ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation examines the masterplan as a spatial interface between spatial planning, urban design, and the delivery of urban transformation. Its starting point is the observation that contemporary transformations of large urban areas are multi-stage processes involving multiple stakeholders and a range of instruments. Under these conditions, a key challenge is to maintain continuity in urban design decision-making across the identification of existing conditions and aspirations, the definition of spatial structure, regulation, detailed design, preparation for implementation, and subsequent updating.

The dissertation aims to determine how the masterplan can stimulate and organise transitions between successive levels of decision-making and to operationalise the identified mechanisms in the form of the Author's Masterplan Method. The masterplan is analysed in functional terms—as a framework for guiding a long-term transformation process and preserving the spatial intent of decisions over time, rather than as a single document depicting an intended final form.

The research combines an analysis of the literature and the historical development of masterplanning models, an examination of contemporary practice in London, and case studies. The analysis of London practice serves to identify relationships between spatial structure, the hierarchy of documents, phasing, governance models, responsibility, and implementation instruments. The findings of the theoretical and empirical research provide the basis for developing the method, which was applied and evaluated in three real-world design and planning processes in Poland: Słoneczna Dolina II in Zabrze, Górki Czechowskie in Lublin, and the Wujek Coal Mine (KWK "Wujek") site in Katowice.

The findings indicate that the masterplan has evolved from designing an intended final form, through coordinating decisions, to organising the transformation process. Its operational effectiveness depends on the appropriate distribution of decisions across stages, scales, instruments, and actors. The masterplan incorporates earlier strategic decisions and expert findings, translates them into a spatial structure, stabilises relationships essential to the coherence of the whole, and defines the scope of decisions that can be developed during subsequent stages of implementation.

The Author's Masterplan Method is organised around three interdependent areas of action: selective stabilisation of decisions; translation and controlled delegation; and implementation, responsibility, and updating. The method provides a means of distinguishing elements that require stability from those that may be adapted or left open, and then specifying how the provisions are to be carried forward, their intended recipients, the appropriate instruments, implementation conditions, and principles for subsequent review. Its key elements include traceable Masterplan Provisions, the Masterplan Provisions Register, Overarching Masterplan Rules, and the Masterplan Readiness Level.

The evaluation of the method's application revealed three complementary ways in which the masterplan operates. Słoneczna Dolina II illustrates the transition from spatial structure to specialist technical documentation, land subdivision, and draft planning regulations. The Górki Czechowskie case documents the progression from draft planning regulations, through a spatial model of their impacts and an expert assessment, to revision and the formal adoption of a statutory planning document. The Wujek Coal Mine case illustrates the transition from the problem, values, and memory of the site to a structure that frames future decision-making. The analyses confirm the importance of decision traceability and of preserving the spatial intent of decisions through changes in scale, language, instrument, and the actor responsible.

The principal outcome of the dissertation is a conceptualisation of the masterplan as a spatial interface that organises continuity and controlled change over time. The Author's Masterplan Method translates this principle into an approach to managing decisions that connects spatial design with regulation, preparation for implementation, implementation, and adaptation. In this understanding, the masterplan becomes a framework for transformation that preserves the continuity of the spatial vision for a place while leaving room for its further development by multiple actors involved in design and decision-making.

Keywords: masterplan, masterplanning, interface, spatial planning, urban design, continuity of urban design decision-making, translation, delegation, transformation of urban space, Masterplan Method.