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“Promoting Spatial Development by Creating COMMon MINdscapes”



European Spatial Policy-Making¹ by Dr Kai Böhme²

1. Introduction

There is nothing like a European spatial planning system or a designated actor responsible for European spatial planning.

In many cases spatial planning – although there is no generally agreed definition – challenges the understanding of planning focusing merely on land-use planning and on blueprints. Indeed, spatial planning connotes strategy building and is closely intertwined with amongst others regional and environmental policies. Even the term European spatial planning is ambiguous and probably best to be understood as territorial policy-making at European level.

Looking at the sphere of actors in this field four major groups with three different geographical settings can be distinguished.

Focusing at Europe in terms of the European Union the two main actors are the European Commission, mostly represented by the Directorate General for Regional Policies (DG Regio), and the intergovernmental co-operation where the Member States come together to shape policies. Both actors have been active in territorial policy-making at European level for a long time.

Enlarging the geographical scope, CEMAT, the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning, is an obvious actor at the pan-European level. As the CEMAT is part of the Council of Europe framework it covers not only the 27 EU Member States but in total 47 countries. The CEMAT can also be considered as a form of intergovernmental co-operation.

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In addition to these there are various trans-national spatial planning or territorial policy making processes which often (but not always) are carried out under the framework of INTERREG, e.g. such as the Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) in the Baltic Sea Region.

Today all of these actor groups plus various other actors are in one way or the other active in shaping territorial policies for Europe. Each of them has a different understanding on what territorial policies or spatial planning at European level is. Furthermore, each of them has different intentions and means.

Generally, the actors at European level are weak when it comes to means and instruments to exercise territorial policies. The competence and means for real action lie with the Member States, regions and local actors. Therefore, most “European actors” can only take influence via non-binding guidelines, convincing arguments and discourses. The European Commission has furthermore the possibility to influence via funding schemes, such as the Structural Funds and in particular INTERREG or via regulations. However, there is no regulatory power in the field of spatial planning or territorial policies at European level. Thus the regulatory influence comes via other policy sectors which – mostly unintentionally – influence territorial development and spatial planning.

2. How it all began

There are different stories about the origin of European spatial planning and territorial policy-making depending on the geographical focus, the understanding of the topic and the actor perspective.

Generally, the first CEMAT conference in Bonn in 1970 might be taken as a starting point in the context of the Council of Europe. Thereafter a number of milestones can be identified. Each of them gave the development of the policy field an own specific touch and most of them concentrated on the territory of the European Union:

Year	Milestone
1983	CEMAT Charter of Torremolinos At their meeting in Torremolinos, the CEMAT put down its definition of spatial planning and its aims in a broader and interdisciplinary sense.
1991	Europe 2000 The publication “Europe 2000” by the European Commission Services is a first attempt from the Commission’s side to approach a more territorial view.
1994	Europe 2000+ Following up on the earlier publication, the Commission Services present with “Europe 2000+” another document preparing the way for territorial policies at European level.
1994	VASAB The presentation of the Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea as trans-national spatial development perspective have inspired the setting-up of trans-national INTERREG co-operations and strategies in Europe.

1994	<p>Leipzig Principles</p> <p>In the preparation of the ESDP the ministers responsible for spatial planning in the (back than 12) EU Member States agreed at an informal meeting in Leipzig on the basic principles of the ESDP.</p>
1996	<p>INTERREG IIC</p> <p>With the establishment of INTERREG IIC trans-national co-operation and spatial planning issues become a formal platform and instrument in the EU. This is later continued as INTERREG IIB (2000-2006) and under Structural Funds Objective 3 "Territorial Co-operation" (2007-2013).</p>
1997	<p>European Spatial Planning Compendium</p> <p>The Commission Services publish a compendium on European spatial planning systems providing an overview on the various approaches to spatial planning within the EU.</p>
1998	<p>Study Programme on European Spatial Planning (SPESP)</p> <p>In co-operation with the EU Member States the European Commission Services set up the SPESP as a research network to support European territorial policies between 1998 and 1999.</p>
1999	<p>European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)</p> <p>After many years of intergovernmental co-operation the ESDP is finally adopted and presented by the ministers responsible for spatial planning at an informal meeting in Potsdam.</p>
2000	<p>CEMAT Guiding Principles</p> <p>Following-up the ESDP and broadening the scope to a wider range of European countries, the CEMAT presents Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent in Hanover.</p>
2000	<p>INTERREG IIIB</p> <p>The trans-national co-operation scheme INTERREG IIC is continued and further developed as INTERREG IIIB.</p>
2001	<p>Second Cohesion Report</p> <p>The Commission Services present the Second Cohesion Report "Unity, solidarity, diversity for Europe, its people and its territory" incl. a series of territorial features and SPESP results.</p>
2002	<p>ESPON</p> <p>Following up on the SPESP experience, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) is established to provide territorial evidence for European policy-making covering 29 countries and after 2007 even 31.</p>
2004	<p>Proposal for EU Constitutional Treaty</p> <p>The debated draft constitutional treaty for the EU has been presented and included among social and economic cohesion also territorial cohesion as an aim for the European Union.</p>
2004	<p>Third Cohesion Report</p> <p>The Commission Services present the Third Cohesion Report "A new partnership for cohesion. Convergence, competitiveness and cooperation" again incl. a series of territorial features and ESPON results.</p>
2007	<p>Structural Funds Objective 3</p> <p>The territorial co-operation has been integrated into the mainstream Structural Funds system. INTERREG is continued under Objective 3 "Territorial Co-operation" (2007-2013).</p>
2007	<p>Fourth Cohesion Report</p> <p>The Commission Services present the Fourth Cohesion Report "Growing regions, growing Europe" again incl. a series of territorial features and ESPON results.</p>
2007	<p>Territorial Agenda and Territorial State and Perspectives</p> <p>At an informal meeting in Leipzig the ministers responsible for spatial development agreed on the "Territorial Agenda of the EU" and the background evidence document "Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU".</p>

Considering the character of territorial policies at European level a legitimate question is whether it is not simply “much ado about nothing”. Indeed, focusing on the territorial policies and documents themselves, the effects are often described as agenda setting or discursive integration. Thus it is arguable to which degree Europe makes a difference.

Intergovernmental initiatives for planning for Europe

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is certainly the document which kick-started a lot of spatial planning thinking at European level. The ESDP might merely be a first and so far main point of reference. The story continued via the elaboration of an evidence document, the Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU, mainly based on ESPON findings. It also includes COMMIN (p. 53) as an example for the impact of spatial planning and development policy and the heterogeneity within the Member States. The evidence document resulted in a policy document known as the Territorial Agenda of the EU. This Agenda still has to prove itself, but its mere existence suggests that the momentum of European spatial planning has been sustained from the start of the ESDP. In policy terms these years meant steps in the creation of an intergovernmental spatial policy agenda offering itself as a frame of reference for other policies, including existing EU policies and planning and sector policies in Europe.

In the same category, one can find the policy document ‘Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent’ (CEMAT 2000). These Guiding Principles have been developed in the wake of the ESDP, and considered the principles more ‘European’ than the ESDP. The Guiding Principles have been positively received and have aroused interest in territorial issues in CEMAT countries, in particular those outside the EU15.

Community initiatives for planning for Europe

Whereas the intergovernmental setting appears natural in a field where the European Community does not have an explicit mandate, the contribution of the European Commission is more subtle. However, in addition to the unintentional influences on territorial development and spatial planning in Europe via various sector policies, EU Regional Policy has also taken some deliberate steps. Among others, there are the three-annual Cohesion Reports which set the agenda for regional development and socio-economic cohesion policy. As such they do not influence planning directly. However, they influence the context of planning by way of their influence on European and national regional policies. In the evolution of the Cohesion Reports it can be noted that spatial issues and territorial cohesion are increasingly acknowledged in the Cohesion Reports. Furthermore, the European Structural Funds, i.e. the main instrument of European regional policy, are partly used to promote territorial thinking in Europe and thus indirectly also spatial planning. The establishment of INTERREG IIC, in 1996, as a funding framework for trans-national co-operation of regional and local actors in the field of spatial planning can be seen as one of the most direct contributions of the European Commission to European spatial planning. The themes for co-operation are mainly linked to the exchange of experience, the condition of joint studies or the development of common approaches regarding spatial development topics. This was later followed by INTERREG IIIB (2000-2006). In the Structural Funds period 2007-2013 it has been integrated in the mainstream policy under objective 3, “European territorial cooperation”.

3. Europe makes a difference

Whereas the impacts of territorial policies at European level are debatable, it has to be acknowledged that a wide range of other EU policies actually influence European territorial development via regulations and financial means etc.

The degree to which EU policies, e.g. in the field of competition, environment, transportation or regional policy, influence decisions at lower levels varies greatly.

A study on the EU influence on spatial development in the Netherlands with the telling title “Unseen Europe” (Ravesteyn & Evers, 2004) gives first insights. This study shows how EU policies influence spatial development both directly and indirectly. The influence on actual territorial development certainly also implies – albeit sometimes indirectly – an influence on spatial planning.

The following examples from this Dutch study show, e.g. European cohesion policy influencing through its various forms of co-financing of infrastructure structural change in rural areas and cities. Furthermore, it exercises influence through network building and governance processes which are supported by the EU. European transport policy requires national governments to pre-select lines for high-speed trains which affects the location of the lines and the selection of cities and stations at which high-speed trains will stop. Through this policy, it improves accessibility for some cities, whereas others will find it difficult to plug into the international high-speed rail-system. The European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has clear territorial effects, too, e.g. through supporting the concentration of intensive cattle farming in certain areas. European competition regulations and policy affect territorial development, e.g. via the liberalisation of the energy-market or the open sky policy in the field of air-transport. Indeed, the liberalisation of the air-transport sector made the success of low-budget airlines possible. Competition policy, which deals amongst others with state aid and procurement, can even restrict options for public authorities to grant economic support. European environmental policy intervenes directly in territorial development and spatial planning, e.g. via Natura 2000, the Habitat and Water Framework directives, but also through the requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA).

What is true for the Netherlands is also true for other parts of Europe. Policies such as the ones above influence, be it directly or in more subtle ways, territorial development. Moreover, they do not only influence spatial development but also spatial planning policies and the way spatial planning decisions are taken at any given administrative level. The exact way and the degree of impact differ greatly throughout the EU, due to the great variety of spatial conditions, governance systems and because of the variety of ways in which Member States transpose EU sector policies into national legislation.

As regards spatial preconditions, it is interesting to note the ESPON studies on territorial effects of EU sector policies in Europe which provide first comparative insights into what kinds of effects these policies have in what kinds of areas. The particular EU policy fields assessed were the Common Agricultural, Energy, Environment, Fishery, Pre-Accession Aid, Research & Development, Structural Funds and Transports Policies.

It has to be mentioned that most of the studies concentrated on ex-post assessments of the territorial impacts of the respective policies. Indeed, only the study on transport policies approached an ex-ante assessment.

In the following we focus on some key findings on three selected policy fields.

- **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**

Summing-up, the territorial impacts of the CAP are largely unsupportive of territorial cohesion in Europe, although there is scope in the given instruments to do more in that direction. Furthermore, one has to consider that the analysis of the instruments and expenditures of the CAP excludes the largest component of the support received by EU farmers in the form of the higher prices paid by consumers within the EU. This support is estimated by the OECD to amount to 56 billion Euro. (University of Aberdeen/ESPON 2.1.3 2005)

- **Structural Funds**

The main objectives of the EU Structural Funds 1994-1999 were thus to reduce disparities in GDP and unemployment between regions. In doing so, they contributed to territorial cohesion by stimulating regional and local innovation and development. However, they did so less consistently than might have been anticipated. The assessment revealed a complex picture where the overall picture shows that money went to less-favored parts of the EU, whereas differences between regions within a country were left largely untouched or even accentuated. Furthermore, there is evidence that the funds have boosted competitiveness through leverage effects on national policies and by empowering local and regional levels of governance, resulted in innovations, strategic planning, new partnerships etc. (Nordregio/ESPON 2.2.1 2006)

- **European Transport Policies**

In general European transport investments do contribute to cohesion in relative terms, although they may actually widen the absolute economic gap between regions. The TEN transport infrastructure projects planned for the period up to 2020 have a decentralising effect, and so favor peripheral regions. Infrastructure policies have larger effects than pricing policies, and the magnitude of the effect is related to the number and size of projects. However, even large increases in regional accessibility produce only small benefits in terms of regional economic activity. Generally, the overall effects of transport infrastructure investments and other transport policies are small as compared to those of socio-economic and technical macro trends. (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel/ESPON 2.1.1 2005)

The same is true for all policies reviewed by ESPON. Compared to larger socio-economic trends such as globalisation, increasing competition between cities and regions, the aging of the population, shifting labour force participation and increases in labour productivity, the effects of the policies reviewed remain rather small.

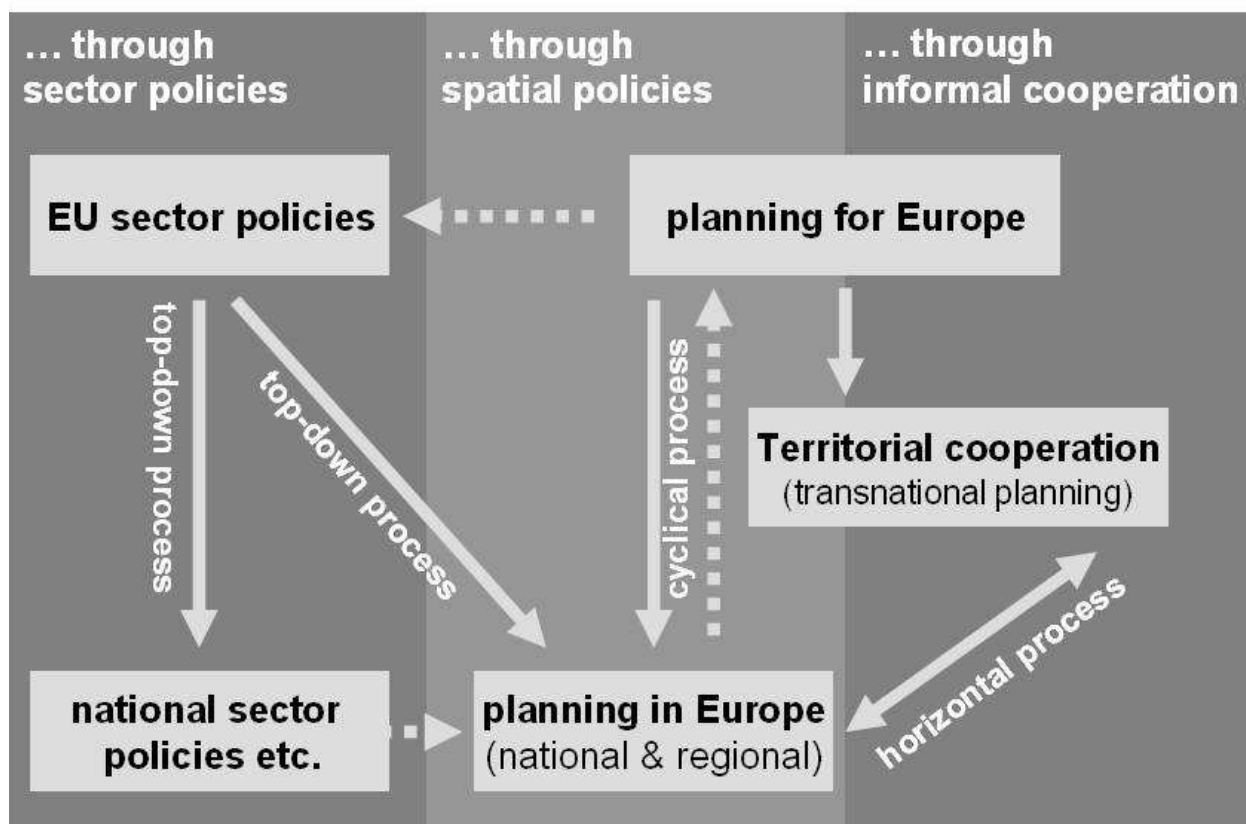
Certainly the reflections provided above can only be single highlights of a few aspects where European territorial policies affect spatial planning and development. A comprehensive review would be a research programme of its own.

Conclusion

The European level exercises a lot of influence on spatial planning and territorial development. This is mainly done unintentionally and via different sector policies.

The picture depicts the main sphere of European influence on planning in Europe and which processes are related to them. Planning for Europe regards here territorial policies at European level and territorial co-operation is mainly focused on INTERREG.

Europeanization of planning ...



(Böhme & Waterhout 2007)

Summing-up this short paper shows that territorial policies at European level have been around for some decades. There are various actors driving this policy field and all of them have different interests, different legal statuses, geographical coverage and different means and interests. Generally, the powerful instruments for spatial planning and territorial policies lie – depending on the country in question – with the state, regions or local authorities. Thus actors at European level have very little direct means and count mainly on their good arguments. One exception might be the European Commission which – although there is no formal competence in the field – has a few instruments interlinked with the territorial development and spatial planning. An important mean in the field is indeed the informal co-operation. This regards both the co-operation between Member States but also between regional and local authorities.

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