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Citation for final published version:

Shahab, Sina and Claus, Tristan 2024. The 18th Annual Conference on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR), Munich, Germany, 18–22 March 2024. *Town Planning Review* 96 (1) , pp. 103-109. 10.3828/tpr.2024.33

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2024.33>

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**The 18th Annual Conference on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR), Munich, Germany, 18-22 March 2024**

*Sina Shahab and Tristan Claus*

**Introduction**

The eighteenth annual conference of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR) took place from 18 to 22 March 2024. The event was hosted by the Chair of Land Management at the Technical University of Munich, one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Germany. Participants were warmly welcomed by Prof. Walter de Vries, Head of the Chair of Land Management, and his organising committee, including Liliane Raths, Tobias Bendzko, and Christine Schwarz, who should be highly commended for their hard work and diligence in ensuring that the formal proceedings, excursions, and social events were well prepared and smoothly executed.

The conference, which was held at the Downtown Campus of the university, offered a platform for scholars to present research on diverse topics at the crossroads of planning, law, and property rights. This year's conference was one of the largest PLPR events with over 120 researchers and practitioners participating in the conference from over 30 different countries, along with 21 PhD students who attended the annual PhD workshop.

**PhD Workshop**

Following the annual tradition, the PLPR conference started with a full day PhD workshop on Monday 18 March. After a warm welcome by Prof. Walter de Vries, 21 newly arrived PhD students received an inspiring keynote by Prof. Thomas Hartmann on the societal and personal value of doing a PhD. Following introductions, the students were divided into research-focused groups mentored by distinguished past PLPR presidents: Prof. Thomas Hartmann (TU Dortmund, Germany), Prof. Richard Norton (University of Michigan, USA), and Prof. Rachelle Altermann (Technion, Israel). Prof. Altermann concluded the introductory session with a thought-provoking presentation on navigating publication. Her talk addressed the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing a PhD by publication or monograph, the challenges of writing in a non-native language, and the importance of robust theory and methodology.

Each group, guided by their assigned mentor, then moved to dedicated breakout rooms. PhD researchers presented their projects in concise, four-slide presentations, followed by facilitated discussions focused on their current research hurdles. Beyond valuable guidance on the societal and scientific impact of their research, research questions, or

study design, a core takeaway emphasized "owning one's research." This concept underscored the importance of PhD students pursuing their research driven by their own interests, goals, and aspirations, alongside the vital role of their supervisors.

## **Keynote Speeches**

After the PhD workshop, the conference kicked off on Tuesday 19th of March with a keynote speech on 'Urban Planning in the City of Munich' held by Jacqueline Charlier, the deputy to the head of the Municipal Planning and Building Control Office of the City of Munich. She commenced her presentation with a quote from Dr Hans-Jochen Vogel (former Lord Mayor of the city of Munich): "Land is not an arbitrary good[s], but a basic requirement for human existence. Land is unreproducible and indispensable." She emphasized Munich's status as Germany's most densely populated city, facing a stark disparity between housing and land price increases (34,000%) and average income growth (5,000%) since 1950. Ms Charlier then outlined various initiatives her team is leading to address these issues. One key policy is the Housing Policy Action Programme, allocating over €2 billion for targeted housing development. Additionally, the Socially Just Land Use policy mandates private developers to integrate social housing within their projects. Finally, the city establishes conservation areas to mitigate gentrification. The presentation concluded with a powerful call to action, echoing Dr Vogel's sentiment: "Mehr gerechtigkeit!" ("More justice!"). This emphasizes the city's commitment to ensuring equitable access to housing and land use within Munich.

On Wednesday 20th of March, Dr Daniela Schaper presented a keynote speech on "Property Valuation Regulations in Germany". In search of standardisation to improve market transparency". Dr Schaper is a member of the Land Valuation Board in Munich and the Upper Expert Committee for Property Values in Bavaria. As a member of a task force at the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction, she contributed to the development of real estate valuation guidelines. In her keynote speech, Dr Schaper focused on the recent changes to valuation regulations in Germany, after providing an overview of the current property market in the country. She outlined the reasons for why the federal government put forward new regulations (i.e., the comprehensive amendment of the valuation law in 2022) that aim to further standardise valuation practices and processes in Germany. The primary motivation behind the recent changes was to maximise the transparency of the property market. This sparked debate among the audience, raising questions about whether further improvements to market transparency were truly necessary in a country with a well-established system of publicly available data on land and property market. Dr Schaper argued that the new ordinance (ImmoWertV2021) contains much more binding regulations and has a higher liability. She concluded her speech with a discussion of the limitations of standardization, while pointing out the role of digitalisation and artificial intelligence in driving future changes.

## **Parallel Sessions**

This year's conference saw over 120 presentations delivered within four parallel sessions over three days. Most presentations were part of five special sessions. Special Session 1 (Just building more will not solve the housing affordability problem – Critical perspectives on planning, property, and housing exclusion) was proposed by Josje Bouwmeester, Vera Götze, Jessica Verheij, Deniz Ay, and Jean-David Gerber. Presentations in this special session explored the rising tide of housing unaffordability in cities, attributing it to the growing power of private landowners and a shift towards commercially driven, project-level planning, particularly in densification efforts. Presentations sought to understand how financial forces and entrepreneurial governance contribute to this problem, and explore alternative approaches like decommodification, all through a global lens examining various national contexts.

Special Session 2 (Land policies in Europe) was proposed by Andreas Hengstermann and Thomas Hartmann. Presentations in this special session discussed case studies across Europe with regards to different national and regional land policies. Presenters defined 'land policy' in their country's context, described a specific land-use case including its procedures, actors, and institutions, and then reflected on how typical this case is for their nation's overall land policy. These questions fostered rich discussions and identified both commonalities and differences in European land management approaches.

Special Session 3 (Exploring Property Rights' Impact on Planning Theory) was proposed by: Sina Shahab and Andreas Hengstermann. This special session aimed to examine the interplay between urban development, legal frameworks, and property rights. It explored how planning theory adapts to changing legal landscapes and property considerations, how these legal and property factors influence city formation, how property rights impact social justice in urban areas, and how emerging legal and property challenges, like new technologies and environmental concerns, are reshaping planning theory.

Special Session 4 (The digital (Dis-) Order of the City: Spatial Governance under the Influence of the Platform Economy) was proposed by Vilim Brezina, Lea Fischer, Michael Kolocek, and Jan Polívka. Presentations in this special session explored the sharing economy, a facet of the platform economy, analysing its challenges and benefits for urban planning. The session aimed to discuss key issues such as the platform economy's impact on spatial planning, potential regulations for success, how planning tools can be adapted to address these new economic forces, and the impact of short-term rentals from a planning perspective.

Special Session 5 (Aspiration versus delivery: the implementation of development and enforcement) was proposed by Hannah Hickmann, Sebastian Dembski, Katie McClymont, and Rebecca Leshinsky. Presentations in this special session focused on the under-studied area of implementing and enforcing planning decisions. Presenters examined how implementation and enforcement vary across different planning systems

and how they affect the overall success of planning practice. The special session aimed to bring new light to the development process, particularly by exploring how legal frameworks differ, how power imbalances between stakeholders play out, and how the balance between flexibility and strict rules is struck in planning decisions.

### **Panel Discussions**

Two panel discussions were held this year. Moderated by Prof. Walter de Vries, the first panel discussion focused on 'Land Policy in Munich'. The panel members were Prof. Alain Thierstein (Head of the Chair of Urban Development at TU Munich), Prof. Elisabeth Merk (Head Director of the Department of Urban Planning at the City of Munich), and Stephan Reiß-Schmidt (Former City Director at the City of Munich). The panel discussion delved into the current landscape of land policy in Germany, with a specific focus on Munich. The discussion acknowledged the pressing challenges posed by the city's housing situation - a significant demand surplus leading to high rents and purchase prices, and consequently, a rising cost of living. Prof. Merk pointed out that in a wealthy city like Munich, it is easier to be poor. While the city has a very low unemployment rate with not many people without a job, still many people struggle to get on the property ladder due to issues around affordability of housing market. In this context, Walter de Vries made the provocative statement that perhaps houses should be built for the rich, so that they move in and make room for people with lower incomes. The responses emphasised the importance of a mix of classes: what is needed is not just housing, but communities, neighbourhoods, and public spaces. Subsequently, the panel engaged in a lively debate about the current regulatory environment in the housing market. Prof. Thierstein argued for a reduction in regulations and their re-structuring, believing the market is over-regulated. In contrast, Mr Schmidt advocated for stricter regulations concerning development management, suggesting the market is currently under-regulated. Mr Schmidt argued that current land value capture mechanisms demonstrate limited effectiveness in capturing the increased value generated by public investment and planning decisions. This results in the windfall profits associated with development accruing disproportionately to private landowners, rather than being reinvested for broader public benefit. By evaluating the current situation, the panel aimed to identify potential pathways forward for both policy and research in addressing these concerns.

The second panel discussion, "Planning Law: Past, Present, and What to Expect," was moderated by Associate Prof. Rebecca Leshinsky (RMIT University, Australia). A moment of remembrance preceded the discussion, honouring the recent passing of Prof. Patsy Healey. Prof. Healey, a founding member and past president of AESOP, was an influential and pioneering scholar in planning theory and practice, and an inspiration to countless researchers in the field. The panel members were Prof. Rachelle Alterman (Technion, Israel), Prof. Ben Davy (TU Dortmund, Germany), Prof. Terje Holsen (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway), Dr Heather Ritchie (Queen's University Belfast, UK) and Prof.

Mark Oranje (University of Pretoria). Prof. Alterman began with an introduction to the history of planning law. She argued that the legacy of British land use planning spans continents, with Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, and Asia all shaping it according to their own histories, from post-war reconstruction to colonial pasts. Building on this theme, Prof. Davy emphasized the importance of comparative analysis between nations. He cited the example of "regulatory takings," a legal concept originating in the US but also applied by the European Court of Human Rights under the principle of "fair balance." This comparative approach underscored the nuanced interpretations of planning law across jurisdictions. Prof. Holsen then provided insights into the evolution of planning law in Norway. He noted a significant shift since 1992 towards densification strategies to combat urban sprawl, with private investment playing an increasingly prominent role in development projects. Dr Richie's presentation shifted the focus to planning reform efforts in Northern Ireland within the broader context of the UK. She stressed the importance of continuous professional education for planners to adapt to emerging objectives and the evolving needs of the Northern Ireland planning landscape. The final presentation, delivered virtually by Prof. Oranje from Pretoria, South Africa, offered a critical perspective. He expressed concern that planning law in South Africa may have overshadowed actual planning practice, potentially leading planners to prioritize legal compliance over practical considerations. This viewpoint sparked a lively debate with the audience, highlighting the ongoing conversation surrounding the role and impact of planning law in achieving sustainable development goals.

### **Excursions and Visits**

The conference included two different excursions on Tuesday the 19th of March. One was to the Munich city centre, exploring its historical architecture, evolution, and history, the other to Freiham, a newly developed district located on the western outskirts of Munich.

The walking tour of Munich's city centre explored the rich history of the city since its foundation in 1158 and showed how the charm of the 'old town' coexists with exciting new architecture and renovations. Guiding Architects Munich, a team of architects, urban planners, and architecture journalists, provided an insight into how art and publicly accessible and inclusive architecture have revitalised the city centre. Starting at the recently renovated Alte Pinakothek art museum, the tour moved on to the colourful Museum Brandhorst. From there, it continued through the ground floor of the Siemens headquarters before entering Munich's old town. On Wittelsbacherplatz, participants admired the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior housed in a fully restored early 19th-century concert hall. Just steps away, Odeonsplatz offered a pedestrian-friendly space in an Italian Renaissance setting. The tour continued through Munich's pedestrian zone to the town hall and the parish church of Alter Peter, the city's birthplace. Finally, it reached the Jewish Centre at St. Jakobsplatz, where the interesting building arrangement creates cozy

squares of varying sizes. The tour concluded at the lively Viktualienmarkt, a daily food market where participants could indulge in Munich's finest local food and drink.

The visit to Freiham started with a short train journey before taking the form of a walking tour guided by planning practitioners from the Department of Urban Planning of the City of Munich. Spanning 350 hectares, this new district at completion will house over 20,000 residents and provide workplaces for 7,500 people. The project incorporates a mix of affordable housing, a central hub, educational facilities, a sports park, and green spaces. Construction is well underway with some areas already completed, prioritizing sustainability through energy-efficient buildings. As of March 2024, around 2,500 people live in the district with two thirds of the commercial area have been sold and partly developed. The tour included a visit to the educational campus of Freiham, which is the largest in Munich. Serving approximately 3,000 pupils, the campus encompasses a grammar school, secondary school, special education competence centre, and an elementary school, fostering a diverse learning environment within the community. Freiham aspires to be a thriving and ecological environment for a future surge in Munich's population.

The day ended with a reception hosted by the City of Munich in Munich Town Hall, which has recently been renovated.

### **General Assembly and The Next PLPR**

This year's general assembly saw an election of the PLPR executive committee. The conference participants voted for Associate Prof. Rebecca Leshinsky (RMIT University, Australia) to replace Prof. Thomas Hartmann (TU Dortmund, Germany) as the new PLPR President. Associate Prof. Andreas Hengstermann (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway) was elected as the new Vice-President of PLPR. The participants voted for Associate Prof. Nir Mualam (Technion, Israel) and Prof. Yifat Holzman-Gazit (College of Management, Israel) as a team to serve as the PLPR Secretary General. Last but not least, Josje Bouwmeester (University of Bern, Switzerland) and Tristan Claus (KU Leuven, Belgium) were voted for as a team to serve as the new PhD Coordinators. In a display of community spirit, the PLPR conference attendees acknowledged the incoming executive committee members with a warm welcome. This was coupled with an expression of deep gratitude towards the outgoing committee members, i.e., Prof. Thomas Hartmann and Prof. Eran Kaplinsky (University of Alberta, Canada), for their notable contributions over the past four years, and especially with the challenges during the pandemic years.

At the end of the general assembly, Dr Sina Shahab (Cardiff University, UK) warmly invited the PLPR community to next year's PLPR conference that will take place in Cardiff, UK. During the flag ceremony, Prof. Walter de Vries and Liliane Rath (PLPR2024 local organisers) passed the PLPR flag on to Dr Shahab (chair of the PLPR2025 organising

team). More details on the PLPR2025 will be available on the PLPR website (<https://plpr-association.org/>).

### **About the Authors**

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