organisations (Aliaj et al., 2003: 101-103). In this context the following studies can be singled out:

- The ‘Study of the Transport Scheme in Tirana’ (1993), financed by the World Bank
- The ‘Study of Tirana City Development’ (1995), conducted by the Austrian company ‘Regional Consulting International’, financed by the Austrian government
- The ‘Zoning Regulation of the Tirana City’ (2001), conducted by the US Urban Institute, in the context of the ‘Urban Housing and Development Project’, financed by USAID
- The ‘Regional Study of Tirana-Durres Corridor’, conducted by GTZ and financed by the German government
- The ‘Strategic Plan for the Greater Tirana’, conducted by the US-based company PADCO, financed by the World Bank
The ‘Strategic Plan of Greater Tirana Area’ (2002), by the Albanian NGO Co-Plan in collaboration with the Institute for Housing and Urban Development (the Netherlands)

The ‘Environmental compatible development and promotion of architectural and environmental heritage in Albania’ (2005), conducted by the University of Rome and funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

All the above studies do not acquire a binding status nor do they enter the implementation phase; they do not necessarily comply with each other, or with an overarching regulatory framework. They are, nonetheless, important to the extent that they set the overall framework of development, express the interests of diverse actors and promote various politics in space.

5.2 The Tirana City Centre Master Plan

The Tirana Centre Master Plan was the outcome of the European competition ‘Tirana- a new European Capital’, held in 2003 and financed by GTZ through bilateral agreements of the Albanian government with the Dutch and the German governments. The competition was aiming to give Tirana a new urban image and identity. Among the three selected finalist companies; namely Architecture Studio (France), Bolles+Wilson (Germany) and Mecanoo (Netherlands), the first prize was awarded to Architecture Studio in July 2003 and since then this project is commonly referred to as the ‘French Plan’. As can be noted, the City Centre Master Plan was not complying with the existing regulatory plan, the urban planning law or the building code. It was rather a spatial concept referring to a radically new identity and urban image, aiming to promote the development of the City Centre. Although approved, only very few elements of the Master Plan have until present progressed to the implementation stage, while others have become the subject of additional international competitions.

5.3 The Tirana Regulatory Plan

The most significant step in regulating Tirana’s urban space until present is the city’s new Regulatory Plan (2004-9). The links between the Tirana Municipality and the Dutch government that were established in the process of the City Centre master plan
competition, gave way to the formulation of the city’s new regulatory plan, through competitions financed by the Dutch Government. The competitions were held under the monitoring and the financing of the World Bank. The project of the Regulatory Plan was divided in two phases (Source: Tirana Municipality):

- The first phase (2004-5) included the cartographic and geographic registration of the city through the elaboration of digital maps and a GIS database and was commissioned to the Turkish-based company ‘Inta Space Turk’.
- The second phase referred to the elaboration of the Zoning Code and the Regulatory Plan (2005-8). Six out of the fourteen participant international companies were selected to present their proposals: DHV & Mecanoo Architects (Netherlands), MVRDV Architects (Netherlands), Urban Research Institute USA (Albania & USA), Louis Berger SAS (France), Halkrow Group (UK) and Urbaplan (Switzerland). The Swiss-based company Urbaplan, with a long-lasting experience in spatial planning for the cities of the global South, was selected to proceed with the elaboration of the plan.

The Plan’s final draft was published in November 2008 and was presented at an exhibition kiosk in Skanderbeg Square, the city’s major public space. Following a period of public consultation, the final draft has been delivered to the Municipality. However, until present the Plan has not been approved by the Territorial Adjustment Council of the Republic of Albania and has not yet become a binding document.

6. Korca

Korca is the major demographic and urban centre of Albania’s southeast and is a city with a significant urban tradition and culture. The city stands in relative isolation in relation to the Tirana-Durres metropolitan region and the high-development coastal axis. Nonetheless, its geographic location, in close proximity to Greece and Macedonia, present the challenge of integration into a potential future network of economic development and tourism. Although the city suffered from severe out migration during the 1990s, local level dynamics have been trying to counterbalance the negative
demographic trends over the last years; to attract investments and develop strategies in collaboration with international consultants and organisations.

6.1 Studies and plans of the early transitional period

Korca singles itself out among many Albanian cities for maintaining up to a certain extent spatial order and promoting ‘formal planning’ even during the early transitional period, but also managing to cover all major infrastructure needs over the last years through international aid. In this context, Korca Municipality has promoted a series of partial urban studies and projects for urban interventions (such as the ‘Sports Planet Complex Study’, 2008, and the ‘Feasibility Study for the Regeneration of Public Areas and Roads’, 2009). Additional studies for specific projects have been conducted with the involvement of the Municipality, national agencies and local and international experts; among which the Study for the Restoration and Revitalisation of the Bazaar (2008).

Given the city’s relatively weak development trends, most of the studies and plans over the last decade either deal with specific projects, or with citywide infrastructure projects. The two studies that directly relate to the urban development of the entire city are:

- The Strategic Plan for Economic Development conducted by FLAG/Open Society Institute in cooperation with Korca Municipality (2005) (The Plan is currently under revision).
- The Local Environmental Action Plan (Plani Lokal i Veprimit ne Mjedis) (2005) by the Albanian ‘Regional Centre for the Environment’ in cooperation with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

6.2 The Korca City Centre Master Plan

The City Centre Master Plan was the outcome of the international competition held by Korca Municipality in 2009. The five out of twelve finalist companies, selected to present their proposals were: 51N4E (Belgium), Bolles+Wilson (Germany), Daniel Libeskind Architects LLC (New York, USA), JA-Joubert Architecture (Rotterdam, Netherlands) and Domus Concept (Lisboa, Portugal). The first price was awarded to the German-based company Bolles+Wilson. As can be noted, the City Centre master plan did not comply with the 1994 Regulatory Plan or the regulations for the protection of the
traditional quarters of the city, nor did it take any account on issues of property rights. Following the Tirana case, this was again a spatial concept aiming to develop the City Centre. In May 2010 the Territory Adjustment Council (regional level) rejected the plan, on the grounds of extreme intensification with a negative impact on the identity of the centre. Since then, the future implementation of this project remains uncertain.

6.3 The Urban Development Regulatory Plan of Korca

The Urban Development Regulatory Plan of Korca is part of the Land Administration and Management Project, 2007-2011 (LAMP); namely a programme promoted by the World Bank in cooperation with the Government of Albania and funded by the World Bank, through the International Development Association (IDA). The LAMP project aims to provide urban development and regulatory plans for eight major cities of Albania, divided into two packages/groups of cities: The first package includes the cities of Shkodra, Vlora, Durres and Kamza and was assigned to the Italian-based company HYDEA. The Plan of Korca is part of the second package of cities that also included Berat, Lushnja and Gjirokaster. Following the announcement of the project in 2007, requests for proposals were addressed to the companies: Halcrow (UK), Urbaplan (Switzerland), Consortium DFS & Hanami Progetti & Archea Associati & SEDA (Italy), Urban Solutions BV & Metro Polis (Netherlands), Marmanet & Lerman Architects (Israel) and Urban Institute (USA). The Israeli company Marmanet/Lerman, a company with a wide experience in World Bank funded projects in Eastern Europe, was in the end selected to undertake the project.

The Urban Development and Regulatory Plan of Korca is currently in process. The final draft of the project will be submitted to the World Bank and the Albanian Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications in September 2010. Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether the plan will be approved by the Korca Territory Adjustment Council (regional level) and the Territory Adjustment Council of the Republic of Albania (national level) and whether this will in turn become a binding, statutory document.

1 For more information: www.worldbank.org.al and www.mppt.gov.al
7. Conclusions

This paper has presented the broad context of planning for two Albanian cities over the last years. What has been described as institutional diffusion; namely the transfer of responsibilities from the central to the local authorities and the instrumental involvement of international and local actors in the political stage, has had a direct impact on space and its regulation. As has been demonstrated, the context of spatial planning in Albanian cities after Socialism is to a large extent defined by international organisations, who promote specific planning agendas, in cooperation or not with each other or with the central and local authorities. This is first of all evident in the multiplicity of studies and plans, promoted by different international actors in Korca and even more in Tirana since the early 1990s. Furthermore, the involvement of international actors highly characterises the projects of the elaboration of the regulatory plans and the urban design competitions for the City Centres of the two cases, in terms of defining the overall framework, funding, participants’ eligibility and final commissions.

At the same time, the decentralisation process and the new political status of cities in the post-socialist era has provided the political space for dynamic Mayors to promote personal visions and to establish power networks. This is evident both in the cases of Korca and Tirana, where the Municipality has undertook a pro-active role in urban development, either by promoting plans and studies or by promoting development projects in cooperation with the private sector. In this context, the capacities and the quality of local leadership and the interaction with local and international actors can have a significant impact on urban planning and urban development.

The comparative analysis of Tirana and Korca raises the issue of spatial planning in the context of the uneven spatial development of the post-socialist era. Tirana, the capital city, faces a dynamic urban development, the massive inner migration and the extended informality, through a multiplicity of studies and plans, as well as actors involved in the planning process. On the other hand, Korca has to deal with the severe losses of out migration, trying to keep its population, attract foreign investments and counterbalance its geographic isolation from the high-development zones of the country. The comparative analysis of the two cities confirms the argument that planning in the post-socialist era is a highly fragmented process (Dimitrovska-Andrews, 2002, Stanilov,
This fragmentation first of all stems from the multiplicity of actors involved that do not necessarily coordinate with each other, with the profound example of distributing the country’s regulatory plans to different actors with no coherent overarching regulatory framework. As can be noted, the fact that the regulatory framework that will support the new Law on Territorial Planning will be formulated after the submission of the regulatory plans and will be shaped through the processes and the products of these plans is indicative of the uncertain nature of this process. Additional evidence of fragmentation derives from the absence of a rational sequence in planning, which leads to gaps, overlaps and conflicts. For instance, in both city-cases the regulatory plans come after the city centre master plans, in an absence of regional or national level spatial planning.

The future development of the research will focus on the process and the products of planning, through a comparative analysis of the plan-making processes and the plans themselves, on specific case studies. The research will further investigate the regulatory framework of planning in Albania with all the changes of the transitional era and will move on to include fieldwork observation, partial recordings of the plan-making process and interviews with representatives from the central and local governments, international organisations, local stakeholders and planners. Through a critical approach on the interrelations between the context of planning with the processes and the final products in Albanian cities after Socialism, the research will in turn further explore the ways that institutional diffusion is related to spatial planning and urban development.
Bibliography


