

# Strategies of municipal land policies: Proposing an alternative to the passive-active dichotomy

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## Abstract

How do municipalities strategically use land policy to develop land for housing? The development of housing is a challenge for many European countries, though the scale and time of it differs. Issues are not always about the absolute number of houses that need to be supplied in a country. The distribution and quality of houses affect the demand for housing. Land policy determines where and how future developments take place, and as a result, it has a considerable impact on both supply and demand of housing. Municipalities use different strategies of land policy to pursue housing goals. Strategies of land policy are often classified into passive and active land policy, depending on the role of public authorities in the land market. This distinction, however, does not cover the variety of strategies of land policies that can be found in practice. Within active and passive land policies, some municipalities embrace more cooperative approaches or rely more on their public power when steering urban development projects. This study aims to explore the rationalities underpinning such strategies of land policy. Therefore, a theory on pluralism - Cultural Theory - is employed to understand municipal strategies in different contexts, i.e. Germany (Ruhr region), Belgium (Flanders), and Netherlands. Applying Cultural Theory to land policy results in four ideal-typical strategies of active, passive, reactive, and protective land policies. The names describe the relation of municipal planning authorities with the land market (i.e., private developers and investors). Each strategy of land policy driven by different market elements (demand, supply, revenue, or welfare). These four types of land policy strategies are linked to certain types of instruments, although this assignment of instruments is not exhaustive and not mutually exclusive. Despite the fact that the decisions of municipalities are made within (or constrained by) their institutional environments (i.e. national/regional planning systems, development cultures, etc.), we found that there are key similarities between the strategies of the studied municipalities regardless of their different institutional environments.

**Keywords:** Land Policy, Instruments, Housing, Strategy, Cultural Theory.