

The politics of co-implementation

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Aim of the study

This study contributes to the debate on coproduction in planning theory and practice by examining the political agency of non-profit housing actors (alternative co-producers) in building an egalitarian city. Drawing from empirical data on the post-Katrina reconstruction of New-Orleans, and theories of coproduction, planning and implementation, democracy and social innovation, the paper introduces, and theorizes the concept of 'co-implementation' as the political moment in which egalitarian cities can be shaped.

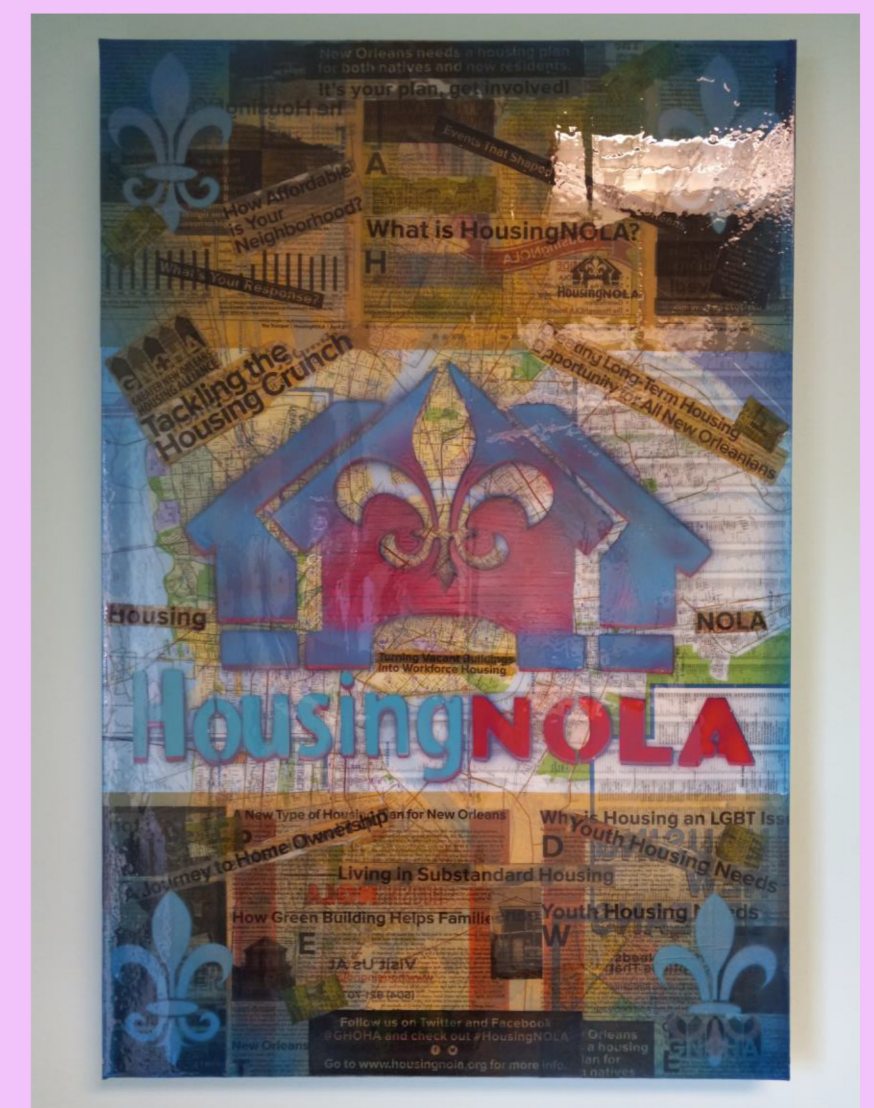
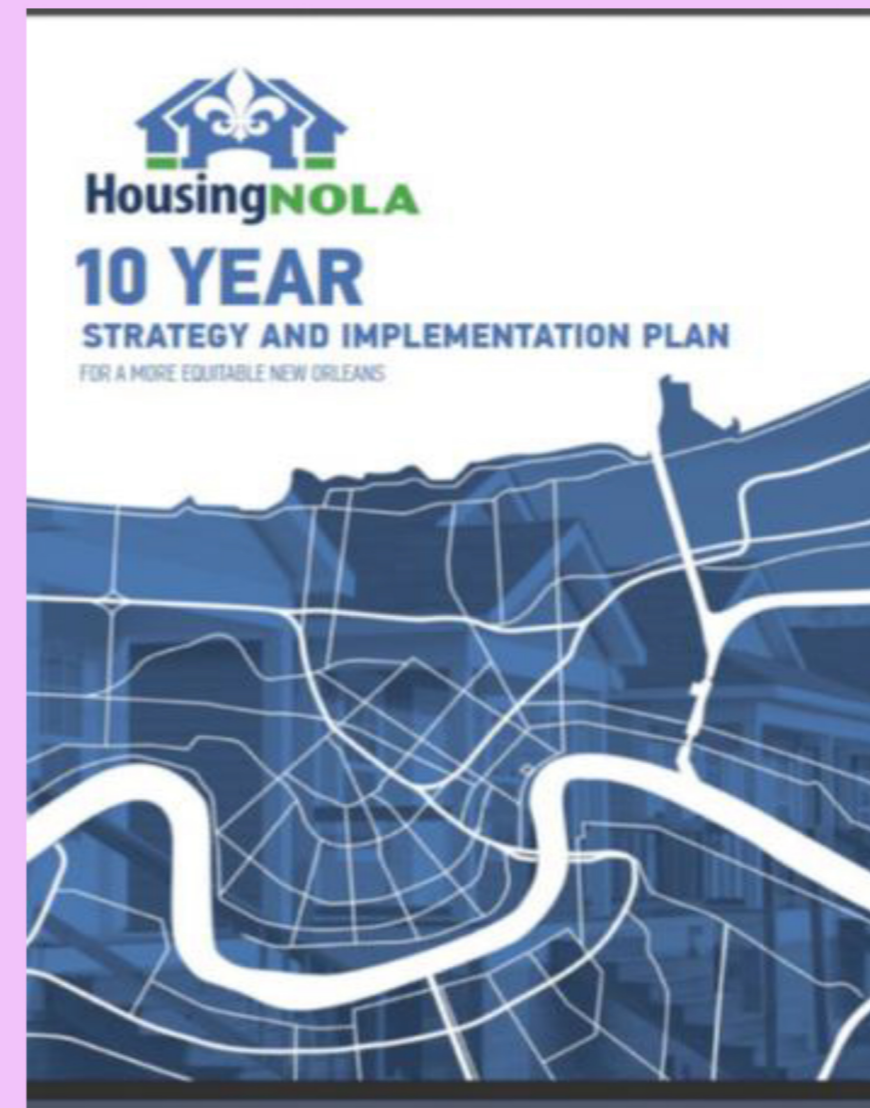
Theoretical Framework

Insights from *co-production* (Albrechts, 2013; Bovaird, 2007; Mitlin, 2008; Ostrom, 1996; Watson, 2014) and *planning politics* (Albrechts, 2020; De Blust & Van den Broeck, 2019; Gualini, 2001; Healey, 1999; Servillo & Van den Broeck, 2012; Van den Broeck, 2008, 2010, 2011; Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016; Wildavsky, 1973) cast light on the agential features of planners and the power dynamics of the wider political context in planning processes. *Democracy* theoreticians (Galli, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2009; Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2014) elaborate on the political conditions that hinder or foster democratic urban processes, while theories of *socially innovative governance* analyze how new initiatives create the basis for socio-political transformation by activating and further democratizing bottom-linked governance arrangements. This study introduces to the debate the concept of *co-implementation* as key for strengthening the political agency and expanding the meaning and usefulness of co-production in planning theory and practice.

Methodology

Qualitative research was conducted (interviews, participant observation, document analysis) to analyze the experiences of the first three years of HousingNOLA, a 10-year (2015-2025) multipartner collaborative planning process focusing on how New Orleans can ensure affordable, high-quality housing for all residents.

Findings



Political conditions hampering co-implementation:

- State preemption
- Counter-advocacy by opposing forces
- Radically reduced public funding for subsidized housing
- Temporal inconsistencies of political support

Political conditions favoring co-implementation:

- Constant political presence of informed and networked alternative co-producers
- Proliferation of housing alliances at larger scales
- Connections to larger community networks and the broader base
- Co-implementation outliving public administrations



Figure 1. Photos from fieldwork in New Orleans (2014-15).

Conclusions

The vision of building an egalitarian city is only partially materialized because of disrupted planning and implementation processes. Specific goals and actions oriented toward the satisfaction of housing needs will not produce expected outcomes when met with shifting political support, power imbalances, austerity-inspired housing policies and the powerful influence of pro-growth urban actors. The vision of making an egalitarian city is visible on the horizon when alternative co-producers become watchdogs of planning and implementation and use this as an instrument to rectify persisting neoliberal policies and manifest new aspects of democratic governance that can guide more fair urban redevelopment outcomes.

Full article and References

