

European Spatial Planning Policy

Rob Atkinson and Karsten Zimmermann

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we argue that there has been a growing interest in spatial planning policies supported by the European Commission and a limited number of member states across Europe for several decades and that its roots lie in the planning systems and practices of a number of North-Western European countries, most notably France, Germany and the Netherlands. It may be seen to derive its meaning from a ‘mix’ of planning approaches variously captured by the German notion *Raumplanung*, the Dutch term *Ruimtelijk Planning* and the French concept of *aménagement du territoire*. In terms of its ‘origins’ European Spatial Planning draws on and reflects the different planning traditions and cultures in these countries but this also means it is something of a ‘contested notion’ in terms of its implications, practice and geographical origins. In recent years the notion of European spatial planning has found less overt recognition and support in the sense that it has been incorporated into the territorial development approach. With the Territorial Agenda¹ coming into effect 2007 (EU Ministers for Spatial Planning and Development 2007) the notions of territorial cohesion and territorial coherence more or less absorbed what was previously included under the rubric of European spatial planning, thus simultaneously appearing to downgrade both the idea and political significance of strategic spatial planning at transnational and national levels whilst giving it greater legitimacy as an approach and methodology associated with the Territorial Agenda (EU Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development 2011).

In this chapter we adopt an interpretative/social construction approach as the most appropriate way to grasp the emergence of European spatial planning as a distinct subject and

practice. Put rather simply such an approach starts from the assumption that there is not an objective, already constituted and immutable, reality (i.e. the ‘world’) ‘out there’ waiting to be studied and appropriated, but that it is in part a social construct, that how we understand it (conceptually) and the language we use to discuss it interacts with and shapes (or constructs and reconstructs) that reality. Such an approach is embedded in a discourse methodology (see Atkinson et al. 2011); this refers to the context within which knowledge is produced and reproduced and acts to represent that ‘reality’ and structure what is ‘thinkable’. Thus, for instance a dominant (or hegemonic) discourse contains a particular construction and presentation of reality and delimits ‘the possible’, attempting to steer thought and action in a particular direction consistent with that discourse. This also involves the construction of narratives (see Stone 1989; Atkinson 2000) that present a particular representation (image) of aspects of the world and an associated future course of development/action. Such narratives frequently entail normative assumptions about such a future desired state of affairs that is congruent with the overarching discourse informing the narrative. However, discourses are not simply a question of ideas and language, in order to move beyond this realm and have policy impacts they need to become embedded in institutional contexts and this entails a process of interaction and contestation with other discourses and the creation of ‘discourse coalitions’ (Hajer 1993). Thus it is not simply a matter of the ‘best ideas’ establishing themselves but is also a question of the power to determine what counts as knowledge (see Flyvbjerg 1998). Here we enter into the realm of what Flyvbjerg (1998) has termed ‘real rationality’ (*Realrationalität*), the ‘rationality’ rooted in, and defined by, power which operates in ‘real politics’ (*Realpolitik*).

We consider such an approach as useful for two reasons. First of all, the EU lacks legal (i.e. treaty based) competence for European spatial planning and thus it is weakly institutionalized. Nevertheless the ESDP, and other initiatives to be discussed later in this

chapter, have had some impacts on the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds and domestic planning practices. Therefore, we argue that the Europeanization of spatial planning works through ‘soft means’ of Europeanization (Atkinson and Rossignolo 2010). This also implies that, the still contested, concepts and associated language of European Spatial Planning have to be enacted (or not) in national, regional and local practices. The second reason is that European spatial planning emerged onto the agenda because a discourse coalition,² gained some momentum in the late 1990s (Faludi and Waterhout 2002). However, this group of planning experts was not a typical interest group lobbying for a specific set of material ‘interests’, rather it was seeking to create, establish and shape a particular way of understanding and ‘talking about’ the European territory and its development (i.e. a narrative) within the institutional framework of the EU.

First of all we outline what is meant by European spatial planning before moving on in the following sections to focus on a number of recent documents and developments that illustrate the changing role of spatial planning within the EU. We will show that key organizing themes that are central to European spatial planning such as territorial integration, coordination of different policies/strategies, polycentricity and bringing multiple actors together to share knowledge and experience (partnership) still remain central to the EU’s structural funds and cohesion policy (see the chapter written by Heinelt and Petzold in this book). Whilst key principles of cohesion policy – like economic and social cohesion and later on sustainable development as well as balanced competitiveness of the European territory – are clearly central to spatial planning what has been reduced in significance is the role and place of spatial visions for the European territory which have tended to be replaced by an emphasis on territorial development policies largely designed to support economic development and competitiveness. In the conclusion we argue that the uncertain outlook for European spatial planning policies is also reflected in reforms of national planning systems

that have downgraded the role of spatial planning. The result being that the diversity of spatial planning policies in Europe is greater than in the 1990s when a group of member states, or more precisely a group of spatial planning experts with a strong and relatively coherent understanding of strategic spatial planning, were able to put European spatial planning on the European agenda. Indeed it may now be argued that today what this diverse set of European spatial planning approaches does have in common is the abandonment of (normative) spatial visions and the internalisation and normalisation of key tenets of neoliberalism. However, post-2000 the cohesive discourse coalitions of the late 1990s that created the ‘discourse of spatial planning’ and an associated language long with a narrative presenting a particular representation of a desired territorial development pathway for Europe has lost momentum and its influence at European and national levels has declined.

WHAT DOES EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING MEAN

At the EU level interest in spatial planning began to develop in the late 1980s and to a large extent it became synonymous with the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) embodied in a non-binding intergovernmental document agreed between member states in 1999 (Faludi and Waterhout 2002). However, the intergovernmental nature of this document means that spatial planning has an indeterminate status within the EU, reflected in the lack of any specific legal competence to justify Community actions in this sphere.

While it may seem idle to ask if the idea of transnational or European spatial planning is older than the 1980s the roots of this approach can be found in the historical evolution of what we today term the European Union. Some see territorial integration as an essential part of European integration process starting with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 or consider the European Recovery Plan (or Marshall Plan from 1947) as a first attempt to establish a European spatial development policy (Faludi 2015). Without doubt the ESDP

process was influenced by the legacy of the ‘Conference on regional planning in North-West Europe’ (CRONWE). CRONWE was established in the late 1950s and involved the key actors (or nation states) that were later the moving force behind the ESDP process: these were the Netherlands, Germany and France (Dühr et al. 2010, p. 196). The North-Western Region represented a densely urbanized and functionally interdependent region including the Benelux, Northern France, Western Germany (the Ruhr area in particular) and even the South-East of England. At that time this area was the industrial core of Europe, it was heavily urbanized and congested and affected by density of infrastructures and environmental degradation. A study by Jean Gottman (1961) inspired scholars to call this area a transnational Megalopolis. The area later became the nucleus of the European Dorsale (commonly known as the Blue Banana). Today this area is still a relevant functional space in Europe but with the enlargement of the EU and the emergence of new technologies and post-industrial economies the balance has shifted somewhat – and this had an impact on the discussion of European spatial planning.

In a manner similar to the emergence of spatial planning as a public function in many West European states during industrialization the idea of European Spatial Planning and the ESDP, at least initially, was a reaction to dynamic cross-border developments in an area facing the challenges of past industrialization and post-industrial developments – and related land-use policy. Therefore the ESDP had a clear basis in spatial planning as a discipline in the German or Dutch understanding of the word. The ‘makers’ of the ESDP all had a background in spatial planning and they went through a learning process as they had to accept that something different from national types of land use regulation had to be invented (Faludi 2000). At the risk of over stating the case it may be argued that the ESDP reflects a North-Western hegemony in the debate centred around a particular narrative of polycentric and balanced spatial development and a common understanding of strategic spatial planning.

As we will see later, with the extension of the European Union from 15 member states during the ESDP process to 28 the notion of European spatial planning had to be reformulated to reflect the changing situation created by the 2004 enlargement of the EU.

What is clear is that in spatial terms the territory of the EU is very heterogeneous and so are the associated planning cultures of member states. This is a challenge the conference of ministers responsible for spatial planning at the Council of Europe (Conférence du Conseil de l'Europe des Ministres responsables de l'aménagement du territoire; CEMAT) also had to face long before the ESDP process. Founded in 1970, CEMAT agreed upon a European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter in 1983 (Kunzmann 1983). With the Council of Europe being an intergovernmental institution the impact of this document was limited. However, the ESDP process made reference to the CEMAT document that addressed regional disparities and the need for scientific analysis of the spatial structure of Europe. The document also made a strong claim for a European spatial development concept (Kunzmann 1983).

The ESDP is a result of several ministerial meetings and workshops that took place over a period of ten years (see Williams 1996 and 1999). It was clear from the beginning that spatial planning understood as the regulation of land use in the German, French or Dutch sense of the discipline would not be a Community competence. The dominating themes were centre-periphery relationships, socio-economic disparities and polycentric development. During the ESDP-process there was hope that something like a genuine European spatial planning approach could emerge. It may be characterized as strategic (Faludi 2000; Healey 2006); strategic referring here to the regional scale of planning and territorial policies. In addition, there was also a recognition of the significance of governance (i.e. coordination of actors, integration of sectoral policies and a form of collaborative planning). Other notions in use are spatial visioning or soft planning in flexible geographies (Faludi 2010). At the very least this made it clear that the European approach differed from an approach based on land

use regulation. However, even during the ESDP process it was clear that the national experts who led the process could not agree on a common approach (Faludi and Waterhout 2002). Dutch experts were the initiators of the process and sought to ‘upload’ Dutch planning doctrine. While the French protagonists believed in a cohesion policy based on the socio-economic approach that was part of their national *aménagement du territoire* approach and already influential in the structural funds. At the same time German federal states (*Länder*) tried to protect the role of the *Länder* as the key actors for the implementation of *Raumordnung und Landesplanung* in the German system. Despite this post-unification Germany was well aware of its geographical position in the middle of Europe and the need to develop a wider European approach and thus the need for compromise. Hence, European spatial planning gained some momentum from this somewhat disparate group of participants, although those involved were unable to reach a consensus about a visual presentation of the European territory and as a result the ESDP was published without an accompanying map that embodied a ‘spatial vision’ for Europe. However, the resulting document did go beyond some cooperative planning in border regions and constitutes a ‘discursive frame’ for transnational planning in Europe. The document is divided into two parts: part A describes the political challenges and arguments in favour of European spatial planning while part B is more descriptive and visionary. The emerging pattern of spatial planning was structured around the coordination of spatial impacts of other policies such as the structural funds, Trans-European Networks for Transport (TEN-T) and environmental policies. The ESDP contains within it a particular discourse about European spatial planning/development and an associated narrative (with embedded normative assumptions) about a future desired state of affairs – these were most clearly expressed through the articulation of three basic European goals and associated ‘concepts’ (or notions). The three basic goals were:

- economic and social cohesion;

- conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage; and
- more balanced competitiveness of the European territory (ESDP 1999, p. 10)

The narrative argued these goals had to ‘be pursued simultaneously in all regions of the EU and their interactions taken into account’ (ESDP 1999, p. 11). The overarching objective was to achieve balanced, sustainable and polycentric development within a framework of competition and cooperation. Thus *polycentric development* and ‘harmonious and balanced’ development are central to the achievement of the ESDPs goals and they are arguably the key ‘concepts’ which structure the discourse and narrative of the ESDP. However, they are *normative* notions, they refer to the policy outcomes those who wrote the ESDP would like to see happen, while the achievement of such an objective is something entirely different dependent on decisions taken by multiple (and multi-level) European, national and regional authorities and organisations and how they appropriate, interpret (or ‘filter’) and implement this discourse. Thus polycentric development and harmonious and balanced development will be appropriated, understood and implemented through the ‘lens’ of existing dominant national discourses and policies in relation to the (desired) national and regional development trajectories of each member state. In each member state it will be what we referred to earlier as ‘real rationality’ (*Realrationalität*) defined by the power relations which operates in ‘real politics’ (*Realpolitik*) that will determine this process.

Nevertheless, one of the strengths of the ESDP was its recognition that a range of EU sectoral policies (e.g. transport, environment) have important implications for spatial development of the European Union and that these spatial impacts needed to be taken into account by those formulating and implementing policies (ESDP 1999, p. 13-19). Thus the document also argued for the integration and coordination of the activities of the EU, member states, regions and localities in order to address the challenges facing the Union and avoid new and deeper territorial divisions developing. As part of this approach the notion of (vertical and

horizontal) partnerships between public (and private) actors played a key role in the ESDP's advocacy of a 'new' methodology to address territorial imbalances.

After the inter-ministerial decision on the ESDP in 1999 in Potsdam the mood was not very enthusiastic as it became clear that the European Commission had neither the instruments nor the will to implement the ESDP. So the document was devolved to the member states for implementation. During the follow-up ministerial meeting in Tampere (Finland) ten action points were agreed upon but only two became effective: The European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON; see below) and INTERREG. INTERREG, once a community initiative of the structural funds (see section 2 in the chapter of this book written by Heinelt and Petzold) became mainstream policy as object 3 in 2007 (European Territorial Cooperation or ETC). It is important to note that in these funding schemes the ESDP goals were binding and INTERREG became one of the main bearers of and implementation channels of the ESDP. However, the total amount of funding allocated to ETC or INTERREG was marginal, although increasing during recent years. Over the following years the INTERREG programme experienced a three-fold differentiation in the funding scheme. This introduced distinctions between cross border cooperation (INTERREG A), transnational cooperation (INTERREG B) and international cooperation (INTERREG C) that have subsequently become key for discourse and practice of the cohesion policy. Within this scheme the share of INTERREG A subsidies has been always considerably higher compared to INTERREG B and C.

The bulk of INTERREG funding was channelled into cross-border cooperation but a significant amount was also allocated to the thirteen transnational cooperation areas that are supported by small regional secretariats. These cover large areas such as the Baltic-sea region, the Alpine-Adriatic area, the 'Atlantic Arc' or the north-west of Europe including Ireland and the UK and an area encompassing the Benelux countries, Northern France and

parts of south-western Germany. As a result several hundred actors from various levels of government and different sectors were involved. Given this diversity of smaller and larger projects it is hard to estimate the success of these cooperation areas in relation to the goals of the ESDP or the more recent Territorial Agenda (Waterhout 2011, p. 86). A more recent development refers to macro regions such as the Baltic Sea area and the Danube region (and will be addressed in Section 3 of this chapter).

If we look beyond cross-border cooperation the European Spatial Observation Programme is probably the most successful follow-up pathway directly flowing from the ESDP. The ESDP process clearly revealed the need for the systematic collection of more data that could provide the basis for a more detailed and rigorous understanding of European territorial development. This was linked to a debate on evidence-based or evidence-informed policy and planning and the design of territorial policies (Davoudi 2006; Adams et al. 2011). However, the view that an observatory (or what has been called *territorial evidence*) can function as an equivalent to non-institutionalized spatial planning needs to be questioned. Indeed ESPON changed its name from the European Spatial Planning Observation Network to the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion precisely because of the view, expressed by a number of member states, that the EU had no legitimate role to play in spatial planning.

The ESPON programme runs in parallel with each programming period of the structural funds and operates through projects with limited life times and is coordinated by a very small secretariat based in Luxembourg. The topics selected for investigation in part originate from within the European Commission (principally the Directorates-General/DG Regional and Urban Policy but also other DGs) and from member states. This lack of continuity can lead to a certain degree of fragmentation that impedes the search for a systematic and in-depth data base on and analysis of European spatial development and the

resulting policy impact. Whether or not the territorial evidence generated by ESPON is a factor in European or national spatial planning politics is often hard to judge. The Cohesion Reports and many other European and national documents refer to the results of ESPON projects, albeit in a selective manner, while the ESPON network as a scientific community has a tendency to be somewhat self-referential. The knowledge generated and circulated by ESPON represents a means of soft Europeanization but it lacks the capacity to construct an associated discourse coalition and articulate an attendant narrative. Thus it is used (appropriated) in a highly selective manner by those who draw on it.

The overall impact of the ESDP is hard to measure. An ESPON study confirmed what Faludi expected (Farinos Dasi 2006). The research group found many traces of elements of the ESDP in national planning discourses; references to the ESDP were found in plans and programmes as well as in debates on the reform of national planning systems when considered appropriate in the national context. However, while this is far from being a systematic and thorough study of the implementation of the ESDP's key goals and themes it can plausibly be argued that the ESDP informed national spatial planning policies, albeit to different degrees and filtered by national planning traditions – without being the decisive factor for change.

All of this means that European spatial planning and the ESDP have had something of a chequered history which often makes it difficult to trace direct relationships between it and particular policies and outcomes. While a common European understanding of spatial planning has been visible for a number of years (e.g. the growing emphasis on strategic planning) the divergence among national planning systems remains strong (see Reimer et al. 2014). Despite this we argue one should not underestimate its impact at European and national levels through its influence on the structural funds and particular initiatives such as INTERREG. More recently it has become articulated with territorial development and the

associated notion of territorial cohesion now included in the Treaty on the Functioning of European Union.

To conclude this section we contend that there is an ongoing policy narrative about European spatial planning which has its roots in the ESDP and associated programmes such as ESPON. However, its institutionalization remains vague and uneven. As described by Waterhout (2011) its main pillars are the generation of data and knowledge on European spatial development (ESPD), transnational cooperation (INTERREG, now ETC), territorial cohesion and the territorial agenda (see next section). All four pillars follow different patterns of institutionalization and governance. ESPON is now organized as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) with a small unit in Luxembourg under the shared control of the member states and the Commission, transnational cooperation is the responsibility of DG Regional and Urban Policy and the thirteen regional secretaries. Key documents that arguably embody important elements of the European spatial planning discourse, such as the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (2008), are Commission documents while the Territorial Agenda (2007 and 2011) is an intergovernmental agreement of the member states. This ‘distributed competence’, in the double sense of the word (capacity to act and legal responsibility or control), creates a system of checks and balances but not a coherent approach to spatial planning and territorial cohesion.

THE POST-2000 PERIOD: TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT, COHESION AND THE PLACE-BASED APPROACH

In this section we discuss the more recent articulation of spatial planning with the notions of territorial development and the place-based approach within the EU. In the post-2000 period spatial planning has become articulated with the wider approach known as territorial development (see Albrechts 2004; Janin Rivolin and Faludi 2005; Cotella et al. 2012) as part

of both the wider approach to (territorial) cohesion and as an ‘instrument’ in strategic (territorial) development. As we have noted the wider policy context is one in which the overarching narrative reflects the concern to achieve both ‘polycentric development’ and ‘territorial balance and harmonious development’ which may be equated with territorial (economic and social) cohesion across the European space (see CEC 2001, 2004, 2008; 2010; ESDP 1999). However, it is vital to remember that the underlying, or hegemonic, discourse is that of neo-liberalism and the aim is always to improve Europe’s competitiveness (see Olesen 2013) particularly in the current period of economic crisis and fiscal austerity that prevails across Europe (see Section 3.3 of the chapter on cohesion policy in this book). A clear example of this can be found in the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion which contends that:

‘Increasingly, competitiveness and prosperity depend on the capacity of the people and businesses located there to make the best use of all of territorial assets. In a globalizing and interrelated world economy, however, competitiveness also depends on building links with other territories to ensure that common assets are used in a coordinated and sustainable way. Cooperation along with the flow of technology and ideas as well as goods, services and capital is becoming an ever more vital aspect of territorial development and a key factor underpinning the long-term and sustainable growth performance of the EU as a whole’ (European Commission 2008, p. 3).

This assumption is also inscribed within the core of ‘Europe 2020’ (European Commission 2010) where the emphasis on achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is framed by the need to regain competitiveness or experience continued relative decline (ibid, p. 8-9). Thus, there is a certain tension between the competitiveness and cohesion dimensions of EU policies which is reflected in the approach to territorial development (see Servillo 2010 as well as the chapter on cohesion policy in this book).

It is important to note that an explicit concern with territorial development only gradually emerged in the post 2000 period. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly neither the Lisbon nor Göteborg Strategies made explicit reference to the issue, nor were their spatial impacts across the European space considered, this only developed incrementally in subsequent years. The 2004 enlargement of the EU and the subsequent macroeconomic trends affecting most new member states created new and significant social, economic and spatial challenges for several strategic policy sectors, providing a highly challenging context for the territorial cohesion objective of the EU. Partly for this reason, whilst the pursuit of territorial cohesion and balanced and/or sustainable development continues, at least rhetorically, to be central to the EU policy agenda, the period since 2000 has been characterized by an emphasis on ‘regional competitiveness and employment’, as the Sapir Report (Sapir et al., 2003) clearly demonstrated in 2003. Nevertheless, the aim of transforming Europe into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 has been combined with a commitment to sustainable development and territorial (and economic and social) cohesion.

As pointed out above the ESDP (1999) argued that a range of EU policies had spatial/territorial impacts which needed to be taken into account when considering territorial cohesion. Thus the argument that policy at European, national, regional and local levels should be developed and applied in an integrated, coordinated and targeted manner to address regional disparities/imbances. Building on this approach the second and third reports on economic and social cohesion (European Commission 2001 and 2004) focussed more explicitly on these issues, which became even more pertinent in the context of the accession of an additional ten member states in 2004. Thus the third report argued:

‘In policy terms, the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, avoiding territorial imbalances and by making both

sectorial policies which have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent' (European Commission 2004, p. 27).

The main concern was with addressing territorial imbalances 'that threaten the harmonious development of the Union economy in future years' (European Commission 2004, p. 27). The Report went on to argue that: 'These territorial disparities cannot be ignored, since [...] they affect the overall competitiveness of the EU economy' (European Commission 2004, p. 28). Rather like the ESDP the solution proposed was a more 'balanced development' that would reduce the disparities.

Building on many of the previous European Commission documents The Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (European Commission 2008, with its subtitle 'Turning territorial diversity into strength') emphasised Europe's rich territorial diversity and the need to draw on this to increase cohesion and growth. At the core of the approach advocated by the Green Paper is the argument that:

'Territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all these places and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories. As such, it is a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU' (European Commission 2008, p. 4).

The Green Paper represents an important stage in the development of an approach that brings together the territorial, social and economic dimensions, explicitly arguing that they cannot be considered in isolation and that policies must be developed in an integrated manner and directed at 'meaningful places of intervention' (i.e. not restricted by administrative boundaries/borders; see Barca 2009, p. 93). This approach assumes that only by focusing on the (many) endogenous strengths of places can more harmonious development be achieved.

Following this line of thinking the fifth report on economic and social cohesion (European Commission 2010) argues:

‘the regional diversity in the EU, where regions have vastly different characteristics, opportunities and needs, requires going beyond “one-size-fits-all” policies towards an approach that gives regions the ability to design and the means to deliver policies that meet their needs. This is what Cohesion Policy provides through its place-based approach’ (European Commission 2010, p. 13):

The place-based approach has emerged as a mode of action that seeks to support a more long-term, sustainable, development process, based on the (endogenous) development of territorial assets (see also Section 3.3 of the chapter on cohesion policy in this book). In the Barca report (2009, p. VIIff.) a place-based policy is defined as a:

‘long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and multilevel governance. It promotes the supply of integrated goods and services tailored to contexts, and it triggers institutional changes.’

This has now become established as the *de facto* approach to (endogenous) territorial development to be employed across the EU particularly where member states are in receipt of structural funds. In relation to the place-based approach to local (territorial) development spatial planning has an important role to play by providing an analysis and structure for the development of a strategic approach to the territory under consideration.

What this implies is that spatial planning has been ‘absorbed’ in this new cohesion discourse reflecting the fact that the previous discourse on European Spatial Planning failed to establish independent policy goals and principles (or narratives). Its role here, while not insignificant, is to identify and understand the underlying dynamics of a territory, how these are developing/changing and how they articulate with other territories in a manner that is not

restricted to existing administrative boundaries. Thus spatial planners still have an important role to play working with regional and local stakeholders as they seek to create a shared vision of where territorial development is going and then to allocate appropriate forms of investment (e.g. in infrastructure) to support such a vision.

The continuing emphasis on ‘balanced and sustainable competitiveness’, in relation to cohesion, can be seen as the other face of the political message. For instance the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (EU Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development 2011) seeks to situate territorial development and sustainable development in relation to and within the overarching goals of ‘Europe 2020’ (i.e. smart, sustainable and inclusive growth). There is also an intention that economic, social and territorial cohesion should be at the centre of the approach and the post-2014 funding period of the structural funds which are intended to be used to support these objectives. In order to try and give a clear ‘steer’ to member states regarding how they use the structural funds the Commission has published a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) that seeks to achieve enhanced coordination between all European Structural Investment (ESI) Funds. The aim being to ‘increase coherence between policy commitments made in the context of ‘Europe 2020’ and investment on the ground. It should encourage integration by setting out how the funds can work together’ (European Commission 2012, p. 3). All of these themes are strongly emphasised in the sixth cohesion report (European Commission 2014a) along with a recognition that since 2007 there has been an increase in European wide levels of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, particularly in the EU-13³ where, apart from capital cities and adjacent regions, territorial inequalities are increasing. This is argued to be unacceptable and that territorial development must address these developments alongside competitiveness and that economic growth should be both inclusive and sustainable *à la* ‘Europe 2020’.

Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) has developed as part of this evolving approach and is one of the means deployed to implement the principle of territoriality in EU policies. There has been increasing interest in TIA in recent years and several ESPON projects in the 2006 programming period of the structural funds supported the evolution of an advanced methodological approach (ESPON 2010; 2011; Fischer et al. 2015; see also ESPON 2004; 2005). However, TIA was first discussed in the late 1990s in the context of the preparation of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). The elaboration of a sound TIA methodology and approach was part of the ESDP working programme agreed in Tampere in 1999 but it took several years before a concerted discussion of TIA started in the ESPON framework. This again underlines that ESPON is one of the main programmes for the implementation of the ESDP. TIA was initially thought of as a modified version of Environmental Impact Assessment for large infrastructure projects (e.g. transport, water management) and in relation to cross-border cooperation (INTERREG) but there were ambitions to broaden the scope of TIA. Two ESPON projects analysed the territorial impacts of EU agricultural policy and transport policy albeit in an ex post manner (ESPON 2004; 2005). By contrast recent debates on an eventual TIA directive focused more on ex ante evaluation within the overall impact assessment procedure of the Commission. The main intention of such a procedure is to avoid the negative unintended effects of sectoral policies implemented in a given territory (later termed ‘territorial sensitivity’; ESPON 2011). The German spatial impact assessment procedure (*Raumordnungsverfahren*) was considered to be an example for an ex ante assessment tool which was largely unknown in other member states. This approach fits well with the more recent debate on territorial governance and territorial coherence as part of the EU Territorial Agenda. However, the mere coordination of actors or policies having an eventual impact on territorial development constitutes an approach that differs significantly from a spatial planning approach. While the latter is more

interventionist in nature and based on a vision for the territory, impact assessment is more passive or reactive.

Plans for implementation of TIA became more tangible in 2013 when the Commission published a Commission Staff Working Document entitled ‘Assessing territorial impacts: Operational guidance on how to assess regional and local impacts within the Commission Impact Assessment System’ (European Commission 2013a). This document illustrates how TIA can complement the current practice of social and economic impact assessment in the Commission based on existing data bases and models with minimum effort. This implies that TIA is not considered as a holistic and independent procedure but an addendum to existing practice.

In a more recent ESPON project the authors claim that a procedure is needed that a) shows a discrete territorial approach and b) enhances the capacities of local and regional authorities to use TIA for their own purposes (Fischer et al. 2015). In fact the debate on TIA largely referred to internal procedures of the Commission, thereby representing a top down approach.

To conclude this section we argue that the notion of ‘territory’ or the territorial dimension has found a prominent place in Commission documents and policies. The notion of territorial cohesion as well as the EU Territorial Agenda triggered the turn to a number of ‘new’ concepts such as territorial capital, territorial diversity and territorial governance (Camagni 2001; ATTREG 2012). However, territorial development and spatial planning are by no means identical and there are, unresolved, tensions between the two approaches. Moreover, the many notions in use remain rather vague both in terms of their definitions and implementation. However, vagueness does not necessarily imply weakness. In particular in the context of the European multi-scaled policy environment vagueness may be an advantage as it offers multiple ways for implementing ideas on territorial development in different

contexts and thus helps make spatial planning acceptable to different member states who have their own territorial development objectives. Nevertheless, despite the indeterminacy associated with notions such as spatial planning and strategic spatial planning there is a strong argument that as part of the hegemony of the competitiveness agenda they have ‘absorbed’ and internalised key assumptions of neoliberalism (Olesen 2013) which structure their operation and use across the European territory.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POST-2014 PERIOD: WHAT ROLE FOR SPATIAL PLANNING?

As we pointed out in Section 3 at the European level spatial planning has increasingly become associated with territorial development. In the post-2014 period the overarching objective is to achieve the improved integration and focussed use of different strands of the structural funds that will support the achievement of ‘Europe 2020’s key objectives both across the EU and within member states, and the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) is an attempt to ensure that this actually takes place. However, the way(s) in which the CSF is translated/interpreted by member states will be important.

The Partnership Agreements between the Commission and member states will have an important role to play in determining the extent to which a focus on territorial development emerges within member states that allows for the improved integration and focussed use of different strands of the structural funds. The draft guidance states (European Commission 2014b, p. 2):

‘In order to address key territorial challenges in the preparation of their Partnership Agreement and programmes, thereby taking into account territorial cohesion, Member States shall identify the specific challenges of each region, taking into account the major societal challenges faced by the EU today (globalisation, demographic change,

environmental degradation, migration, climate change, energy use, the economic and social consequences of the crisis). According to the intervention logic, this analysis shall help them identifying their specific needs and potential to achieve Europe 2020 objectives, as well as selecting the corresponding thematic objectives, investment and Union priorities, specific objectives and appropriate delivery mechanisms.’

In addition post-2014 cohesion policy has provided a range of new instruments such as Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), integrated sustainable urban development and Community-Led Local Development (CCLD) as well as the general use (or mainstreaming) of the LEADER approach. All of which provide a stimulus for member states and managing authorities to adopt a more integrated and territorially focused approach that has a significant bottom-up component and allows local communities to take a leading role in the design and delivery of programmes.

Within this context spatial planning potentially has an important role to play as both a methodology and mechanism that can be used to achieve the enhanced integration, coordination and focussed use of the structural funds that territorial development and a place-based approach requires. However, once again we need to remember that ‘spatial planning’ and ‘territorial development’ have many different meanings and implications across the EU and the extent to which they are embedded within the thinking and governance structures of different member states varies considerably.

Against this background the introduction of macro-regions is another attempt to establish transnational cooperation areas. The difference is that macro-regional strategies are not under the INTERREG or ETC scheme but are endorsed by the European Parliament and Council (European Commission 2013b). This gives them much more visibility and political recognition, the disadvantage arguably being that they are seen as a top down approach by local and regional authorities. Nevertheless macro regional strategies are not completely new

in terms of their working principles and spatial delimitations. Multi-level governance, coordination and cooperation are the basic mechanism that should guarantee more effective implementation of EU as well as national policies. To a certain extent macro-regional strategies represent a continuation of the INTERREG programme (line B; i.e. transnational cooperation).

The introduction of macro-regional strategies began with the Baltic and the Danube regions, both regions have been subject to various attempts under the INTERREG scheme to establish strategic transnational approaches not least because of the pressing environmental problems they face. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was adopted in 2009 and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region was adopted in June 2011 (European Commission 2013b). They were followed by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region by the end 2014. The macro-regional strategy for the Alpine Region began in summer 2015 and additional cooperation areas are in preparation. Macro-regional strategies are considered to be 'soft spaces' where the Commission and member states are expected to coordinate their territorial policies, environmental and transport in particular. Interestingly these macro regional strategies receive no additional funding but those involved are expected to pool existing resources (from INTERREG and ETC) and use them in a strategic manner to address common problems/issues as part of a wider strategy for the macro-region. Once again there is potential for spatial planning to play an important role as both a methodology and mechanism for development in the macro regions.

What the above developments suggest is that spatial planning is by no means dead, but rather that its role has changed. However, much will depend on how those participating in various programmes/initiatives (e.g. structural funds, macro regions) understand development and the degree to which they are prepared to look for ways of transcending sectoral, local administrative units and boundaries. This turn will be structured by how particular national

and regional/local discourses interact with one another and, for instance, construct a shared developmental narrative for a macro-region containing a 'vision' depicting a desired future – e.g. where it is going, what it will 'look like', how it will be achieved. The degree to which such a narrative is established and articulated will depend upon the extent to which an attendant discourse coalition can be created that has the 'power' to realise it.

CONCLUSION

When assessing the impact(s) of spatial planning policies it is tempting to turn to part of the subtitle of Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) famous book on Implementation: 'How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland'. One might be inclined to use the popular subtitle of this book on the implementation of federal policies in the US to describe the state of European spatial planning policies. However, the multi-scalar reality of territorial and spatial development policies illustrates that implementation of European spatial planning policies cannot easily or simply be described as a product of central-local relationships.

First of all we have to acknowledge that the EU channels billions of Euros into policies that are territorial in nature, i.e. have strong effects on the development of cities and region. Most notably these are measures financed by the European Structural Investment (ESI) Funds largely tailored to fulfill development goals in the new member states that give less priority to strategic spatial planning and place emphasis more on economic development and increased competitiveness.

Secondly, the recently introduced new instruments introduced for the structural funds in the new programming period (e.g. ITI and CLLD), understood as one of the main carriers of the principle of territoriality (and by extension of spatial planning) in EU policies, are likely to be used very differently by different member states. For instance in the German context ITI is used only by two of the sixteen federal states (Baden-Württemberg and one region in

Schleswig-Holstein). By contrast in Poland the application of ITI is compulsory for city regions and metropolitan areas. Although even in the Polish case one may question whether or not spatial planning in the sense outlined in the ESDP is actually being implemented and transcends a sectorial approach.

In addition, we have to accept that the recent reforms of national spatial planning policies have impeded the emergence of a common understanding of strategic spatial planning. Notably the reforms in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark demonstrate that 1) the trajectories of change of national spatial planning policies point in different directions and 2) that strategic spatial planning has gained less recognition in some member states than others (see Reimer et al. 2014; Zonneveld and Evers 2014; Damsgard 2014; Boddy and Hickman 2013). In addition there is the argument (e.g. Olesen 2013) that spatial planning has increasingly absorbed and internalised the key assumptions of neoliberalism to the extent that they now form key part of the *modus operandi* of spatial planning. In many ways this latter point should come as no surprise given that Europe has been living through a prolonged period of economic crisis. However, the dominant response of fiscal austerity has been framed by neo-liberal assumptions that it is not the failure of the market that has caused these problems but rather than the economic crisis results from state intervention in market processes and excessive fiscal expenditure by the state – thus the need for fiscal austerity. The outcome being that neoliberal shibboleths such as ‘economic growth and competitiveness are being normalised as common-sense policy objectives’ (Olesen 2013, p. 8). Such assumptions are seen as ‘unquestionable’ – they are presented as the only ‘solutions’ to the crisis and have largely been internalised as ‘articles of faith’ by politicians and policy-makers across Europe; in the words of a former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, ‘there is no alternative’.

Given the always uncertain meaning and status of spatial planning at European and national levels it is unsurprising that it has largely become seen as one means to achieve economic growth. As Olesen (2013, p. 12-13) concludes, the:

‘neoliberalisation of strategic spatial planning has materialised, partly in governance reforms aimed at reducing or abolishing strategic spatial planning at national and regional scales, and partly through the normalisation of neoliberal concepts and practices together with the use of depoliticisation tactics in strategic spatial planning processes. As a result, contemporary practices and discourses of strategic spatial planning have moved further and further away from the theorisations of strategic spatial planning that helped to pave the way for the revival of strategic spatial planning in the 1990s.’

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Notes

- 1 The Territorial Agenda is an intergovernmental ‘agreement’ between the Ministers of EU Member States responsible for spatial planning and development. It is described as ‘an action-orientated framework for our future cooperation, developed together with the European Commission. Through the Territorial Agenda we are contributing to sustainable economic growth and job creation as well as social and ecological development in all EU regions’ (EU Ministers for Spatial Planning and Development 2007, p. 1). The aim being to ensure that the territorial implications and impacts of European level strategies such as the Lisbon-Göteborg Strategy and ‘Europe 2020’ are taken into account and that member states work together and with the European Commission to ensure the territorial dimension is embedded in their policies and actions thereby avoiding exacerbating existing territorial inequalities/imbbalances and/or creating new ones. This would be seen as compatible with the Treaty obligations to address economic, social and territorial cohesion.

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- 2 'A discourse coalition is the ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utters these story lines, and the practices that conform to these story lines, all organized around a discourse' (Hajer 1993, p. 47).
 - 3 This refers to the member states that joined the EU post-2004.