

## 2022 RSA Winter Conference

Regions in Transition:

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### **Analysing transitions in metropolitan regions, planning and governance**

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Analysis of the planning and governance of metropolitan regions typically emphasises macro-level change in broad, theoretical-abstract terms or micro-level change through a series of detailed and comparative case studies. By contrast, meso-level perspectives draw attention to comprehensive, historically informed accounts—rooted in heuristic models—and emerge as a middle ground, emphasising generalised aspects of concrete empirical realities. In two recent accounts, meso-level approaches have served as framing devices to systematically (1) analyse how specific thematic categories (e.g. institutions, policies, spatial imaginaries, planning styles) influence metropolitan development change and continuity across largely taken-for-granted historical eras of capitalist development (Galland and Harrison 2020); and (2) periodise place-specific planning histories by interpreting how relevant thematic categories (i.e., agents, structure, institutions, discourses) and their interrelationships shape the historical evolution of the planning–development relation (Suitner 2021).

In this paper, we reveal that the emphasis on the thematic–temporal dialectic is common to these heuristic models. This allows for retrospectively periodising place-based processes of metropolitan change and continuity within and across time horizons by revealing what has occurred, where it has occurred, who has been involved, and how and why. However, we contend that the thematic–temporal dialectic needs to be supplemented with *phronetic* categories to reflect upon the metropolitan present and metropolitan futures critically. We argue that embedding phronetic planning questions—*what is the future of planning, who is shaping the future of planning, in whose interest planning is taking place, what future (for people, places and planning) is desirable according to different values and interests*—in these meso-level heuristic models is key to unveiling *what is at stake* across time (past, present, and future) for metropolitan regions. In the paper, we use Denmark and The Netherlands as illustrative cases of the framework in action. We will conclude by reflecting on the potential added value of the different approaches to studying metropolitan regions.