Polynuclear urban regions and the transnational dimension of spatial planning

Proposals for multi-scalar planning in North West Europe

EURBANET REPORT 3

Bart Lambregts
Wil Zonneveld

HOUSING AND URBAN POLICY STUDIES 26

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DUP Science

Housing and Urban Policy Studies
are published by DUP Science

DUP Science is an imprint of
Delft University Press
Postbus 98
2600 MG Delft
The Netherlands
Phone +31 15 2785678
Fax +31 15 2785706
http://www.library.tudelft.nl/dup/

Housing and Urban Policy Studies are edited by
OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies
Delft University of Technology
Jaffalaan 9
2628 BX Delft
The Netherlands
Phone +31 15 2783005
Fax +31 15 2784422
E-mail mailbox@otb.tudelft.nl
http://www.otb.tudelft.nl

Design: Cyril Strijdonk Ontwerpburo, Gaanderen
Printing: Haveka, Alblasserdam

ISSN 0926-6240; 26
ISBN 90-407-2462-8
NUGI 655

Subject headings: urban networks, polycentric urban regions, Randstad, RheinRuhr, Flemish Diamond, Central Scotland.

Preface

This third volume on the EURBANET project focuses on the 'building blocks' for transnational planning in North West Europe. This research which looks at the different aspects of polynuclear urban regions in a North West European context shows the crucial importance of putting spatial issues in a wider perspective and seeking connections between different spatial scales. The first building block is a synthesis of the regional case studies carried out in the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond and Central Scotland. The message is that the polycentric urban regions examined still have a long way to go before they can come up to the high expectations articulated in the most recent generation of transnational spatial planning documents, and that there is considerable scope for learning between the regions. The second building block deals with visioning at the transnational spatial scale. This contains a thorough discussion of the difficulties involved in vision making at this scale and outlines of a network-oriented approach. The third building block deals with the possibilities to give shape to specific forms of cooperation in order to tackle policy issues relevant for polycentric urban regions.

EURBANET was one of the almost fifty projects for transnational cooperation in spatial planning that were executed under the umbrella of the North Western Metropolitan Area Operational Programme. This programme was part of INTERREG IIC, a Community Initiative to promote transnational cooperation among public bodies and private parties from different countries through projects on regional and local issues. INTERREG IIC was co-financed by the European Community. EURBANET was carried out by a consortium of five academic research institutes from the four countries where the regions of research are located:

- OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies, Delft University of Technology (The Netherlands: lead partner);
- Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow (United Kingdom);
- Institut für Landes- und Stadtentwicklungsforschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen in cooperation with the University of Dortmund (Germany);
- Department of Architecture, Urban Design and Spatial Planning (ASRO), Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium);
- Nijmegen School of Management, University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands).

Contents

1 Introduction

Bart Lambregts & Wil Zonneveld

1.1 Transnational spatial planning on the way up

Political and professional attention for transnational spatial planning in North West Europe is once more on the rise. With the European unification process advancing at a steady pace and many activities occurring increasingly on an international scale, cross-border and transnational spatial issues are making their presence increasingly felt. Encouraged by (a) the finishing of the first official *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) in 1999, and (b) the active financial and practical support organised through Community Initiatives such as INTERREG IIC (1994-1999) and INTERREG IIIB (2000-2006), a large number of 'transnational spatial development projects' have been initiated in the past five years or so. For North West Europe alone, we are talking about at least 70 to 80 individual projects. They can be seen as part of a major attempt initiated by the European Commission to anchor the 'transnational dimension' firmly in the spatial planning practice of the EU member countries.

The EURBANET project is one of the 40 odd projects that were carried out under the INTERREG IIC programme for North West Europe (also known as the *North Western Metropolitan Area*). Five research teams from four different North West European countries extensively explored the opportunities for establishing regional planning approaches in polycentric urban regions. Detailed studies were carried out for the polycentric urban regions of the Randstad, the Flemish Diamond, RheinRuhr, and Central Scotland. To date, findings have been presented in a dozen or so reports (not officially published) and in two booklets (Ipenburg & Lambregts, 2001a; Meijers, Romein & Hoppenbrouwer, 2003). A special issue of the journal *European Planning Studies* reporting the results of the EURBANET project will be published in Spring 2004 (Priemus, Zonneveld & Faludi, forthcoming).

A significant part of the EURBANET project, was concerned with the question of how the knowledge and ideas developed during the comparative study of the four polycentric urban regions could be put to use for the greater good of transnational spatial planning in North West Europe as a whole: a difficult task that was made somewhat easier by the fact that polycentric urban regions and the concept of polycentric spatial development both feature largely in the ESDP and also play an important part in the *Spatial Vision for North-West Europe* (a discussion document developed as part of the same INTERREG IIC programme, from here referred to as the NWE Spatial Vision). One branch of the project therefore focused directly on the underlying

process and the application of the ESDP (see Waterhout & Faludi, 2001; Faludi & Waterhout, 2002; Faludi, forthcoming), while another was designed to produce concrete 'building blocks' for transnational spatial planning in North West Europe. It is the results of this part of the EURBANET project that occupy central stage in the present publication.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is divided into four sections. Section 1.2 briefly reports the essentials of the EURBANET project. Section 1.3 elaborates on the focus and objectives of the present publication. Section 1.4 explains the structure of the rest of the book. The chapter ends with some acknowledgements.

1.2 Outlines of the EURBANET project

The EURBANET project started early in 1999 and ended in December 2001. It had a role in encouraging transnational cooperation in spatial planning in North West Europe – both through functioning as a 'real life' example of transnational cooperation in spatial planning research, and through producing results that may be helpful in further advancing the achievement of this goal.

The main objective of the EURBANET project itself was defined as follows: to establish the case for a more explicit regional approach in polynuclear urban regions. In our definition, a polynuclear urban region is composed of several historically and administratively distinct cities located in more or less close proximity to each other (roughly within commuting distance). Typically, none of the individual cities dominates the entire region (cf. Kloosterman & Musterd, 2001). Several such regions dot the North West European landscape, where they are among the most densely populated areas. The Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland serve as case study areas in the EURBANET project (see Figure 1.1). The regions known as the West Midlands and Northern England are another pair of excellent examples, but they were not included in the project.

Polynuclear urban regions have recently attracted considerable interest for at least two important reasons. The first relates to the fact that – prompted by the gradual spatial expansion of daily activity patterns – they are increasingly viewed as more or less comprehensive metropolitan regions and as such are ascribed an increasingly important role in strategic spatial development plans and perspectives – also at the transnational level. The second reason is that these regions sometimes experience quite serious difficulties in coping with the pressures exerted by ongoing urbanisation and its derivatives (con-

Figure 1.1 The four polycentric urban regions examined in the EURBANET project

gestion, fragmentation of space, degradation of environmental standards, for example). The great challenge is to explore how these regions, which are also typically handicapped by institutional fragmentation, can possibly comply with the metropolitan ambitions imposed on them and, even more important, how they can be provided with the means to respond adequately to the difficult spatial challenges they face.

It is against this background that the EURBANET project has explored the case for a more explicit regional approach in the four polynuclear urban regions. Although in none of the four regions were functions examined as comprising a truly functional, administrative, and 'cultural' entity in all respects, there are important and growing interdependencies between their constituent parts. Of course, these interdependencies assume partly similar and partly different shapes and strengths in each of the regions. The same

holds for the factors that function as barriers to the regions' functioning as an entity or fully-fledged urban network.

The basic arguments underlying the project are that, currently, these interdependencies are in many cases insufficiently recognised by actors in the field, and that present planning and decision-making arrangements are not suited to dealing adequately with some of the bigger spatial challenges that polycentric urban regions face. The local scale of current governance arrangements has a logic of its own, but nevertheless does not encourage well-considered anticipation and response to broader spatial development trends. In addition, local governance often fails to support sustainable and effective forms of supra-local cooperation. Fierce inter-local competition, poor policy coordination – both between neighbouring localities and across different decision-making tiers – and restricted planning and decision-making horizons are all too common. As a result, opportunities tend to be missed and the policies that are eventually implemented are not necessarily those that are most efficient or effective when seen from a wider perspective. The effects on competitiveness and the quality of life may eventually turn out to be counterproductive, even at scales different from the regional.

So, on the basis of the above, there seems to be a clear scope for a more explicit regional approach in polynuclear urban regions. Such an approach would include the adoption of a larger-scale perspective regarding the interdependencies between the regions' constituent parts as well as the creation of a context in which cooperation between stakeholders and across sectors and administrative tiers was encouraged and made easier to achieve. The approach could be helpful in recognising complementary aspects in different (spatial) trends and challenges and in bringing to light specific, potentially productive or counter-productive regional imbalances. In addition, a regional approach could be of help in promoting the development of specialised and complementary assets in neighbouring cities, facilitating a more comprehensive way of dealing with various types of networks and taking the edge off local territorial competition. A regional approach for polycentric urban regions could, in brief, significantly improve the prospects for the strengthening of competitiveness and the quality of life in these regions.

The idea that (some of) the shortcomings associated with the local scale of current planning and decision-making arrangements in these regions could be overcome by applying instead a larger scale perspective is slowly being recognised in planning theory *and* in planning practice. The Randstad, the Flemish Diamond and RheinRuhr have already been conceptualised, or at least identified in the respective spatial planning frameworks and policies of the Netherlands, Flanders, and the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Central Scotland yet has to attain such a status. However, such 'top-down' attempts to shape coherent polynuclear urban regions or urban networks are certainly helpful, but by no means sufficient for achieving an effective regional planning approach and cooperation in practice.

In the EURBANET project, the case for a regional approach in the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland was explored in a five-step approach. First, for each of the regions the mental maps of local, regional, and national stakeholders were recorded by means of an elaborate series of interviews (see Ipenburg & Lambregts, 2001a). Next, again for each of the regions, key spatial planning issues were identified for which it could be reasoned that a regional approach might offer attractive, new opportunities for addressing these issues. Based on an analysis of the regions' (lack of) coherence in functional, administrative and cultural terms (step 3), the scope for actually promoting a regional approach in each of the regions was identified (step 4). Finally, concrete recommendations were formulated for establishing such a regional approach (step 5; see for an extended report: Meijers, Romein & Hoppenbrouwer, 2003).

1.3 Building blocks for transnational spatial planning in North West Europe

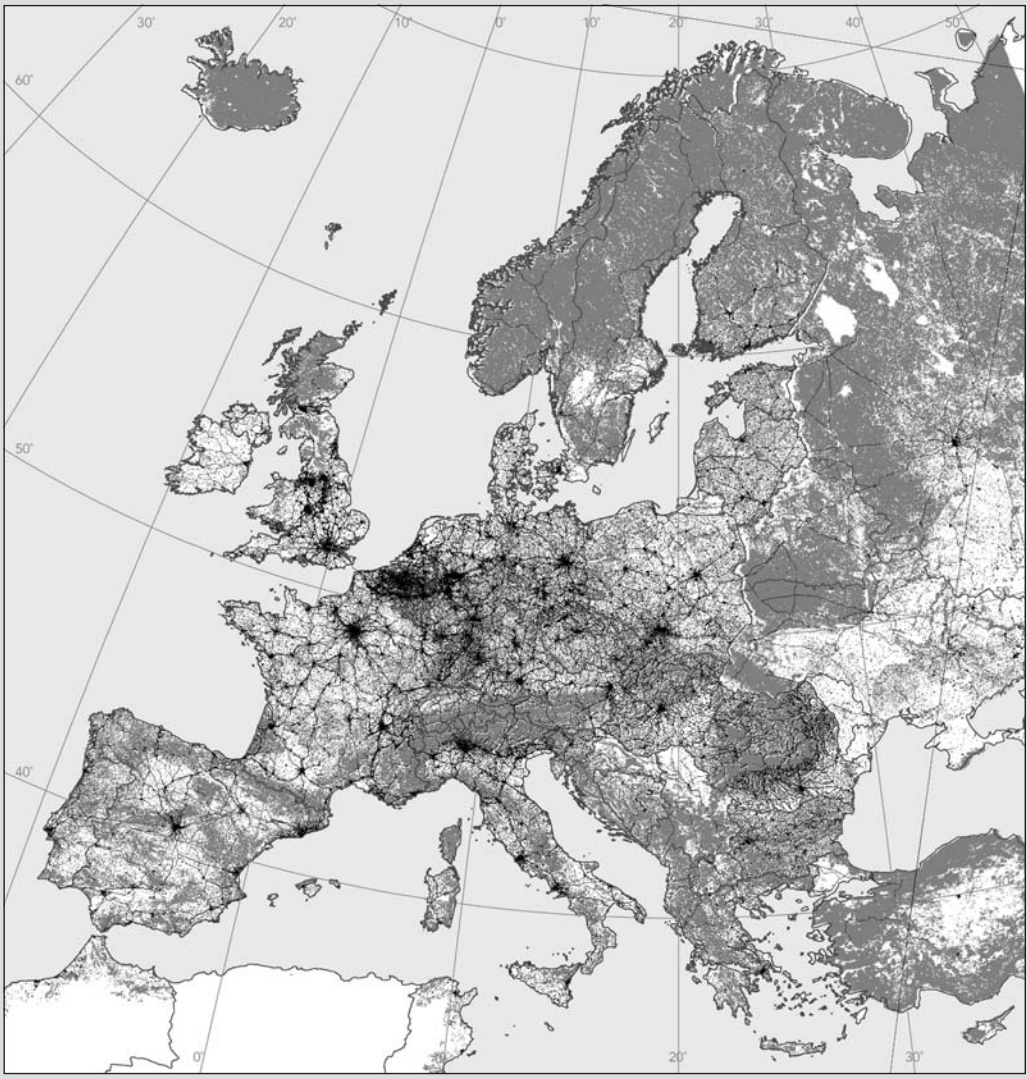
Consequently, in the EURBANET project, considerable emphasis has been put on the redefinition of specific spatial development issues at the scale of the polynuclear urban regions. In contrast, in the present publication we look upward, to the transnational and the North West European level. Our explorations into the different aspects of polynuclear urban regions in a North West European context have taught us the crucial importance of putting spatial issues in a wider perspective and seeking connections between different spatial scales. Current social, economic, and political dynamics continuously shape and reshape the relationships between the built environment, the trends and developments that impinge on it, and the opportunities for intervention. Specific spatial issues and the forces shaping them are increasingly difficult to fit into a simple 'local-regional-national-international' typology; they are no more easily classified as, for example, typical 'urban,' or typical 'rural' issues (see also SPESP, 2001).

The dynamics of the relationships and interdependencies between different spatial scales and the blurring of boundaries between different spatial categories have become important realities and challenges for spatial planners and policy makers (see, for instance, Graham & Healey, 1999). Increasingly, the transnational level also comes into play. With the European unification

process advancing at a steady pace and with many activities occurring increasingly on an international scale, cross-border and transnational spatial issues are making their presence increasingly felt. In North West Europe, where cross-border and transnational interdependencies are strong and where state boundaries are many, this effect is particularly evident. Here we find Europe's 'only … outstanding larger geographical zone of global economic integration', which is defined as the pentagram between the metropolises of London, Paris, Milan, Munich, and Hamburg (CEC, 1999, p. 20). On the European *and* on the global scale, this zone is an important centre of gravity in terms of population and economic production. The area is interconnected with other parts of the world in multiple ways. Perhaps the most salient characteristic of this area is the enormous density of (cross-border and transnational) network relationships. Of course, these concern the 'traditional' infrastructure networks facilitating the exchange of people, goods, and information, but also physical networks made up of nature reserves, river systems, or ecological zones, and – increasingly important – urban networks. The enormous coagulation of different network relationships in this zone generates not only great opportunities, but also an increasing number of serious spatial conflicts and threats. Some of the most noticeable of these are congestion on infrastructure networks (not only on the links, but also at the nodes), pressure on space in quantitative terms, pressure on space in qualitative terms, and pressure on environmental, ecological, and cultural values, especially in North West Europe's megacorridors (see the various contributions in Priemus & Zonneveld, 2003). These problems are certainly not exclusive to North West Europe, but their scale and severity are substantial (see Figure 1.2) and – as is widely recognised – clearly call for transnational collaboration and a more coherent spatial strategy or spatial development framework defined at the transnational level (North West Europe, for example).

In this book, we contribute to the achievement of such objectives by developing three 'building blocks' for transnational planning in North West Europe. From the ESDP and the NWE Spatial Vision and from the comments both documents have attracted from the (North West) European planning community, various things can be learned (see Faludi & Waterhout, 2002; NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001, for example). Among these are the realisations that: (a) there is still much to be learned about the functioning of the various spatial elements making up North West Europe's landscape; (b) there is still progress to be made in the practice of visioning at the transnational spatial scale; (c) effective forms of transnational cooperation are only slowly getting off the ground. These are by no means all the issues in need of an answer if transnational spatial planning is genuinely to take root in (North West) Europe, but they are indeed the issues for which the outcomes of the EURBANET project may be of value. It should then come as no surprise that the building blocks developed in this book are specifically designed to address these three issues.

Figure 1.2 Pressure by urban areas and transport networks (dark areas are those where the pressure is high)



Source: European Environmental Agency, 1999

With regard to the first building block, we stay close to the core-business of the EURBANET project: the polycentric urban region. The four polynuclear urban regions examined in the EURBANET project constitute key elements in North West Europe's spatial structure. As we mentioned above, in both the ESDP and in the NWE Spatial Vision an important role is reserved for these (and other) polycentric urban regions. In brief, they are expected to evolve into somewhat more coherent metropolitan regions that may counterbalance the dominant positions currently taken by 'classic' metropolises such as London and Paris, and thereby help to strengthen (North West) Europe's international competitive position (cf. CEC, 1999; NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000). Building on the detailed regional studies performed in the course of the EUR-

BANET project, we examine here the extent to which the prototypical polycentric urban regions of the Randstad, the Flemish Diamond, RheinRuhr, and Central Scotland are ready to assume this role.

The second building block deals with the art of visioning. Spatial concepts, in brief, are policy-oriented perceptions of the spatial structure of a particular area. A great challenge for planners is how to conceptualise such large, multi-layered and multi-faceted tracts of space as North West Europe or, harder still, the European Union as a whole, in a way that does justice to the complexity found on the ground and is helpful to spatial policymaking. North West Europe boasts a long, although to a large extent informal tradition in this respect (Waterhout, 2002; Doucet, 2002). The latest attempt to conceptualise North West Europe is included in the NWE Spatial Vision (Nadin, 2002a,b). However, given the criticism it has received, it will probably not be the last to be produced. In this book, we contribute to the discussion by presenting an alternative approach to visioning North West Europe's spatial structure. By expanding the 'layered approach' (a new and promising approach that has recently made its entry into Dutch spatial planning practice) with a network dimension, we present a first step towards the conceptualisation of North West Europe's spatial structure as a 'networked space'. By distinguishing between three types of superimposed spatial networks (that is, natural networks, infrastructure networks, and urban networks) we show how North West Europe is made up of different spatial realities that complement each other, but also give rise to specific spatial conflicts. In our opinion, such an approach to spatial conceptualisation provides promising possibilities for the identification of spatially relevant problems and opportunities. We also argue that such an approach offers interesting starting points for constructing visions regarding the future spatial development of North West Europe (see Zonneveld, 2002; 2003), and for actual transnational cooperation in spatial planning in this area and parts thereof.

The latter – that is, actual transnational cooperation – constitutes the core of the third building block. Across North West Europe, the need for transnational cooperation in spatial planning is widely acknowledged and intentions are generally good. In practice, however, serious and effective forms of transnational cooperation are rather thin on the ground, in contrast with, for example, cross-border forms of cooperation. It is certainly the case that, under the umbrella of such Community initiatives as INTERREG IIC and INTERREG IIIB, quite a number of 'transnational cooperation projects' have seen the light of day, but their life span is generally strictly related to the programme (and finance) periods of these initiatives. We therefore present here some tentative ideas about how cooperation in spatial planning in North West Europe can be further stimulated. The EURBANET project has shown that there are both

interesting similarities and differences with regard to the spatial and institutional challenges that concern polycentric urban regions and the ways in which they are seeking to address them. Based on this experience, there seems to be considerable scope for learning between these regions. This learning may even be extended to other regions that share similar conditions (the West Midlands, for example). We therefore elaborate on the idea of establishing a 'learning network' between polycentric urban regions in North West Europe and, in addition, show how national and regional planning authorities across North West Europe might cooperate in dealing with the cross-border and transnational planning challenges that are sure to come.

All in all, the three building blocks are designed to contribute to: (a) a better understanding of the (possible) roles of particular spatial elements (in this case, polycentric urban regions) in North West Europe's spatial system; (b) the conceptualisation of North West Europe's spatial structure; (c) the promotion of cooperation between various types of key actors in the field. We hope that these blocks may prove to be of help in shaping and sustaining a more mature transnational spatial planning practice in future in North West Europe.

1.4 The structure of the book

The rest of the book is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 serves as an introduction to the three building blocks that are developed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Chapter 2 clarifies the nature and the urgency of the challenges the building blocks are to address and therefore delves deeper into the present state of affairs with regard to transnational spatial planning in (North West) Europe. In Chapter 3, we offer a synthesis of the regional case studies carried out in the EURBANET project. The message is that the polycentric urban regions examined still have a long way to go before they can come up to the (high) expectations articulated in the most recent generation of transnational spatial planning documents, and that there is considerable scope for learning between the regions. Next, Chapter 4 examines an alternative approach to conceptualising North West Europe's complex spatial structure. This chapter presents a thorough discussion of the difficulties involved in vision making at the transnational level and proposes a network-oriented approach. In the final chapter, chapter 5, some suggestions are put forward on how to give shape to concrete forms of cooperation. Attention is divided between (a) the promotion of a network between polynuclear urban regions in North West Europe aimed at the mutual exchange of experiences, and (b) the stimulation of cooperation between planning authorities on actual cross-border and transnational spatial planning issues.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Reflecting as it does the final stage of the EURBANET project, the book builds firmly on the results of preceding actions undertaken in the project, focusing on each of the four polynuclear urban regions in turn. An important moment of consultation and exchange between the authors of the report and a group of regional stakeholders and transnational planning experts took place at an early stage of this undertaking. On the 11th and 12th of June 2001, a two-day international workshop was organised in which both regional issues and our work on the transnational level were discussed. Initial ideas about how to approach spatial planning in what was labelled the 'Urban Delta' were presented and discussed with the participants (the Urban Delta is the highly-urbanised transnational zone of which the Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond constitute the corners; see chapter 4). Opinions and ideas expressed during the various rounds of discussion subsequently served as inputs when the work was continued. The authors tried, in their turn, to keep up-to-date with relevant developments at the transnational scale. The consultation report on the NWE Spatial Vision was referred to soon after it was published and some workshops/conferences organised by fellow INTERREG IIC projects were attended. Here, the aim was to exchange experiences and tap into the knowledge of urban competitiveness and transnational network management that was being developed in these specific projects. In addition, the fruits were harvested of a series of complementary research activities that were conducted in parallel with the execution of the EURBANET project. These activities relate not only to the CORRIDESIGN project that was executed simultaneously, but also to work that was undertaken for the Study Programme on European Spatial Planning and a preparatory study for the Dutch Fifth Planning Memorandum on the international spatial dimension (Rathenau Instituut, 2000). The contribution of Wil Zonneveld is part of the NWO-ESR programme 'Spatial Developments and Policies in Polynuclear Urban Configurations in North West Europe' which was financed by NWO, BNG (Dutch Municipalities Bank) and the municipalities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

2 Key challenges for transnational spatial planning in North West Europe

Bart Lambregts & Wil Zonneveld

2.1 Introduction

At the start of this book we set ourselves a threefold task: (a) to ascertain the validity of the claims that polycentric urban regions in North West Europe are expected to play a key role in the strengthening of the area's competitive position and quality of life; (b) to go into the thorny task of visioning at the transnational level; (c) to concern ourselves with the question of how to encourage the coming about of concrete forms of transnational cooperation in the field of spatial planning. Although the selection of the tasks had much to do with the subject matter of the EURBANET project, we stress that these three issues are some of the most important to be addressed if transnational planning for North West Europe is to get anywhere in the foreseeable future.

To clarify the nature and the urgency of the challenges identified, we must delve deeper into the present state of transnational spatial planning in (North West) Europe. Two documents are indispensable for this: the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (CEC, 1999) and the *Spatial Vision for North West Europe* (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000). Neither document is legally binding, but both contain the latest ideas and perspectives on the course the spatial development of (North West) Europe should take and on the challenges that lie ahead. In addition to these key documents, we have also consulted a number of highly relevant related sources. These include the *Consultation Report on the Vision Document* (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001) and a variety of papers that have recently been published in reaction to the presentation of the transnational planning documents mentioned (Faludi, 2002; Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, for example).

In the next three sections we draw on these and other sources to lay the foundations for each of the three building blocks developed in the succeeding chapters.

2.2 High hopes for polycentric urban regions

2.1.1 A multi-scalar concept

Polycentricity has rapidly become a key notion in discussions about spatial development in Europe and parts thereof. The reasons for this include: a) the observation that specific spatial developments strengthen interdependencies between cities, as a result of which they become part of wider spatial config-

Table 2.1 Examples of the use of polycentric spatial concepts at different spatial scales

Scale	Concepts based upon polycentric spatial development	Related strategic objectives
Continental	■ zones of global economic integration[1)]	■ spatial balance/cohesion ■ competitiveness
Transnational	■ global cities and gateways, and counterweight global gateways end economic centres[2)]	■ spatial balance/cohesion ■ competitiveness ■ transnational cooperation
Cross-border	■ cross-border urban networks such as MHAL and ANKE[3)]	■ cross-border cooperation ■ economies of scale
National	■ 'le polycentrisme maillé'[4)]	■ spatial balance/cohesion ■ competitiveness/economic performance ■ environmental balance
Regional	■ polynuclear urban regions and urban networks such as Randstad/Delta Metropolis and Flemish Diamond and *Metropolregionen* such as RheinRuhr[5)]	■ regional cooperation ■ regional balance ■ competitiveness ■ economies of scale
Urban district	■ network city[6)]	■ inter-municipal cooperation ■ creating 'room to manoeuvre'

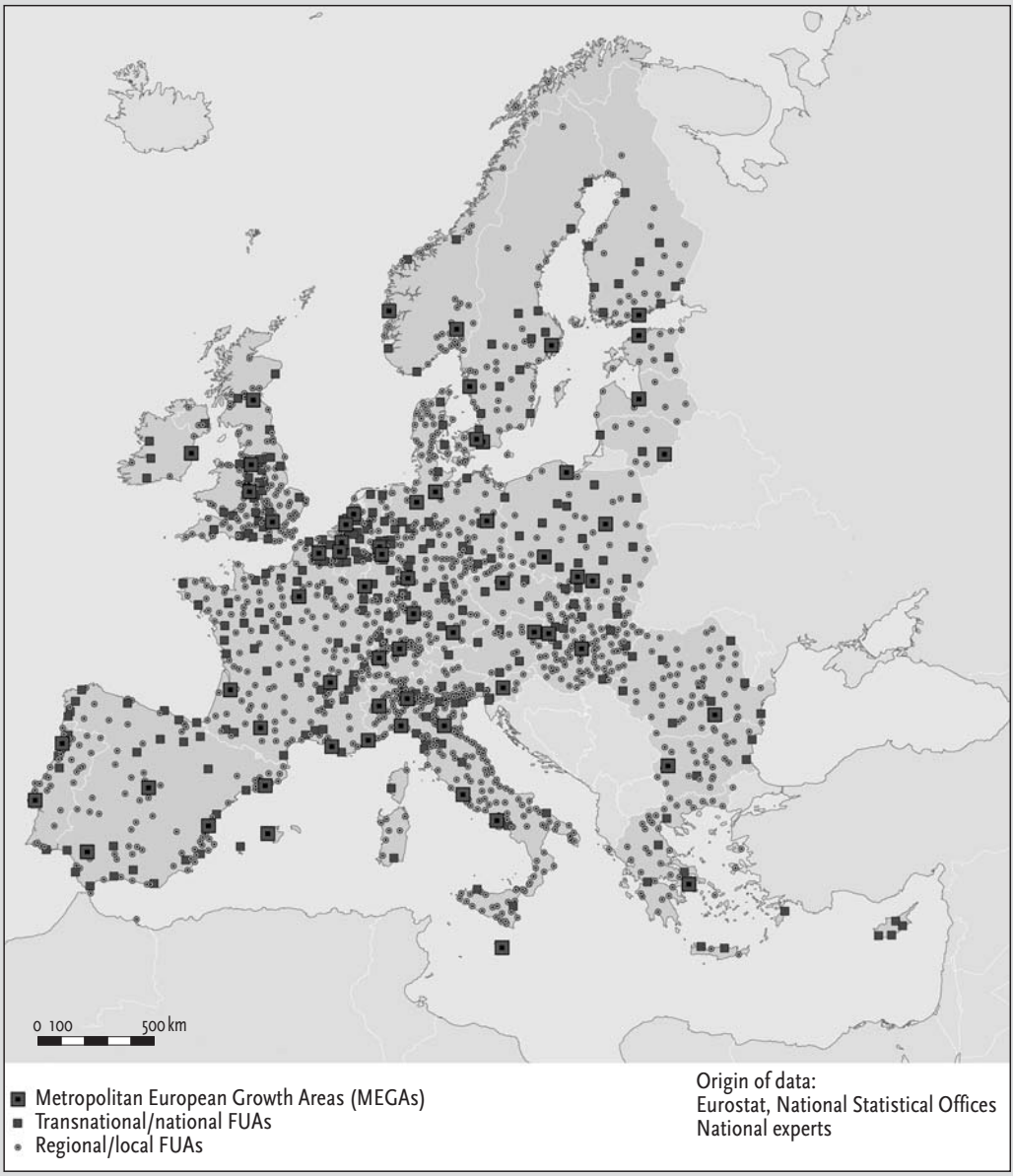
1 Key concept in 'European Spatial Development Perspective' (CEC, 1999), further explored in the ESPON 2006 programme.
2 Key concepts in the 'Spatial Vision for North West Europe' (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000).
3 Cross-border co-operation between local and regional authorities. MHAL stands for Maastricht/Heerlen-Hasselt/Genk-Aachen-Liège; ANKE for the cross-border urban network Arnhem-Nijmegen-Kleve-Emmerich.
4 Recent scenario for the polycentric spatial development of the French territory developed and supported by DATAR (DATAR, 2000, in Drewe, 2001).
5 Key concepts in respectively present Dutch, Flemish and German spatial policies.
6 Key concept in the Dutch discussion on the future national spatial planning policy (see VROM, 2001).

urations or networks; b) an upsurge in various strategic uses of the concept. Polycentricity is a notion that lends itself to various interpretations and uses (cf. SPESP, 2001; Kloosterman & Musterd, 2001). It is not inherently connected to a specific spatial scale and it can be employed for multiple purposes. Within the context of contemporary European spatial planning discourse, the notion may be seen to be used for analytical and strategic (planning) purposes while at the same time being applied to local, regional, national, transnational and/or continental scales, sometimes even within a single document (see Table 2.1 for a selection).

2.2.2 Polycentricity and the debate on new economic core areas in Europe

Polycentricity is neither a unique, nor a new quality of spatial organisation. If framed at the right scale, any landscape contains elements of polycentricity. Much also depends on the (statistical/spatial) unit of analysis and the indicators used. If, for example, population density is the measure (an adequate proxy for urbanisation), both the European Union and North West Europe contain elements of polycentricity, despite the relative concentration of pop-

Figure 2.1 The distribution of (functional) urban areas across the European territory

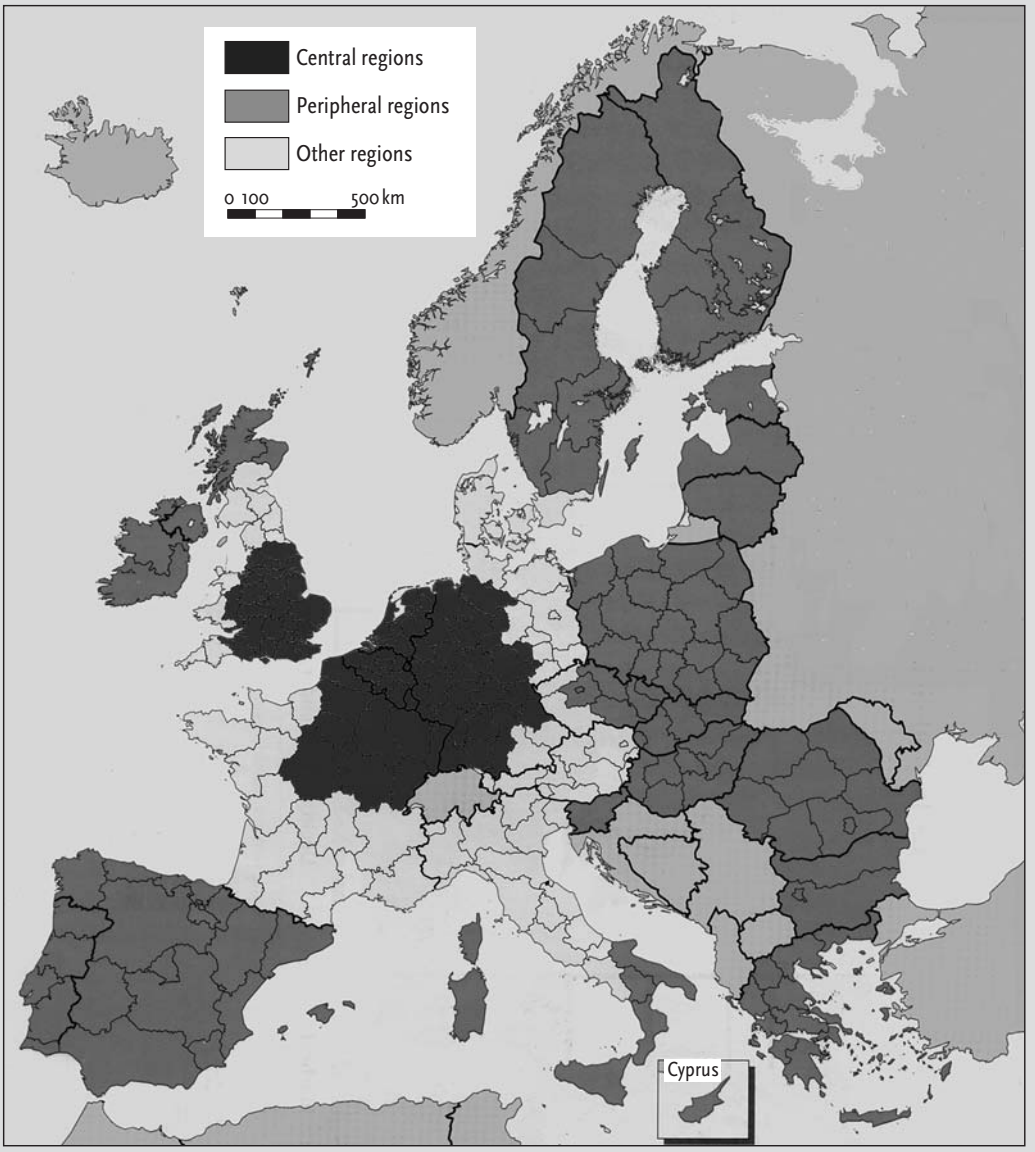


Source: Nordregio et al., 2003

ulation in what has become known as the 'blue banana', stretching from the Po valley in Italy to the Midlands in England (Figure 2.1). However, if the measure is accessibility (defined as the time needed to reach other regions weighted by their economic importance, see CEC, 2001), Europe's territory is a clear case of a (single) core-periphery configuration (Figure 2.2).

A very similar picture would probably arise if the regions' contribution to the GDP of the EU15 were taken as an indicator: the regions characterised as cen-

Figure 2.2 Central and peripheral regions in the EU



According to the peripherality index to GDP in Euro by lorry (NUTS2)
© MEGRIN for the administrative boundaries
Source: IRPUD – DGREGIO

tral (that is, readily accessible) in Figure 2.2 together account for only 14% of the land area, but for 33% of the EU's population and almost half of its GDP (CEC, 2001).

It is exactly this core-periphery perception of present-day EU territory that lies at the heart of much of EU policy with a spatial impact. Socio-economic disparities between member states and also within member states are

stronger than the European Commission considers desirable. Achieving a more balanced and sustainable development, in particular by strengthening economic and social cohesion, is therefore a major EU policy objective (CEC, 1999). The 'European Spatial Development Perspective' (ESDP) is the first attempt at the EU level to provide a spatially oriented comprehensive policy framework to contribute to this objective. The ESDP aims specifically at the promotion of a spatially more balanced development of the territory of the European Union. *Polycentric spatial development* is the main concept introduced in the ESDP to give substance to this objective and, as Waterhout argues (2002), the only one that has the capacity to function as a bridge between the 60 policy options presented in the document. In this respect, the ESDP deviates from previous policy measures (mostly within the realm of structural policies and the Trans European Networks approach), which emphasised the importance of interconnectivity between core and periphery. If only the infrastructure links between the core area and various peripheral zones were improved, so it was hoped, surplus resources from the core would automatically find their way to the periphery. The ESDP polycentricity concept alternatively emphasises the endogenous potentials of (possible new) economic core regions[1].

When applied to the continental level, polycentric development in the ESDP stands for a normative future perspective of the EU territory in which Europe's present spatial-economic structure – dominated by the 'pentagram' – will change in 'a polycentric and more balanced system of metropolitan regions, city clusters and city networks' (CEC, 1999, p. 20-21). The present situation in the USA, 'which has several outstanding economic integration zones on a global scale' (ibid., p. 20), serves as an example. Through the concept of polycentric development, the ESDP seeks to stimulate regions outside the existing core to pursue a stronger integration into the global economy, a theme further explored by the Council for Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR, 2002).

According to those who set up the ESDP, polycentric development will not only 'help to avoid further excessive economic and demographic concentration in the core area of the EU' (CEC, 1999), but is also required to safeguard 'the greater competitiveness of the EU on a global scale' (ibid.). Apart from mentioning the Barcelona and the Øresund regions as possible examples, the ESDP does not explicitly designate regions that should otherwise (be stimu-

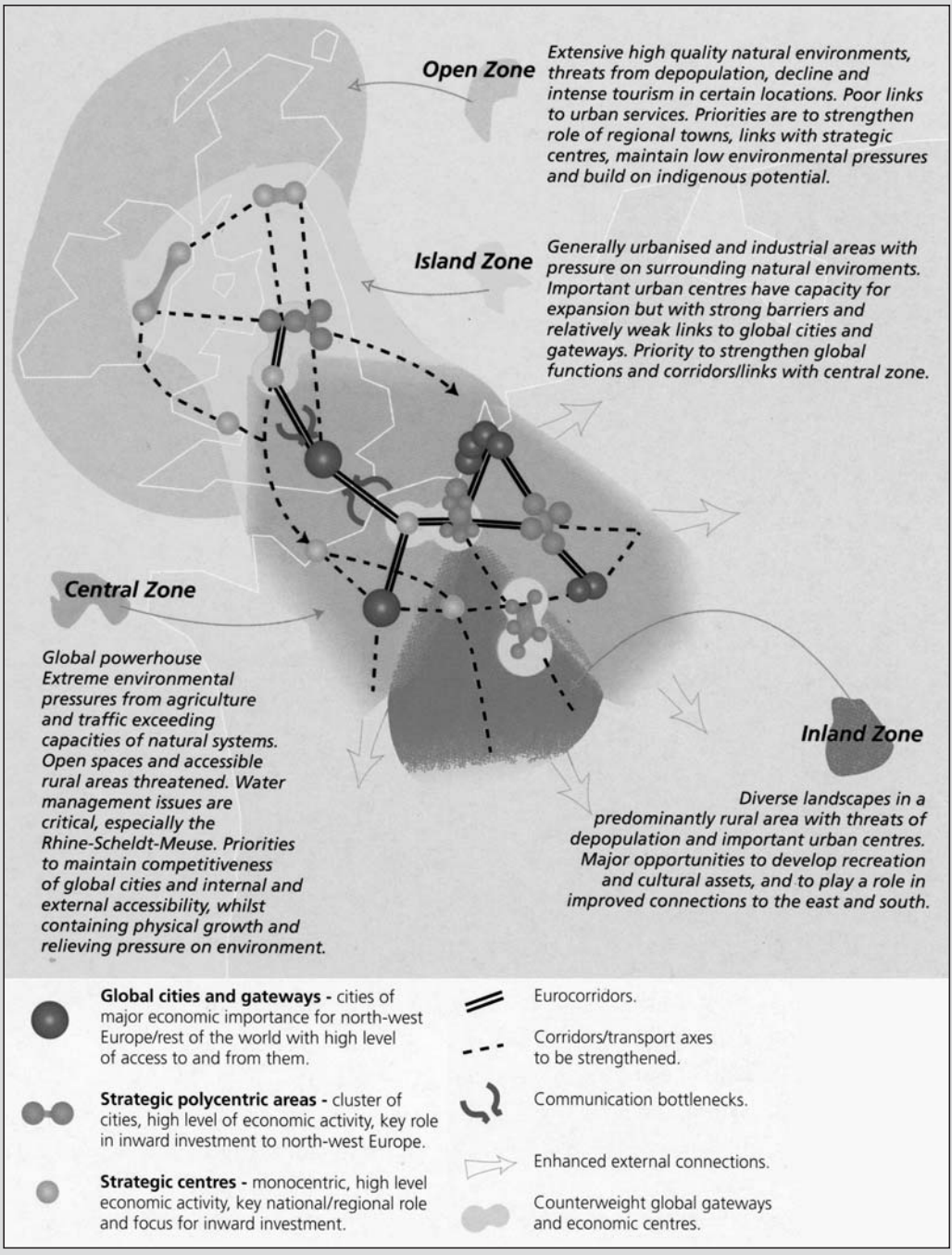
1 Polycentric spatial development in combination with a new urban-rural partnership is one of three spatial development guidelines presented in the ESDP. The other two are 'parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge', and 'wise management of the natural and cultural heritage'.

lated to) aspire to such a role. Presenting some general outlines for polycentric development at the regional level, however, does lift a corner of the veil with regard to the question of how cities and regions could give shape to such ambitions. According to the ESDP, cities should be stimulated to cooperate in city networks and establish complementary relationships, not only with regard to economic functions, but also for other urban functions such as culture, education and knowledge, and social infrastructure. In addition, city clusters within individual member states should become the subject of integrated spatial development strategies in which the aim should be to build on the advantages of economic competition between them while overcoming the disadvantages (CEC, 1999, p. 21). The expansion of towns and cities is only considered possible when coordination is sought at the regional level, not only between urban centres, but also between cities and their hinterland. City and countryside, in this respect, should be treated as a 'functional, spatial entity with diverse relationships and interdependencies' (ibid., p. 24). Only through cooperation and coordination at the regional level (that is, by establishing new forms of urban-rural partnership based on the voluntary principle and equality) can a balance be achieved between economic, environmental, and social interests on a larger scale (ibid., p. 25). Over distances that render the establishment of such relationships more difficult, cities should focus on the exchange of experiences aimed at solving common problems.

2.2.3 Polycentric urban regions in the Spatial Vision

The ESDP elaborates the principle of polycentricity in a generic way without elaborating the concept in a territorial sense. The ESDP does not touch on the politically sensitive question of which areas outside the 'pentagram' could be considered as (potential) new economic integration zones (this matter has been taken up by the CPMR; CPMR 2002). The pentagram is also presented as some sort of homogenous zone. The internal structure is not touched on, so there is plenty of room to elaborate the polycentricity concept territorially. This challenge is taken up at the North West European level. A large part of Europe's prime economic core area, the pentagram, is located in what in the INTERREG IIC and IIIB initiatives has been defined as the North Western Metropolitan Area (NWMA) and North West Europe (NWE) programme areas respectively. Still under the INTERREG IIC initiative, a 'Spatial Vision for North West Europe' was drawn up (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000; see also Nadin, 2002a,b). The Spatial Vision has taken on board the principles and ideas of the ESDP, which means that it intends to set an agenda for balanced and sustainable development in North West Europe and that it attaches great value to (transnational) cooperation. In addition, the Spatial Vision elaborates on the ESDP concept of polycentric development by advocating a more dispersed pattern of economic development in North West Europe. In the Spatial Vision,

Figure 2.3 North West Europe in the Spatial Vision



Source: NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000

North West Europe is divided into four cooperation zones (Central, Island, Open, Inland) across which a (polycentric) system made up of a variety of ele-

ments constitutes an urban and economic backbone (see Figure 2.3). The elements of this system include 'global cities and gateways', 'strategic polycentric areas', 'strategic centres', and potential 'counterweight global gateways and economic centres'. They are interconnected by a number of transport axes and eurocorridors.

There are strong parallels between the way in which the concept of polycentric spatial development is employed in the ESDP (at the continental level) and in the Spatial Vision (at the North West European level). Again, the conception of a territory (that is, North West Europe) is being made up of both a congested core (the Central zone) and several less dynamic zones that form the immediate cause for promoting a more polycentric spatial development. And yet again, an important supporting motive is found in the securing of the global competitive position of North West Europe and its metropolitan areas (Jensen & Richardson, 2001; Jensen, 2002).

The central zone identified in the Spatial Vision roughly coincides with the north-western half of the pentagram mentioned in the ESDP (see above). The zone is conceived as dominated by global cities and gateways (London, Paris, Frankfurt, the Randstad, and their major international airports and seaports) and large polycentric metropolitan centres (the Flemish Diamond/Central Belgian Urban Network[2] and RheinRuhr). These metropolitan areas are interconnected by corridors of infrastructure and economic development. The area is considered to be a 'global powerhouse', 'super-connected', and of crucial importance for (North West) Europe's position in the global economy. However, urban expansion, traffic, and the highly intensive mode of agricultural production cause extreme environmental pressure and are a threat to open spaces and accessible rural areas. Since market forces still tend to result in a further concentration of international economic and communications functions in selected global centres, it is feared that the negative side effects of the area's (economic) success will eventually become counter-productive for its economy and quality of life (see also Rathenau Instituut *et al*., 2000). The main task for the future is therefore defined as maintaining the competitiveness of the global cities and ensuring internal and external accessibility, whilst containing physical growth and relieving pressure on the environment. A more polycentric development at the transnational level through the strengthening of 'counterweight global gateways and economic centres' and the creation of alternative corridors is offered as a strategic response. This is

2 The Central Belgian Urban Network, a spatial concept which is part of the Second Benelux Structural Outline (Union économique Benelux, 1996), is formed by the Flemish Diamond and the 'Walloon Triangle' formed by Brussels-Mons-Charleroi-Namur.

expected to be of help in: (a) relieving pressure on the surroundings of present global centres; (b) promoting more efficient use of infrastructure; (c) widening accessibility to high level urban functions and transport networks; (d) encouraging a fairer distribution of prosperity across North West Europe (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000, pp. 34-35). In identifying potential 'counterweight global gateway and economic centres' the Spatial Vision is quite specific. The wider Brussels-Lille region, the SaarLorLux network[3] and the regional capitals of the Midlands and the North of England are explicitly mentioned and put on the map (ibid., pp. 30-36, see also Figure 2.3). Relatively strong emphasis is put on the role of infrastructure. The proposed alternative corridors are the 'North East Trade Axis' or NETA (from Ireland-northern England-short sea crossing to the Netherlands and Germany), the 'Le Havre-Rouen-Amiens-Reims-Lorraine' corridor, and the 'Brussels, Luxembourg and south' corridor (ibid., p. 34). By emphasising the role of these corridors in achieving a more balanced development in North West Europe, the Spatial Vision, more or less in line with the ESDP (see above), seems to express a strong belief in the potential of infrastructure in stimulating economic development, a criticism also expressed during the consultations after the publication of the Spatial Vision (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001).

2.2.4 Realistic perspectives, or wishful thinking?

All in all, then, both the Spatial Vision and the ESDP make much of the potential value of polycentric urban regions in the wider spatial systems of North West Europe and the EU as a whole. In both documents, polycentric urban regions are conceptualised as (potentially) coherent 'urban networks', or metropolitan regions and expectations are high with regard to the future role of these regions in strengthening (North West) Europe's competitive position and quality of life. The cities of such configurations are encouraged to cooperate with each other and establish complementary relationships in a variety of functions, both between the cities and between each city and its rural hinterland. Integrated spatial development strategies should be formulated for the city networks as a whole and new forms of partnership should be established.

An obvious question remains: to what extent are these regions prepared for the role they are expected to perform. In discussions following upon the ESDP it is recognised – quite justifiably – that metropolitan regions, city clusters, and city networks that on first sight might have the potential to develop into coherent metropolitan regions, 'counterweight global gateways and economic

3 SaarLorLux stands for: Saarland, Lorraine, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

centres' or alternative 'global economic integration zones' often lack the organising capacity to give shape proactively to such aspirations (French Presidency, 2000). As will become clear in Chapter 3, this observation is applicable to the EURBANET project as well.

2.3 The art of making transnational spatial visions

Until now, we have concentrated on the contents of the ESDP and the Spatial Vision document. However, equally interesting (perhaps even more so) are the processes that have led to the eventual coming about of the perspectives and visions they propagate. Since others have covered the process leading to the ESDP quite extensively (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, for example), we concentrate here on the Spatial Vision process.

The Spatial Vision for North West Europe can be seen to form a part of a longer tradition of transnational spatial visioning. This tradition goes back as far as the 1950s, when a small group of planners from various (North West) European countries and regions joined under the umbrella of the standing Conference of Regions in North West Europe (CRONWE) and started to analyse and conceptualise 'their' part of the continent. Right from the beginning, such efforts to conceptualise (North West) Europe's spatial structure were clearly a mixture of scientific analysis and political agendas. Concepts, particularly when accompanied by maps, often led to political discussions or even controversies, because the perceptions of an area they conveyed tended not to be universally acceptable. At the cross-border and transnational levels it seemed almost impossible to reach a broad consensus on spatial concepts, let alone maps, which in some respects comprise the pinnacle of conceptualisation. The reason why planning maps at these levels are hard to find is simply because, like spatial concepts in general, maps invariably leave out certain characteristics and qualities while emphasising others. Maps construct the world, they do not reproduce it, and therefore they bear considerable power. Although cartographic visualisations can help overcome language barriers (Kunzmann, 1996), for these same reasons, producing images of a large-scale territory is a highly sensitive matter, especially when different countries and planning cultures are involved (Zonneveld, 2000). This is one of the lessons planners have learned from the various efforts that have been made to arrive at spatial visions at the European or transnational level, basing ourselves on the analysis of Zonneveld (2002, 2003).

The Spatial Vision for North West Europe (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000) is the most recent major effort to conceptualise the structure of this part of

Europe. The creative process behind this Spatial Vision was not fundamentally different from the process leading to the 'Second Benelux Structural Outline' (see Nadin, 2002a). To prepare the vision, a Vision Group was formed, assisted by a multinational team of consultants. The 'vision process' involved an analysis of North West Europe's spatial characteristics and dynamics and an evaluation of existing national and regional policies. Nadin (ibid.: 30) explains that, although the vision process had both technical and political dimensions, the political dimension was limited to the professional judgements of the Vision Group's members. As with the Second Benelux Structural Outline, the Vision was put to the political test only after a complete report had been finalised.

As far as conceptualisation is concerned, the main output of the Spatial Vision project was the Vision Diagram (see Figure 2.3). Its very title already suggests the delicate nature of conceptualisation: the term 'vision' implies the policy driven imaging of space, while 'diagram' refers to a more neutral, analytical and descriptive unfolding of spatial characteristics. Not surprisingly, the label 'vision diagram' was subjected to criticism in the consultation phase of the vision process. France in particular wished to change the title to stress the fact the Spatial Vision was only meant to be a springboard for discussion (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001, p. 17). The French had clearly developed their own vocabulary on the matter (not long before, a great debate had taken place in France on the most appropriate spatial development perspective for the French territory). The French would probably favour a designation in terms of *débat* (Drewe, 2002).

The thorny nature of conceptualisation at the level of North West Europe is mirrored in the authorship of the Spatial Vision. In fact, there is no official 'author'. Normally, at the national level, a document such as the Spatial Vision would be published by an identifiable planning subject bearing an official name, even if it were just an administrative office and not a political subject. In a transnational and European context, however, the denotation of a planning subject becomes even more fluid. Of course, such documents as the Spatial Vision are written by the participants of the formulation process. Seen in this way, the 'author' of the Spatial Vision is the NWE Spatial Vision Group itself. However, this group was in fact speaking (and writing and drawing) on behalf of a wider group of people taking part in the preparation phase. The Spatial Vision is actually, therefore, the outcome of a process. And because there is no planning subject at the level of North West Europe, and the NWE Spatial Vision Group can at best be described as a proxy of such a planning subject, the Vision does not really have an author. This situation is very similar to that of the European Spatial Development Perspective (Faludi & Zonneveld, 1997, p. 259).

According to Nadin (2002a, p. 33), the Vision Diagram is not a master plan, but an agenda. It is hoped that it "…begins a process of establishing a common spatial development 'identity' for North West Europe" (ibid.), and stimulates thinking about the international positioning of cities and regions (ibid., p. 35). The Vision Diagram depicts the spatial structure of North West Europe as a system of networks and nodes. Worthy of note is the indication of numerous corridors and axes which should be strengthened and the designation of various polycentric urban regions as 'counterweight global gateways and economic centres' (see section 2.2.3).

The Spatial Vision's Vision Diagram clearly seeks to strike a balance between the strong competitive cities and polynuclear urban regions and less competitive areas. Here we see spatial planning struggling with the idea of geographical position, because this is a key method for drawing distinctions. Framed in this way, cities and urban regions that have a central position in Europe or North West Europe have more potential than areas in a more remote position, such as Central Scotland. The counter strategy is deceptively simple, basically entailing a plea for altering the time-space of North West Europe through an improvement of the connections between, for example, Scotland and Ireland and the Central Zone, the metropolitan heartland of North West Europe encompassing all the capital regions. Such a choice seems obvious from the point of view of spatial planning (including infrastructure planning), because the construction and improvement of infrastructure is within the realm of control of these policy domains. There seems however to be a substantial division between the knowledge base of this area of spatial planning and that of modern regional and urban economics where, for instance, the qualities of the general *milieu* are emphasised, particularly the innovative powers (Porter, 2001; Camagni, 2001) or the organising capacity of metropolitan regions (Van den Berg *et al.,* 1997a; Keating, 2001). The question then arises whether spatial planning should become less spatial on the instrumental level as well as on the conceptual level. The latter has important consequences for mapping and visioning.

The consultation phase that started after the publication of the first draft has led to some important considerations, including some affecting its main outcome, the Vision Diagram. Many comments on the content of the Vision Diagram suggested that the vision process had turned into a kind of hegemonic discourse. One criticism read that most of the attention was focused on the metropolitan areas of the central zone (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001, p. 15). Others asserted that the urban hierarchy presented in the Vision relied too heavily on financial and economic decision-making powers, thus understating the international position of some cities (ibid., p. 10). The focus on the potential of cities and regions for economic development has meant that the

Vision pays scarce attention to the natural and cultural heritage of North West Europe (ibid., p. 12). Nadin (2002a,b), the leader of the consultants in the Vision process, is right to say that one of the primary functions of the Vision Diagram was to stimulate thinking about the transnational positioning of cities and regions. The question remains, however, whether this should be done by designing and presenting a single diagram as a reflection of the maximum level of consensus that could be reached in the Vision Group, or by mapping and visualising the North West European territory and its spatial interdependencies and (potential) conflicts in considerably more detail. In Chapter 4 we hold a brief in favour of the latter and put forward some ideas about how such a task could be taken up.

2.4 Some characteristics of current transnational cooperation

Promoting transnational cooperation in spatial development is a key concern of the EC's Regional Policy DirectorateGeneral. The DG provides active financial and organisational support to those who wish to engage in transnational cooperation in spatial development in the real world. This support, as briefly noted above, is mainly organised through the Community Initiatives INTERREG IIC and INTERREG IIIB. These are the strands exclusively designed for the promotion of transnational cooperation in the field of spatial development. Other strands provide for support in cross-border and interregional cooperation. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) constitutes the financial source.

The INTERREG IIIB programme, in combination with its predecessor INTERREG IIC, employs a transnational division of Europe as its starting point.[4] The programme seeks to put countries and regions together and calls on them to cooperate. The starting point was a crude division of Europe drawn up by the European Commission when it was preparing the Europe 2000+ document (Wise 2000). It could be argued, as Gripaios and Mangles (1993: 746) have done, that the Commission had hoped that super-regions would become a coherent economic alternative to the nation-state (see European Commission 1991: 22). Clearly, the Commission was opting for new patterns of governance based on cooperation and thereby boosting regionalism. As the European Commission (1994: 69) put it: "to encourage new ways of thinking about spatial prospects which are not limited by national boundaries and to stimulate a bottom-up approach to the development of links between regions".

4 The remaining part of this section is based on Zonneveld 2002, 2003.

Once launched as a hypothesis, the idea of transnational cooperation areas continues to live on to the present day. The lines drawn are however very different. At present, there is a complex overlap of INTERREG transnational regions that, according to Nadin, "reflects more accurately the complex web of interregional connections than the mutually exclusive areas of Europe 2000+" (1998: 285). Whether we are dealing with more coherent areas than the Europe 2000/2000+ division remains to be seen. Many of the changes that have taken place since the original division of Europe into transnational study areas are the result of regions and countries positioning themselves on the European map. Nadin gives an interesting account of regions and countries positioning themselves and thereby redrawing the map on transnational super-regions. One of the original study areas was the Central and Capital Cities Area, a compact region formed by Southeast England, the southern part of the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of northern France and Germany. It is, in any event, the quintessential core region of Europe. When it became obvious that the transnational study areas would live on as transnational cooperation areas under the INTERREG IIC initiative, the whole of the UK and the Republic of Ireland were incorporated into the CCC Area, which had to be renamed the North West Metropolitan Area (NWMA). "This change was made primarily because of the lobbying by the Irish government who were not happy at being included only in the Atlantic Arc with its emphasis on peripheral and rural issues. They argued that Dublin counted as part of the metropolitan core" (ibid.: 284; see also Nadin 2002a; Doucet 2002). This is an excellent example of naming, framing, spatial positioning and – eventually – mapmaking. In the past, nobody would have dared argue that Ireland was part of the European economic core. The Blue Banana 'crossed' the North Sea, encompassing Southeast England, but it did not cross the Irish Sea. The Irish government must have thought that, if a core area could cross one sea, then it could cross another. Fortuitously, as Nadin (1998) explains, the negotiation of the boundaries coincided with the Irish Presidency. The cooperation area in the present INTERREG IIIB programme has become even larger and therefore even less metropolitan, watering down the influence of stakeholders interested in metropolitan policies. This development has resulted in a renaming of the cooperation area as North West Europe – about as neutral as a name can be.

Other cooperation areas for which INTERREG resources have been made available – such as the North Sea Region, or the Central European, Adriatic, Danube, and South Eastern European Space (CADSES) – are also (very) large areas showing a high degree of diversity spatially, but also culturally and politically. They can be rightfully designated as Little Europes. The question then arises whether this type of large-scale area can be considered to have an identity of its own. In fact, processes aiming at the development of a transnational spatial vision can be seen as exercises in identity building. This could

be said about NorVision, for instance. Following Jensen (2002: 116; see also Jensen & Richardson 2001) this vision project can indeed be interpreted as an exercise directed towards the development of an identity, in this case with many references to a historic past in which there have been all sorts of overseas relationships between the composite parts of the area now referred to as the North Sea Region. Here we can assert with some justification, following Baudrillard, that the notion of a North Sea area is a *simulacrum*. It is nevertheless striking that, doubtless in a spirit of some despair, the spatial vision concerned emphasises how many common spatial characteristics the area has, while on the other hand the very wide internal diversity is also evident. The same can be said with respect to VISION PLANET, the spatial vision developed for the vast CADSES area. Here too, frequent reference is made to that which binds the countries and regions together. Going through the VISION PLANET document, these passages come across almost as a mantra. Bearing in mind the rigidity of the national borders in a still fairly recent past, this emphasis on communalities and with it on the relativity of national borders can be understood (see also Drevet, 2002). The theme of national borders and a common identity is much less evident in the Spatial Vision for the NWMA. Nevertheless the Vision Diagram, the mapping of the desired spatial structure of the NWMA, can be interpreted as an exercise directed towards the construction of an identity, but in this case at scale levels below that of the NWMA as a whole. The development of zonal spatial concepts such as the Central Zone (see Figure 2.3) indicates this.

The present INTERREG IIIB programmes still follow the line of the IIIB programme: stimulate cooperation across wide areas with the emphasis on what is referred to as policy implementation – the main difference between the present and the previous programme; that is, to strive for tangible results (neither a spatial vision nor a strategic study would fit this criterion). In the case of a polycentric urban region this demand is often a bridge too far. When it comes to the development of feasible projects at the level of these regions, a precondition is a certain strength of governance capacity. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is hardly the case in the four regions studied here. There is no obvious policy infrastructure at the level of polycentric urban regions from which feasible project proposals could be derived. That is not to say that no proposals have been submitted – particularly in the NWE IIIB programme – without relevance for dealing with the policy issues that are situated on the level of polycentric urban regions. But this polycentrism is not the prime rationale for these proposals; they are submitted by policy actors below the level of these regions (individual cities and regional governments such as the Dutch and Belgium provinces). In chapter five some ideas about transnational cooperation aiming at the level of polycentric urban regions are fleshed out.

2.5 Conclusion

The polycentric urban region is a relatively new analytical and political construct. It is therefore worth exploring its validity and relevance in the political and scientific domain. Moreover, there are reasons for looking at polycentric urban regions from a perspective above the national state: the transnational level. Indeed, this level has been equipped with policy programmes, especially the Community Initiatives IIC and (currently) IIIB. Since these programmes have been running (roughly since 1998), a practice of cooperation has developed, but not one without difficulties. This is (at least) partly the result of the INTERREG IIC/IIIB areas being nothing less than 'Little Europes': the areas are so large and show such a high level of internal diversity, there seems to be no pressing reason to discern them. This has become even more striking in the INTERREG IIIB programme, because the transnational areas have become even larger than in the previous IIC programme. One of the most critical issues is the identity of these areas, an issue playing itself out in the confusion about the concept of transnationality. There are two perceptions: one narrow, and one much wider interpretation (see Nadin 2002a). The former is related to all those issues where countries have to cooperate with each other in order to deal successfully with a policy issue, with infrastructure development and nature conservation as the most obvious examples. In the wider interpretation "…any issue is capable of being interpreted as transnational because there may be benefits to be derived from sharing experiences about it among countries, and perhaps adopting similar policy approaches". (Nadin, 2002a, 31). In practice, the wider interpretation has prevailed, not only in terms of the content of spatial visions, but also with regard to the overall spectrum of projects supported by INTERREG IIC and IIIB. Two reasons can be given for this. The narrower interpretation only works where there is enough governance capacity at larger levels of scale. The narrow interpretation is also more difficult to grasp and seems to be relevant to a much smaller range of policy issues, that is, those issues where intrinsic spatial coherence is at stake. In the next two chapters we explore the added value of these two interpretations within the context of the concept of polycentric urban regions.

3 Polycentric urban regions as nodes in Europe's polycentric system

Bart Lambregts & Arie Romein

3.1 Introduction

As we learned in the previous chapter, both the NWE Spatial Vision and the ESDP make much of the potential value of polycentric urban regions in the wider spatial systems of North West Europe and the EU as a whole. In achieving more 'zones of global economic integration' (ESDP) and 'counterweight global gateways and economic centres' (NWE Spatial Vision), clusters of nearby, mostly medium-sized cities are ascribed an important role. The cities of such configurations are incited to seek, among others things, cooperation with each other and to establish complementary relationships in a variety of functions, both between the cities and between the cities and their rural hinterlands. Integrated spatial development strategies should be formulated for the city networks as a whole and new forms of partnership should be established.

The question remains, however, to what extent are these regions ready to take up this challenge, and, subsequently, how can they be encouraged to prepare themselves better. In this chapter, we build on the wealth of information produced by the EURBANET case studies to address these questions. First, in section 3.2, we briefly discuss the 'emergence' of polynuclear urban regions as (more or less) coherent systems, or 'metropolitan nodes' in the North West European spatial system. We concentrate on the general tendencies and explanatory factors underlying the phenomenon. In section 3.3, we zoom in on the four polycentric urban regions of the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland, showing the difficulties that are involved in perceiving the regions as coherent urban networks, or metropolitan regions. Next, in section 3.4, we draw directly on the case studies themselves to explicate further the internal logic for promoting a regional approach in each of the polycentric urban regions. Our guess is that clusters of cities in close proximity will not choose to engage in regional forms of cooperation just because they are propagated in the ESDP or the NWE Spatial Vision. What local and regional actors really need in order to be tempted in this direction is a clear perspective of the practical benefits that may be in the offing. In section 3.4, we draw such a perspective by way of discussing three key spatial and governance challenges presenting themselves to local and regional policymakers in the four polycentric urban regions, and by showing that they might be tackled in a more adequate way if they were framed from a regional perspective and addressed through a regionally coordinated approach. The challenges referred to relate to mobility and internal and external accessibility, spatial diversity and the quality of open space, and the issue of urban vitality and spatial balance. Next, in section 3.5 we present

some outlines for planning and governance in polycentric urban regions. Section 3.6 presents our conclusions, one of which is that there is great scope for learning between the four polycentric urban regions examined.

3.2 Polynuclear urban development 'in practice'

3.2.1 North West Europe's dispersed urbanisation pattern

A discussion of the rise of polynuclear urban regions in North West Europe ought to start with a brief description of one of the most striking features of North West Europe's (urban) geography, namely its extraordinarily dispersed urbanisation pattern. Although polycentric regions with high urban and rural densities occur all over Europe, the clearest concentration of such regions is found in North West Europe. Here, London and Paris constitute exceptions in a pattern of urbanisation that is otherwise dominated by cities of relatively modest size. Such cities as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Antwerp, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Manchester, and Glasgow are each typically inhabited by 500,000 to 1 million inhabitants (more, of course, if the hinterland is included). In particular the Netherlands, Belgium, the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia and significant parts of the United Kingdom display a very dispersed pattern of urbanisation. The reasons for this derive at least in part from the area's medieval and early-industrial history (see Dieleman & Faludi, 1998, pp. 367-368). Outside the large and centralised kingdoms of France and Great Britain the area was for many centuries divided into relatively small and often shifting political units before relatively stable nation states were founded. A variety of mercantile, (formerly) religious and emerging political centres such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Utrecht, Aachen, and Cologne competed for dominance. Amsterdam was well on the way to becoming the 'world city' of the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta in the period preceding the industrial revolution, but it could not sustain its position for very long. It was Europe's fourth city around 1750, but it had to give way to other cities in the centuries that followed. In 1850 Amsterdam ranked 16th, but was only 25th in 1950 (Chandler & Fox, 1974, in Hohenberg & Hollen Lees, 1995). In this period, typical industrial cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, and the cities of the Ruhr area saw rapid growth and climbed through the charts ranking Europe's cities. So before Amsterdam or any other city could really tower above the others in its vicinity, the industrial revolution brought along a regime for urban growth in locations where raw materials vital to the industrialisation process could be extracted and/or easily processed (the coal-rich Ruhrgebiet and the Midlands and Northern England in the UK, for example). These historic processes led to a highly dispersed urbanisation pattern, especially in the

Low Countries and in neighbouring regions in Germany (especially North Rhine-Westphalia) and northwest France. One may even speak in terms of a shattered morphology of the built environment. It is hard to identify one or two urban centres that dominate this area in morphological terms. There are nonetheless differences between countries. In the Netherlands there is still a rather sharp divide between urban and rural land use. Settlements are in many cases still sharply defined and surrounded by continuous zones of agriculture land. The same holds more or less for the northwestern part of the German territory. Large parts of Belgium, in contrast, are extremely fragmented with regard to urban and rural land use. Marked, but no longer valid differences in various countries' land use planning policies are likely to play a part in a possible explanation for these differences in occupation patterns. The Dutch system has long been relatively strict and directed at the (deconcentrated) concentrations of population and economic activity in rather clearly defined nuclei (some of which were newly planned and indeed designed), whereas for a long time the Belgium system has in practice been relatively permissive, allowing population and economic activity to spread relatively freely (official plans were quite restrictive, but they have been used in operational decision-making in a far more relaxed way, with local councils allowing many exemptions on a plan's regulations).

3.2.2 Current trends: more nodes, stronger interdependencies, and polycentric models

History, however, is not the only factor that plays a part in explaining North West Europe's dispersed urbanisation pattern. More recent spatial dynamics appear to enhance rather than discourage dispersal at the supra-urban and regional level. A complex set of interrelated forces is at work to shape and reshape the spatial organisation of North West Europe in a variety of ways. These forces lead to different spatial tendencies (dispersal versus agglomeration, homogenisation versus diversification, for example) that produce different outcomes on different spatial scales. There is a rich literature dealing with the nature of these forces and their effects (Hall, 1993; Kunzmann, 1996; SPESP, 2001, for example). Instead of repeating such accounts, we focus here on two major tendencies relevant to our subject: the continuing emergence and further development of new centres of activity, or 'nodes'; and the thickening of interdependencies between such nodes. The integration of such trends in new models describing urban and regional development is briefly addressed at the end of this section.

The multiplication of the number of nodes

Population developments and economic dynamics have facilitated the formation of new centres of activity to accompany existing ones. While many tradi-

tional urban centres continue to be heavyweights in terms of economic production, employment and population figures, the strongest growth in recent decades has often occurred in the surroundings of cities. New towns have been established, overspill towns designated, and many older suburbs and small villages have developed into fully-fledged small towns or 'edge cities', many of them European in style in contrast with those in the United States, that is, as 'internal' edge cities or edge cities at the perimeter of an urban agglomeration rather than, as in the United States, free standing edge cities (see Garreau 1991). Not surprisingly, new centres in already strongly urbanised regions appear to be characterised by higher densities than their counterparts in less urbanised regions (Harts *et al.*, 2000)[5]. Sites that are strategically located from a transport point of view have also enjoyed considerable development. Well-known phenomena include the booming business parks and commercial centres near international airports ('aerovilles,' or airport cities) and strong urbanisation and economic development along important motorways (corridors). Large-scale leisure centres, science parks and distribution parks are further examples of 'new' nodes in North West Europe's polycentric landscape (see also Kunzmann, 1996). The underlying trends include migration (by both people and firms) away from the older cities to suburbs, smaller cities, distribution parks and so forth, but also growth in itself (especially economic growth). The increase in the consumption of space per person is another important factor explaining the continuous expansion of built-up areas and thus the formation and further development of new nodes. In the Randstad, for example, this development has resulted in an astonishing decline of population density in the urban areas comprising the Randstad, thanks to the multiplication of the surface of the built-up area during the period 1960-1990: from a figure of 17,317 persons/km^2 to 5,998 persons/km^2 (Hack, 2000: 186).

Strengthening of interdependencies

The ongoing emergence of new and different centres of activity certainly adds to the polycentric nature of North West Europe's geography, but it is rather the strengthening of interdependencies between all kinds of nodes and centres that explains the growing interest for such phenomena as network cities and polynuclear urban regions. Interdependencies between cities and their surroundings (hinterlands) and between cities and other cities (nearby or distant) have a long and rich history (see Hohenberg & Hollen Lees,

5 The research by Harts *et al.* (2000) only concerned the Netherlands. While it may be speculated that their results are valid for more countries in North West Europe, prudence is called for as Dutch planning policy (which has been rather stringent and in parts effective) is likely to have played a role in the development described (cf. Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994).

1995), but over the past century or so interdependencies have undergone rapid transformations. There is a functional and more institutional dimension at work. The first aspect relates to the fact that peoples' physical radius of (daily) action and the relationships maintained by firms gradually expand over space and simultaneously become more diverse (polycentric) in terms of spatial orientation. Underlying causes include such factors as advances in transport and communications technology and the rapid expansion of various types of infrastructure (see for a more extended account Anas *et al*., 1998). But the rise of double-income households, the further specialisation of firms, and the further separation of functions (housing, work, shopping, leisure, sports, and so forth) over space in general (Harts *et al*., 1999) also play an important part. As a result, physical and virtual networks of interaction and transactions among and between various kinds of agents become more dense and reach out over larger distances; cities, as the habitats and most durable physical articulations of these various kinds of agents, increasingly become part of dense networks of interaction and interdependency relationships.

The second way in which interdependencies between cities have been intensified recently has to do with the fact that cities and other local and regional actors increasingly engage in strategic (often regional) alliances, or 'city networks'. According to the ESDP, within Europe's polycentric urban system, 'cities are increasingly co-operating and pooling their resources, for example by developing complementary relationships or sharing facilities and services', including across borders (CEC, 1999, p. 64). Such networks are claimed to generate advantages (network externalities) to network partners, for example through the exploitation of scale economies in complementary relationships and synergies in cooperative activities (Capello, 2000). North West Europe has witnessed the formation of a significant number of such regional alliances and city networks over the past few decades. Encouraged by European policy directed at the stimulation of cross-border cooperation, many of them can be found in the border regions where they form cross-border city networks, or Euregions. Networks that have gained in reputation over the years include Maastricht/Heerlen-Hasselt/Genk-Aachen-Liège (MHAL), Arnhem-Nijmegen-Kleve-Emmerich (ANKE), Lille-Kortrijk-Roubaix (LiKoTo), SaarLorLux (with Luxembourg, Metz, Nancy and Trier as the main cities) and the Rhine-Scheldt Delta cooperation zone (RSD). In addition to these, various networks or alliances within countries have also emerged. Germany, for example, is home to 26 city networks, which in turn are organised in the countrywide *Forum Städtenetze* (Forum Urban Networks, see Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, 2001). In the Netherlands, the Delta Metropolis alliance is a recently formed, broad coalition in which cities, regional authorities, and various other public and semi-public actors have joined forces to

promote the idea of the Randstad as a fully-fledged network metropolis (see also Lambregts & Zonneveld, forthcoming). Although many examples of city networks and cooperation arrangements can be given, enduring forms of governance at the regional level are difficult to bring about (Herrschel & Newman, 2002; Salet, Thornley & Kreukels, 2003a).

From monocentric to polycentric models

The combined effect of the gradual increase in the number of activity centres and the expansion and diffusion of people's daily radius of action has enlarged the range of models used for describing urban development patterns. Monocentric models departing from a 'single city-hinterland' configuration are rapidly being supplemented and sometimes even replaced by models that depart from, or at least leave scope for, polycentric urban development. For instance, the 'Functional Urban Region' (Cheshire & Hay, 1989) now finds its counterpart in the 'network city' (VROM, 1999); the 'global city' (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991) is challenged by the concept of the 'global city region', focusing far more on the spatial structure than does the concept of the global city (Kunzmann, 1998; Scott *et al.*, 2001). Even a long-cherished monocentric metropolis such as London is now increasingly thought to be part of a larger, polycentric configuration spanning perhaps as much as the entire southeast of England (Hall, 1997; Allen *et al.*, 1998).

Under the same flag, the concept of the polynuclear urban region has come to the surface to capture those cases where several more or less equally sized cities were already located in relatively close proximity to each other. In such places, the processes described above gradually cause (or anticipate) interference between the functional spheres of influence of each of these formerly distinct cities, thereby gradually giving rise to the formation of larger, more or less functionally integrated polynuclear urban regions (cf. Dieleman & Faludi, 1998). The Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond are the polynuclear urban regions that have recently attracted the most attention in the international literature. But Central Scotland, the West Midlands, and Northern England are also good examples.[6]

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6 Other European examples often referred to in literature are located in the northern part of Italy (the Padua-Treviso-Venice region in Musterd and Van Zelm, 2001, for example). Outside Europe the Kansai region in Japan and several polynucleated metropolitan areas in California (San Francisco Bay area, Greater Los Angeles and San Diego-Tijuana) constitute good examples (cf. Batten, 1995; Clark & Kuijpers-Linde, 1994). Gottman's (1957) 'megalopolis' or 'Bos-Wash' corridor, situated on the Northeastern seaboard of the United States, refers to a polynuclear urban system that by and large outmeasures the polynuclear urban regions identified above. Stretching from Boston to Washington it covers an area of approximately 600 km from north to south. As such, it is of a different magnitude than the regions examined in the EURBANET project, which typically extend over 100 to 150 km.

They correspond, one of course slightly better than the others, to the definition of a polynuclear urban region as applied in the EURBANET project (presented in section 1.2), since they consist of a number of historically and politically distinct smaller and larger cities that are located in more or less close proximity to each other (roughly within commuting distance), and none of these cities clearly dominates the region in political, economic, cultural, or other aspects (see also Kloosterman & Musterd, 2001). In the next section, these regions are considered in more detail.

3.3 The Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland as polycentric urban regions

3.3.1 Introduction

In many respects the four regions examined here constitute unique contexts. As elucidated above, they are characterised by different development trajectories, they take different positions in North West Europe and their respective countries, and they are part of different planning and policy frameworks and traditions (see Dieleman & Faludi, 1998; Priemus, Zonneveld & Faludi, forthcoming). In addition, each of the regions is characterised by a different mixture of functional ties and barriers, potentials, and bottlenecks in its decision-making structures and arrangements. Traditions in inter-local cooperation and competition differ across the regions, as well as possible strategic motives in favour of or against regional cooperation and planning. In addition to serving as a general introduction to the four regions, this section shows how difficult it is to perceive the regions as coherent urban networks, or metropolitan regions.

3.3.2 Difference of origin

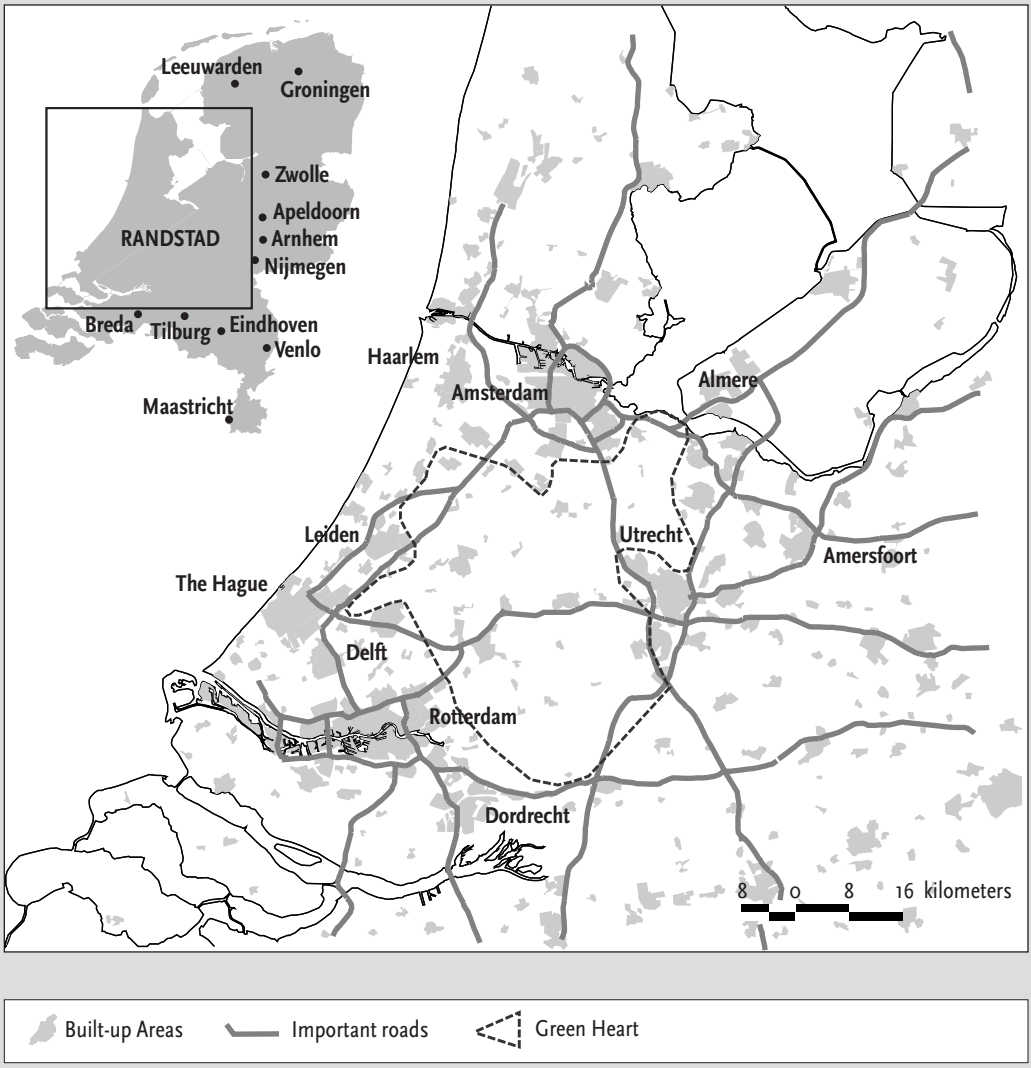
The polynuclear urban regions examined in the EURBANET project are among the most archetypal of their kind in Europe, most notably the Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond (Central Scotland has a basically bipolar structure). These regions probably also come closest to what have been identified in recent EC discussions following on the European Spatial Development Perspective as ‘areas where for a long time polycentric urban systems have already been in existence’ (French Presidency, 2000, p. 7). Central Scotland, in this respect, does not quite share the same reputation as the other three, but it does conform to the criteria and, as will become clear in the next section, it is also recognised as an area the problems of which could be better framed and addressed with the help of a larger scale perspective.

The Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland are typically the result of what Champion (2001) has labelled the fusion mode of polycentric urban development, meaning that they can be understood as having evolved 'from the fusion of several previously independent centres of similar size, as a result of their own separate growth both in overall size and lateral extent and particularly because of the improvement of transport links between them' (Champion, 2001, pp. 664-665). This typical evolution mode distinguishes the regions selected in the EURBANET project from polynuclear urban systems that have evolved through 'centrifugal' and/or 'incorporative' modes of urban development (ibid., p. 665). An illustration of the latter is the polynucleated urban system of which London can be considered part (Hall, 1997; Allen *et al.,* 1998; Simmie & Sennett, 2001). This system can be understood as the combined result of (a) London having expanded its urban field so as to incorporate smaller centres in its surroundings that were previously largely self-sufficient; and (b) a process in which people and functions are squeezed out of London to alternative centres in its surroundings as the result of various diseconomies of agglomeration. That is not to say that the centrifugal and/or incorporative modes of evolution are of no use in describing trends and developments in the four regions examined in the EURBANET project. The mechanisms just described for London also apply to cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, or Edinburgh, although on a (much) smaller scale. The difference, however, lies in the morphological particularities of the regions of which these cities form part and which make possible at a higher level of aggregation the typical pattern of polycentric urban development described by the fusion mode of evolution.

3.3.3 Demarcation

Many polynuclear regions have a nebular type of spatial structure, a main reason why demarcating them is so difficult. The Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland are no exceptions: they are by no means clearly demarcated spatial entities. Out of the four regions, only the Flemish Diamond has been defined officially and unambiguously by listing the municipalities that are considered part of it, resulting not so much in a spatial entity as a demarcated region the future development of which should, for political reasons, be seen in a more integrated fashion (see Ministry of the Flemish Society, 1997, p. 349; Albrechts, 1999). A demarcation that puts more emphasis on functional relationships would also include part of the Walloon province of Brabant, south of Brussels (see Albrechts & Lievois, 2003). The story for RheinRuhr is similar. There is the official concept of the 'European Metropolitan Region RheinRuhr' as presented in federal and state planning documents, but this is outflanked by attempts to define a 'functional urban region RheinRuhr', a 'morphological region RheinRuhr' and a 'poly-

Figure 3.1 The Randstad



nuclear urban region RheinRuhr' (see GEMACA, 1996; Schmitt *et al.*, 2003). The morphological demarcation corresponds with the demarcation of the official European Metropolitan Region RheinRuhr fairly well. The functional urban region RheinRuhr and the polynuclear urban region RheinRuhr are both somewhat larger (but not identical). The Randstad has been depicted on maps on many occasions and practically everyone in the Netherlands has an idea of the area 'the Randstad' covers, but the exact borders are not clear, and that is not a big issue. Only the exact perimeter of the Randstad's Green Heart is determined with as much detail as possible, much as the Metropolitan Green Belts in Britain.

A common demarcation of the Randstad would include the four largest cities

Figure 3.2 The Flemish Diamond

Source: Albrechts and Lievois, 2001c: 32

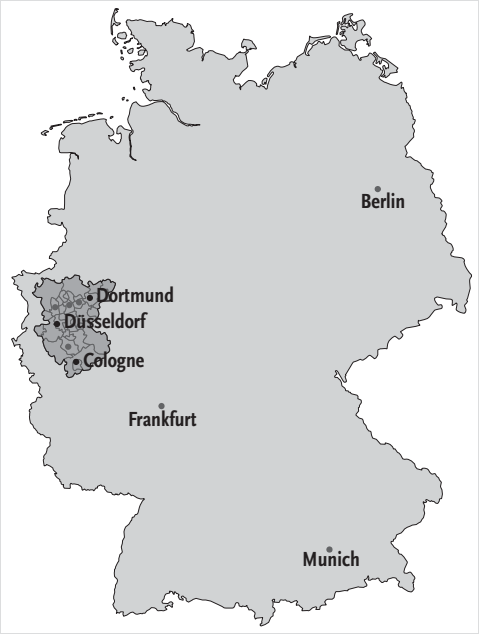
(Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht), their respective commuter hinterlands (stretching from Alkmaar in the north, Dordrecht in the south, and Amersfoort in the east) and the Green Heart in the middle. A disadvantage of this demarcation is that it cuts across a number of administrative borders that are also used as a basis for the collection and representation of statistical data. By defining the Randstad in a more generous fashion as the sum of the provinces of North-Holland, South-Holland, Utrecht, and Flevoland (optional), part of this problem can be avoided. Finally, there is no official benchmark for framing Central Scotland either. In the EURBANET project a provisional definition is determined which includes the Greater Glasgow and Greater Edinburgh city-regions, the area between them, and an outer zone (Bailey & Turok, 2003). The Figures 3.1-3.4 present an idea of the 'borders' of the regions under consideration here. Overall, we may conclude that most demarcations are informed by normative rationales rather than by analytically sustained ideas about the regions' day-to-day functioning. The regions are either defined on the basis of patterns of (desired) cooperation between governments, or they constitute areas that are the locus of key policy goals. The latter is the subject of the next section.

3.3.4 The regions as planning concepts

The leading position taken by the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and (albeit to a lesser extent) Central Scotland in the debate on polynuclear urban regions does not follow from the fact that they correspond to our definition of a polynuclear urban region alone. A much more important

Figure 3.3 Central Scotland

Figure 3.4 RheinRuhr



contribution is made by the fact that each of these regions (except Central Scotland) features quite prominently in national and regional planning policies in which they are identified and promoted as (would-be) polynucleated metropolitan regions, or networks. The Randstad is of course the best-known example. It largely owes its present image as a (coherent) polynuclear urban region to its conceptualisation by planners as an object of policy from the 1950s onward. Initially, the 'invention' of the Randstad and its counter-template the Green Heart was part of an attempt to define national planning problems in terms of a core-periphery dichotomy (the Randstad being the core and the rest of the Netherlands the periphery). The Randstad was to be prevented from developing into an 'enormous' metropolis, as there was a very real fear of the big city and its problems (Dieleman & Faludi, 1998). Flanked by the concept of 'growth centres', for several decades the concept worked quite well in managing urban growth in the Netherlands as a whole and in the Randstad in particular (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). However, from the 1980s onwards, when concern about the international competitive position of the Netherlands started to penetrate spatial planning politics, the Randstad as a planning concept became 'a vehicle for re-invigorating the Dutch economy' (Dieleman & Faludi, 1998, p. 372; see also Lambregts & Zonneveld, forthcoming). Instead of preventing the area becoming too dominant in the national context, the Randstad as a planning concept then became a means of promoting the development of an attractive climate for foreign investment. So the discourse changed from being dominated by the issue of

national territorial cohesion to the competitive position of the Randstad and the entire country. The two 'mainports' located in the area (Schiphol airport and the Rotterdam harbour) became key elements in this new view, whereas the concept was also used to promote complementarity and coordination between the major constituent cities (VROM, 2000).[7]

RheinRuhr and the Flemish Diamond came on to the stage at about the same time. In the early 1990s, the cities of the Ruhrgebiet and the Rheinschiene were presented for the first time as a functional entity, after which they became designated as the 'European
Metropolitan Region Rhine-Ruhr' – first at the federal level by the standing conference of federal and state ministers for spatial planning (*Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung*) and somewhat later by the state government of Northrhine-Westphalia in the Regional Development Plan for Northrhine-Westphalia (see for more details: Knapp, 1998; Blotevogel, 1998). Next, building on the already existing concept of the 'ABG-city' (Antwerp-Brussels-Ghent), the Structure Plan for Flanders[8] introduced the 'Flemish Diamond' as a diamond-shaped representation of the urban constellation bordered by Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, and Leuven (see for more details Albrechts, 1998). In both cases, as in the Dutch case, increasing international competition functioned as an important underlying rationale. In Germany, the European Metropolitan Region RheinRuhr together with five others[9] were described as 'the "driving forces" of economic, social, and cultural development that should reinforce the competitiveness of Germany and Europe and accelerate European integration' (Knapp, 1998, p. 382). This new perspective succeeded the traditional principle of central places on which German spatial planning had been based till then. The Flemish Diamond for its part was called into being 'to provide Flanders with more adequate (spatial) instruments in the fierce international competition' (Albrechts, 1998, p. 411). It formed one of the key elements in a new planning approach deployed for the Flanders territory.

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7 Of course many more developments and new insights played a role in the changes that occurred in Dutch spatial planning in the 1980s and early 1990s. See for example Priemus (1994) for a more elaborate account of Dutch planning and the Randstad in the 1980s and early 1990s.

8 Work on the plan started officially in 1992; it was approved by the Flemish Government in 1997 (Albrechts, 1998).

9 These are: Hamburg, Berlin/Brandenburg, Rhein-Main, Stuttgart, and München (Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, 1995). In a later stage the Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung has appointed a seventh Metropolregion, which concerns the polycentric region Dresden, Halle and Leipzig, referred to as 'Sachsendreieck' (Saxony Triangle) in former East Germany. The main principle at stake here is that Metropolitan Regions should be more or less evenly spread across the national territory, reflecting an image of national polycentricity.

Finally, the clear way in which the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and even Central Scotland are presented in the NWE Spatial Vision as key constituent elements of North West Europe's spatial system illustrates the large extent to which these concepts have become accepted in (North West) European spatial debates.

3.3.5 Faint governance capacity and lack of identification with the regions

Yet, in spite of their assimilation in planning documents and the academic debate, none of the four polynuclear urban regions examined here is formally represented by institutions that are tailored to scale. Institutional fragmentation is an important characteristic of all four regions. It is closely related to the gradual deconcentration of administrative powers and responsibilities of the past few decades. Evidently there are important benefits in carrying out as much administration as possible at the lowest level. However, a problematic aspect arises if such a situation hinders dealing with issues that call for an approach defined and coordinated at a higher level of administration. In general, institutional fragmentation impedes the emergence of fora for strategic thinking based on coordination and collaboration across regions, thereby hampering comprehensive and coherent planning on the regional level. Instead, different economic, social, and geographical realities in combination with disparities in the (short-term) interests of the various stakeholders within the four regions induce a prevalence of inter-local competition over cooperation for such resources as investments, highly skilled workers, and public funds. In addition, in regions that lack fora for strategic thinking, the priority is usually lower for 'general regional interests' such as long-term considerations of environmental sustainability and quality.

In Central Scotland and the Flemish Diamond, fragmentation has increased rather than decreased over the past decade as the result of certain fundamental institutional reforms. In Central Scotland, the Local Government structure of four regions (Central, Fife, Lothian, and Strathclyde) was replaced by one of twenty single tier authorities in 1996. Moreover, in Scotland such institutions as local authorities, Health Boards, Structure Plan teams, Tourist Boards, and transport partnerships all cover different jurisdictions. No organisation or collaborative arrangement spans the entire region. As far as strategic planning is concerned, Central Scotland belongs most directly to the competence of the Scottish Executive, although with an impending review of strategic planning in Scotland there is a possibility that this may change (Bailey & Turok, 2003).

Belgium's institutional structure has gradually become more complex with the progress of the federalisation process over the past few decades. The

country is now divided into three Regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, and the Brussels Capital Region) and three lingual Communities (Dutch, French, German), with the Regions and the Communities not fully coterminous. The Belgian federal government no longer has any planning competencies, neither does it avail itself of the means to force the regions into collaboration. The major competence for spatial planning lies with the Regions. The Flemish Diamond is divided into the Flemish Region and the Brussels Capital Region. Within the Flemish Diamond, four provinces and dozens of municipalities further divide the playing field. Planning for the Flemish Diamond therefore requires cooperation between the Flemish and the Brussels planning authorities at least, which is far from usual practice. Even within the Flemish Region there is no guarantee that local and regional (provincial) planning authorities will seek to coordinate their plans with the broader perspective of the Flemish Diamond as a whole. For example, the only policy context for office planning in the Flemish Region, the contour policy, makes each urban area more or less autonomous in this respect.

The situation in RheinRuhr is equally complicated. Although the North Rhine-Westphalia state government has an apparent interest in promoting Rhein-Ruhr as a metropolis within Europe, and although there are indeed signs of improvement in regional coordination and cooperation, the situation is still far from ideal. A hierarchical structure made up by district administrations (*Regierungsbezirke*), regional authorities (*Kreise*) and urban and rural municipalities (*Kreisefreie Städte* and *Gemeinde*) constitutes the basis. Cross-regional municipal associations (*Landschaftsverbände*) and a District Association of Communities (the *Kommunalverband Ruhr*) add to the complexity (Knapp, 1998).

In spite of its well-established status in Dutch planning and policy, not even the Randstad is represented by formal institutions. Spatial policy for the Randstad is still above all a concern of the national government. Three or four provinces (depending on the demarcation applied), a handful of metropolitan collaborative arrangements (greater Amsterdam, greater Rotterdam, greater The Hague, and greater Utrecht) and a considerable number of quite powerful municipalities coexist (and compete with each other for administrative power) within the Randstad area (see for more details Hoppenbrouwer *et al.*, 2003). Recently, however, renewed attempts to create more appropriate frameworks for planning and cooperation tied to the scale of the Randstad have been launched. While matters still have to be clearly set out, the Randstad would even seem to be on the way to establishing itself as an actor with the potential to pursue its interests proactively in wider arenas (cf. Scott *et al.*, 2001). The top-down imposed conception of the area as the nation's metropolitan growth engine is now complemented by a rather large-scale bottom-up attempt to establish a coalition in which the Randstad's provinces, its

most important cities, and a range of other actors rally round the objective to develop the Randstad into a fully-fledged European metropolis (Deltametropool, 1998; 2001; *The Economist*, 2001; Lambregts & Zonneveld, forthcoming). Interaction between this coalition and the national planning authorities seems to be fruitful, as may be deduced from the willingness of the latter to adopt the new name proposed by the coalition (Delta Metropolis) for the area that used to be known as the Randstad and the Green Heart. Nevertheless, examples of the prevalence of inter-local competition over cooperation are also easy to find. A vivid case was the recent struggle between Amsterdam and Rotterdam over the location of a yet to be devised national institute for the visual arts. Since neither city wanted to give way (that is, allow its own, constituent institutes to be transferred to the other city to become part of the new, national institute) the entire plan to create such an institute was eventually cancelled.

Adding to the institutional fragmentation of the four regions is the lack of a clear regional identity shared by their citizens and stakeholders. This seems particularly true for RheinRuhr, Central Scotland, and the Flemish Diamond. Central Scotland *is* Scotland for many local stakeholders, but at the same time the east-west divide within the region remains strongly anchored in their minds. According to many, the distance between Glasgow and Edinburgh is 'the longest 45 miles in Scotland' (Bailey & Turok, 2001). RheinRuhr, in turn, has been the scene of quite a number of supra-local cooperative initiatives by various stakeholders, but these have rarely stretched out to include the region as a whole. The lack of a 'regional discourse' adversely affects regional organising capacities and self-governance structures in RheinRuhr (Schmitt, *et al*., 2003; see also Schönharting *et al*., 2003). The leap towards a regional approach to planning to promote the international competitive advantages of the region is therefore hard to accomplish. Cosmopolitan and bilingual Brussels is the relative stranger in the midst of the Dutch speaking Flemish parts of the Flemish Diamond. Brussels lies on the dividing line between the Walloon/French sphere of influence on the one hand and the Flemish/Dutch on the other. Suburbanisation constantly changes the balance between the Dutch and Flemish speaking population in the area around Brussels. In addition to that, people from outside Belgium, working within the EU institutes for instance, favour French parties on the whole in local elections, which adds to political unrest in several local communities in and around the Brussels capital region. Finally, the Randstad would seem to be better off here, partly as the result of its considerable history as a concept. It would be going too far to assert that the Randstad coincides with a strong regional, Randstad-identity that could put regional cooperation within easy reach, but the presence of various local and subregional identities does not seem to block regional cooperation either.

Of course, the above examples do not mean that no initial steps towards establishing regional forms of cooperation or capacity building have as yet been made. Perhaps the most tempting step towards a regional planning approach is currently taking shape in the Randstad. Here, as briefly mentioned above, a cross-section of public and private stakeholders joined forces and founded the 'Delta Metropolis Association'. It advocates the development of the Randstad into a fully-fledged metropolitan region named 'Delta Metropolis'. Its ideas have been taken up by the 'Administrative Committee for the Randstad' (BCR), which functions as a consultative body for the national (planning) authorities and has a role in promoting coordination within the Randstad (see Lambregts & Zonneveld, forthcoming). The BCR is supported by an office entitled the 'Bureau for the Randstad Region' (BRR). It performs studies for the Randstad (nowadays for the Delta Metropolis) and represents the Randstad as a region in wider fora (it has a representative in Brussels, for example). The BCR advocates the extension of cooperation and consultation in the Randstad. The BCR intends to set up a Delta Metropolis 'administrative joint venture' in which the four provinces, the four largest cities, and the four city-regions would participate on an equal basis. The original Delta Metropolis Association would continue to exist as an independent thinktank (Deltametropool, 2001). In the Flemish Diamond, the most obvious step was taken by a private business sector. Because of the growing disadvantages of a further concentration of office space in Brussels, real estate developers now seek coordination in their search for alternative locations in the more suburban 'triangle' between Brussels, Antwerp, and Leuven. Some form of networking between the Flemish planning administration, regional economic development agencies, and private real estate developers can be observed, but this networking is still very limited in scope. In Central Scotland the problems generated by fragmentation have also been recognised. Coordinating mechanisms and voluntary collaborative arrangements of local authorities, with or without non-public partners, have been introduced (see Turok & Bailey, forthcoming). Most of these new arrangements, however, still focus on subregional levels. One of the rare examples of a genuine step towards a regional approach in Central Scotland concerns the external marketing of the region towards potential investors. In the late 1980s, the Scottish Development Agency had already produced a schematic map of Central Scotland, showing all the electronic firms and suppliers constituting 'Silicon Glen', in their endeavour to promote and capitalise on the image of a unified region. In RheinRuhr, on the other hand, the persistent lack of a regional discourse and the patchwork of overlapping subregional spaces are reflected in a multitude of cooperative initiatives taken by stakeholders. Overall, the signs (ideas, examples, and so forth) of growing cooperation between public authorities of equal or different layers and with private actors are still fragmentary, local, or in an initial stage (Knapp, Kunzmann & Schmitt, forthcoming).

So while the situation is not entirely hopeless, the picture painted above is also still far from the bright perspectives drawn, for example, in the ESDP.[10] The great challenge that presents itself is to produce rationales for perceiving the areas as more or less integrated regions that are in need of regional forms of cooperation. This was done in the EURBANET project by examining a selection of 'key spatial and governance challenges' that polycentric urban regions are typically facing and showing that the adoption of a regional perspective might be helpful in addressing them appropriately. It is the subject of the following section.

3.4 Key spatial and governance challenges demanding a regional approach

3.4.1 Introduction

Exploring the case for a more explicit regional approach in each of the four polynuclear urban regions has been one of the main lines of research in the EURBANET project. By a regional approach we have in mind a practice in which local, regional, and national actors of different backgrounds are also ready to adopt a more explicit regional perspective in addressing spatial development issues and, in doing so, cooperate with each other on a relatively firm basis. The idea is that such an approach is necessary if the best is to be made of the competitive potential and quality of life of polynuclear urban regions, and if polycentric urban regions are to evolve in valuable nodes in (North West) Europe's polycentric system. The case was explored by (a) identifying a limited number of spatial key issues with common features across the four regions (this was done on the basis of interviews with regional key actors and a thorough study of the regions' spatial dynamics); and (b) analysing the issues 'from a regional perspective' to see whether such an approach would yield useful results. In addition, suggestions were made about how such a larger scale perspective could be enhanced in terms of regional cooperation and network formation between key stakeholders. The three key planning issues identified and discussed in this section are: mobility and internal and external accessibility; spatial diversity and quality of open space; urban vitality and spatial balance. These are discussed in sections 3.4.2, 3.4.3, and 3.4.4 respectively.

10 In most other European urban regions (monocentric *and* polycentric) the situation is roughly comparable (see Herrschel & Newman, 2002).

A word of caution must be expressed at this point. By arranging the chapter on the basis of key planning challenges the impression may be created that the issues addressed are similar in all regions (for example, in terms of nature, causes, severity, perception, response formulated). While there are indeed some important similarities and parallels, there are also some equally important differences. Under the broad issue labels there is a variety of interpretations of, causes for, and proposed strategies for similarly named challenges. The issues cannot be understood adequately when viewed apart from the contexts in which they are embedded. These contexts are shaped by various factors, including past and present demographic and socio-economic developments, past and present relationships between various (political, social, economic) interests, and past and present policies and their effects. In addition, an important part is played by the geographic position of the four polynuclear urban regions in Europe. The Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond are located in close mutual proximity in North West Europe's densely populated and intensively developed Central Zone, where economic opportunities are plentiful but where, for instance, pressure on space is enormous as well. Central Scotland, on the other hand, is a relatively small and imbalanced economy on the periphery of an increasingly integrated Europe (Bailey & Turok, 2003). Central Scotland is located in what was labelled the 'Island zone' in the NWE Spatial Vision. While this contrast does not hamper comparisons between Central Scotland and the three other regions, it does have important (and mixed) implications for the nature and the severity of some of the issues discussed below.

3.4.2 Mobility and internal and external accessibility

Mobility and accessibility constitute a main theme in current (policy) debates on competitiveness and the quality of life of cities, regions, countries, and even supranational entities. The NWE Spatial Vision can serve as an example here. The theme is also a prominent subject of debate in the polynuclear urban regions of the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland. Congestion on motorways in combination with inadequacies in public transport systems bring significant economic (time loss), social (annoyance), and environmental (emissions) costs and are perceived as a major threat to the regions' competitive positions and quality of life. Congestion is especially severe in the Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond, most notably at rush hours and around the regions' largest urban nodes (Hoppenbrouwer *et al.*, 2003; Albrechts & Lievois, 2003; Schmitt *et al.*, 2003; Schönharting *et al.*, 2003). Instead of internal accessibility, the main concerns in Central Scotland involve external accessibility, although internal accessibility is certainly substantive in the three continental polynuclear urban regions as well.

Intra-regional accessibility

Concern over intra-regional accessibility and the scaling up of functional markets go hand in hand. Adequate accessibility at the regional level provides firms with access to wider pools of labour, suppliers, and customers, thereby improving the investment climate. Turning this around, intra-regional accessibility also multiplies job opportunities for (potential) employees, thereby increasing a region's attractiveness for workers. Moreover, keeping within limits (or rather, reducing travelling times between important centres within polynuclear urban regions) is also thought capable of enlarging the scope for the development and strengthening of functional specialisation and complementariness between such centres. Specialisation between cities in urban networks or polynuclear urban regions in turn is assumed to encourage a development in which a higher level of functions could be achieved, hence placing the entire polynuclear urban region or urban network on a higher metropolitan standard. This, in its turn, may attract more investments in again higher-level urban functions and more highly skilled professionals. Congestion and other factors undermining the ease of transport and mobility are, of course, detrimental to such scenarios. In spite of the fact that each of the four polynuclear urban regions defines its internal accessibility problem in a different way, there is no doubt that they could all benefit from policies and projects that took as a point of departure the polynuclear urban region as a whole.

Following current spatial and societal trends, recent spatial policy in the Netherlands (see Ministry of Transport and Public Works, 2000; VROM, 2001) connects mobility explicitly with the concept of the urban network. As Bailey and Turok (2003) and Hoppenbrouwer and colleagues (2003) point out, however, there is a strained relationship between the two. The increase of car mobility, with trips taking place over longer distances according to an increasingly criss-cross pattern, was one of the factors lying at the heart of the concept of the polynuclear urban region in the first place. Stimulating the development of polynuclear urban regions or urban networks by enhancing the level of complementarity between cities in turn entails the danger of encouraging a further increase of car mobility, which might well be undesirable for other reasons. The changing mobility pattern associated with urban network formation also frustrates the most generally proposed counter policy to road congestion: encouraging a modal shift from private car to public (rail) transport. Traditionally, railway systems were designed mainly to connect city centres with one another and with their respective hinterlands (regional or suburban rail systems). This arrangement worked well as long as important shares of mobility were indeed between hinterland and urban core and between the urban cores themselves. However, the criss-cross mobility pattern emerging in polynuclear urban regions is hard to cater for by most existing railway networks, as they are insufficiently intricate. Well-developed

underground systems in such cities as Paris and London are an exception. In addition, it is more difficult (in terms of cost and time) to adjust railway systems to new spatial developments. New centres of activity are usually first incorporated in the road network and only served by rail after some considerable time (if at all). The observation that new centres are among the most rapidly growing centres in polynuclear urban regions raises the question of how railway networks should be adjusted: which nodes should be connected (first) and where capacity should be increased or decreased. In the Randstad and RheinRuhr much of the debate is about the choice between realising a new, large-scale, high-speed system to connect major cities ('MetroRapid' in RheinRuhr and 'Rondje Randstad' – Randstad Orbit – in the Randstad) and investing in more finely-woven urban and regional light rail systems. The MetroRapid project has been criticised for its low cost-effectiveness (Schmitt *et al*., 2003). A plan for the Rondje Randstad was recently turned down by the Dutch Minister of Transport and Public Works. Local and regional authorities in the Flemish Diamond are busy planning various supra-urban/regional light rail systems, but as a result of a lack of inter-regional cooperation there is a danger that an opportunity to interconnect such systems might be missed. Altogether, there seems to be a growing awareness in the regions that the opportunities for a modal shift towards public rail transport are limited. Reducing congestion on motorways by other means such as traffic management and various types of road pricing measures (amongst other things to encourage the redistribution of traffic over time and space) are gaining in popularity. Solving bottlenecks in the road networks by constructing new links or by physically expanding road capacity (by allowing the use of emergency lanes during rush hours, for instance) is still part of some plans, but planners remain hesitant as it is increasingly understood that increasing road capacity eventually generates more traffic. Emphasis is put rather on increasing interconnectivity between different transport systems by designing nodes where people or goods can easily transfer from one mode of transport to another.

In comparison with the three continental polynuclear urban regions, Central Scotland suffers little congestion. This is to some extent a blessing in disguise, because it has been accompanied by less prosperous economic development. From an economic perspective, the region has suffered from (in places persistent) structural weaknesses and it continues to lag behind Europe's core regions, although some improvements have been observed since the absolute decline in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, Central Scotland's competitiveness is also put at a disadvantage by some important bottlenecks, missing links, and (heavily) congested sections in both its road and rail transport systems. Congestion occurs in particular around Edinburgh, where the economy shows some signs of overheating.

External accessibility

In addition to internal accessibility, good external accessibility is also a key dimension of the economic competitiveness of urbanised regions. From an international perspective, a region's competitive advantage depends – at least partially – on the accessibility of its major cities, mainports, and other major nodes of advanced economic activity for flows of goods, people, capital, and information. In the current global network economy, rapid, safe, and reliable high quality connections by motorway, high-speed train, and aircraft and the most up-to-date infrastructure for the transport of data are increasingly important. Because the final destinations of goods and persons are not the region as a whole, but rather specific places within the region, links between these international connections and regional traffic systems, for example at airports and (high speed) train stations, deserve serious attention.

In the continental polynuclear regions, a challenging problem with regard to accessibility is the interference between local and regional (internal) transport on the one hand and long distance (external) transport, mainly of freight, on the other. Considerable shares of this long distance transport are linked to the mainports of Rotterdam (Randstad) and Antwerp (Flemish Diamond). Growing volumes of freight traffic are transported by road to and from these mainports across a European network of transport corridors. Busy hinterland connections between both mainports, that is, between the Randstad and the Flemish Diamond, and from each of these mainports to RheinRuhr are embedded in this European network. The interference of long distance with local traffic flows produces congestion on the regions' motorway systems, especially on stretches around the largest cities (Hilbers *et al*, 1996), and hence aggravates the regions' internal and external accessibility problems. There is no doubt that the problem of long distance transport becoming interwoven with short distance transport requires a regional, if not supra-regional approach that should perhaps be coordinated at the transnational level.

As noted above, the external accessibility problem is of a different nature in Central Scotland. This region's peripheral location at the edge of North West Europe implies that rapid and reliable overland connections by rail and road with North West Europe's core regions are long distance and run through England and across the Channel. Connections are seriously hampered by several bottlenecks, including congestion on various stretches of the English motorway system, the barrier effect of urban agglomerations, in particular London, and the limited capacity of the Channel Tunnel. There is no doubt that Central Scotland's interests are also served by a lobby on the basis of a united voice, in their case mainly facing stakeholders in England.

3.4.3 Spatial diversity and the quality of open space

This key issue has been related strongly to the processes of residential suburbanisation and urban economic deconcentration in many North West European regions for most of the past four decades or so. The general trend is one in which a wide variety of functions, including residence, work, hi-tech R&D, retail, leisure, outdoor recreation, and infrastructure claim increasingly more space (most of it greenfield) for expansion. The trend is basically the same as that described above for its role in strengthening the polynuclear nature of many regions; the trend also lies at the heart of the urban vitality issue discussed in the next section

All four regions experience continuing pressure on their remaining open and – as it becomes scarcer – increasingly valued green space. In the regions, the area of open and valuable green space loses quality and volume, and the landscape in general suffers from further fragmentation and diminishing spatial variety (that is, blurring contrasts between different types of landscape). In RheinRuhr, for example, the persistent deconcentration trend has turned formerly unencumbered open landscapes into an unbalanced patchwork of different types of construction, topography, and space with elements of urban as well as rural landscapes (Schmitt *et al*. 2003). A similar characterisation holds for the Flemish Diamond, but also in the Randstad (as in other parts of the Netherlands) the developments described constitute a growing source of anxiety for many people. In Central Scotland, interest in suburban and ex-urban lifestyles also leads to significant pressure on green and open areas around the major centres. However, the situation does not seem to be as alarming as in the three continental polynuclear regions. There is still a relatively strong contrast between the urban and the rural in Central Scotland. As regards the region's thinly populated green core, the major concern is not so much that it will soon be consumed by other functions, but rather that it lacks significant growth in population and investment in basic services. Many authorities and agencies that cover this green core treat it as a kind of 'no-man's land' (Bailey & Turok, 2003).

Channelling suburbanisation and deconcentration trends has been an important objective of spatial policies in many North West European countries and regions over the past few decades. A raft of different policies has been developed. Some policies have emphasised the 'urban' side of the story, for example by promoting 'concentrated deconcentration', 'new town development', and 'compact urban development'. Others have concentrated mainly on the 'rural' side by identifying, protecting, and sometimes developing (through landscaping programmes) areas considered too valuable to be surrendered to urban sprawl. Such areas have usually been green in colour. Irrespective of

the type, such policies have tended to be only modestly successful at best, even where both orientations have been applied simultaneously to complement and strengthen each other. Dutch spatial planning, in particular its growth centres (new towns) policy of the 1970s and 1980s, is highly regarded for its relative success in controlling urban sprawl (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). Nevertheless, statistics show that the decline of the total number of inhabitants of the four largest cities of the Randstad over most of the past few decades has gone hand in hand with high population growth rates in the Green Heart (Bontje & Ostendorf, 1999). Similar trends of stagnation or decline in the core cities and high growth rates in suburban locations, smaller secondary centres, and smaller villages located in green environs across the regions have been recorded in the three other regions as well. In Central Scotland, strong Green Belt policies have limited urban deconcentration for several decades, but these policies have also been unable to prevent a decline of population and employment in the core cities with respect to the growth in secondary centres and new settlements that leapfrog green belts. Currently, real estate developers exert constant pressure for the relaxation of the controls of the Green Belt policy, especially in the eastern part of the region. In the Flemish Diamond and RheinRuhr, top-down policies aiming at the preservation of the remaining open and green space also tend to be undermined, sometimes even overruled, by development interests more highly valued by stakeholders in the regions.

From the interrelated points of view of competitiveness and the quality of life, the downgrading of the polynuclear urban regions' spatial diversity and quality of open spaces must be judged negatively. In fact, this downgrading harms one of the basic competitive advantages of polynuclear urban regions over monocentric agglomerations, that is, the variety of urban and rural landscapes over short distances. What is very important for spatial diversity and quality in the near future is which interests will get hold of the land that will soon become available as the result of the current restructuring of the agricultural sector. The almost intrinsic impossibility of 'open space' as a spatial sector fending for itself continues to call for an active role for the authorities. Planning authorities in the four regions are therefore applying new instruments to deal with the issue effectively, or are at least deliberating whether to do so. In Flanders and the Netherlands, hopes are pinned on various kinds of 'contours policy' and a restructuring of land policy arrangements (especially in the Netherlands). Contours policy basically amounts to drawing contours round specific areas (in the case of the Netherlands, red contours round existing cities and settlements and green contours round valuable green and open spaces in accordance with a 2001 policy proposal (VROM, 2001); in Flanders, only the built-up areas of cities and villages are delineated, which is far from easy, because the Flemish urban pattern is highly fragmented) and

declaring specific development policies applicable to the areas outlined and in between them. There is much to consider with respect to such instruments (for example, who should draw the contours? What should be the criteria determining how they should be drawn? Over how many years should they be adjusted? What will be the expected and unexpected effects for cities and settlements, intermediate zones, and green zones? What are the advantages compared with existing zoning instruments?). Nevertheless, in both cases a regional approach would seem to be the best guarantee for achieving a minimum degree of coherence in the remaining open and green structures and counteracting further fragmentation in polynuclear urban regions. In Flanders, the policy of drawing contours around urban centres has advanced considerably. In the Netherlands, however, the situation is different. The instrument of drawing contours was part of a proposed new national spatial planning strategy (VROM, 2001) put forward by a centre-left coalition government. The two consecutive centre-right coalition governments have abandoned the decision procedure concerning this strategy and are showing a willingness to permit higher levels of urbanisation outside the large cities than was the case during the last 10-15 years.

3.4.4 Urban vitality and spatial balance

Each of the four regions faces problems that can be subsumed under the broad label of 'urban vitality and spatial balance'. Compared with the accessibility and spatial diversity issues, the urban vitality and spatial balance issue displays greater variety across the four regions, although some important regularities can be observed. In most regions, urban vitality – or rather, the weakening of it during the larger part of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s – was strongly linked to the processes of suburbanisation and deconcentration discussed above, since these drained jobs and purchasing power from the cities, which in turn undermined the cities' tax base and the support for many kinds of typical urban amenities (although the effects in terms of the local tax base depend on the proportion of the income of local councils collected through local taxation compared with funds distributed directly by central government). Many of the larger cities in the four regions examined experienced absolute population decline in this period, in spite of significant international immigration, mainly from former colonies, Mediterranean countries, and countries or regions experiencing (civil) war or other kinds of distress, with both processes leading to substantial changes in the composition of the population, especially in the larger cities. Only since the late 1990s have some of these cities managed to change the direction of the downward trend. In the Randstad, for example, helped by several years of strong national economic growth, a number of cities (not all of them conveying equal conviction, see Kloosterman & Lambregts, 2001a), now seem to be undergoing a degree of

'urban renaissance'. At the same time, the basic Dutch policy approach to urban vitality has entered a new stage. From a 'defensive' approach intended to make good the previously accumulated arrears, the focus is now explicitly on the strengthening of the Randstad as an international 'top' location for business, cultural facilities and events, and supranational institutions. The main idea is to capitalise on the potential of the Randstad as a whole rather than the potential of each of the individual cities separately. To this end, in the Fifth Memorandum on Spatial Planning, the Randstad is conceptualised as a comprehensive urban network and provided with a new name: 'Delta Metropolis' (*Deltametropool*; see Salet, 2003; Lambregts & Zonneveld, forthcoming). Among the concrete stimuli that should give shape to these ambitions are the 'key projects'. These involve large spatial investments by public and private agencies to revitalise the areas around major train stations – which in most cases are also future HST-stations – in the four largest cities. For Rhein-Ruhr, somewhat similar ambitions can be traced back in state and federal planning documents dating from the 1990s. At present, however, they seem to be overshadowed by a situation in which local authorities compete fiercely with each other for new businesses (business tax is an important source of local revenues), and in which they invent flagship projects that compete with rather than complement each other. An alternative approach would be the shaping of an intelligent and future-oriented network of specialised economic clusters in strategic hi-tech sectors at the regional level (Schmitt *et al*, 2003). In this regional development approach, the good internal accessibility of regions is considered a necessary precondition.

Of the four regions examined RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond and Central Scotland are the most distinctly characterised by a basic geographical divide that represents spatial imbalance. Within the Randstad, one could distinguish between a well-performing and leading 'North wing' and a 'South wing' that follows at some distance (Kloosterman & Lambregts, 2001b), but the divides noticeable in the three other regions are more marked. These divides are between Brussels and Flanders in the Flemish Diamond, between the Ruhr Area and the 'Rheinschiene' in RheinRuhr, and between east (Edinburgh) and west (Glasgow) in Central Scotland. This spatial imbalance mainly refers to the unequal distribution of specific economic activities and/or economic development and prosperity in general. In the Flemish Diamond, the spatial imbalance is illustrated by the strong dominance of the Brussels Capital Region over the Flemish Region in terms of its cultural climate and, even more marked, its supply of office locations – both important elements of urban competitiveness and city marketing. Brussels is an attractive city for international companies to locate their 'European offices' through its multiple capital city status (EU, the Federal State of Belgium, Flemish Region and Community, French Community). This status also attracts a wide variety of

high-quality services. The high demand for office space, however, has negative repercussions on the economic vitality of Brussels itself (not to mention the large numbers of commuters going in and out of the city everyday, causing heavy congestion on the motorways around the Belgium capital, especially the orbital road). Real estate prices have gone up and in substantial parts of the city centre other urban functions have been squeezed out. Although a development in which more offices are leaving the city for a location in the surrounding region seems to have taken root (with car accessibility acting as a major criterion for such new locations), the Brussels authorities continue to operate a 'containment' policy with regard to offices and related functions instead of seeking regional coordination (Albrechts & Lievois, 2003).

In Central Scotland and RheinRuhr, the unbalanced spatial development and urban vitality are related to indicators of economic development and social prosperity in general. Parts of both regions have experienced harsh industrial decline and a subsequent process of (partial) economic restructuring over the past few decades. In Scotland, Edinburgh has experienced a prolonged period of slow, but steady growth and is now emerging as a leading financial and political centre for Scotland and the North of the UK. The effects of this development have spilled over into neighbouring areas. At the moment, labour shortages, rising wages, and booming property prices have even started to harm the area's competitive position. Glasgow, in contrast, has been left with a serious legacy of poverty and social dislocation. In RheinRuhr, sub-regions along the Rhine (Cologne/Bonn, Leverkusen, and Düsseldorf) perform significantly better in terms of employment, new business start-ups, and the growth of most knowledge-intensive industries than the Ruhr Area. In particular, the northern fringe of the Ruhr (Essen, Bochum, and Dortmund) lags behind.

In all three regions, a regional strategy to promote closer cooperation between the constituent parts on either side of the divide could be beneficial to the economic vitality and the competitiveness of the region as a whole. Such cooperation could generate greater agglomeration economies, since it could accommodate wider access to pools of labour, business services, information, and cheaper space. This state of affairs would make the regions more attractive to investors, while a broader package of high-level cultural events and urban attractions would make the regions more attractive to professionals and tourists as well.

3.5 Outlines for planning and governance

We have here then a number of concrete, critical planning challenges presenting themselves to the governing parties in polycentric urban regions:

challenges, as we have argued, that might be more easily addressed when framed from a regional perspective and dealt with through a regionally coordinated approach. But how could this be organised in the complex administrative context of polycentric urban regions? In this section we present some first notions and ideas.

The organising capacity of metropolitan regions is increasingly recognised as an important factor in determining competitiveness (Van den Berg *et al*., 1997a). Based on the previous sections, it is hardly an overstatement to say that in this respect the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and Central Scotland face an important disadvantage compared with centrally governed metropolitan regions. Matters would not look so bad, however, if the regions in the fields of planning and decision-making were well taken care of by a higher tier of administration. While some say that the Dutch national government does a good job in this respect for the Randstad (see Ipenburg & Lambregts, 2001b), and while the Scottish Executive may tentatively be suspected of having the intention of looking after Central Scotland's 'interests' more expressly (cf. Bailey & Turok, 2001), the general image is one of fragmented administrative structures and divided regional identities acting as an important barrier to a regional approach at the level of the individual polynuclear urban regions.

That is not to say that all problems would be solved if only an extra administrative tier matching the scale of the respective polynuclear urban regions were introduced. It may be questioned whether it would be wise to readjust the administrative machinery each time a new spatial configuration gets the upper hand (Salet, Thornley & Kreukels, 2003b, p.16). The reality is much too complex for that in more than one respect. The rigidity of existing institutional structures and the fact that the geographical boundaries of polynuclear urban regions are not easily defined are just two of the circumstantial problems. More decisive is the argument that these days many spatial issues call for an approach that is formulated and implemented on multiple scales, or across administrative tiers rather than exclusively on one of them. Furthermore, the phenomenon that an increasing number of spatial issues are (or preferably, should be) addressed through a governance mode rather than a governmental mode makes a call for an extra administrative tier for polynuclear urban regions neither realistic nor wise. The view that such issues are better dealt with through cooperation across administrative tiers, across administrative sectors, and between public, private, and (organised) interest groups is gaining influence, thereby acknowledging that different issues call for different alliances with different spatial competencies and different life spans (cf. Boelens, 2000).

It can be argued that the competitiveness and quality of life of polynuclear urban regions can be strengthened (or threats averted) if specific key spatial issues are addressed through an approach that minimally takes into account the 'existence' of the polynuclear urban region in question. How should we interpret this assertion? Polynuclear urban regions, in the words of Albrechts (2001), are 'layered mixes' of global, regional, and local scales and also 'socio-spatial conflict zones' where multiple interests, multiple identities, and a cultural mix of various stakeholders – public and private – are articulated. He further argues that traditional types of land-use planning largely underestimate, or even ignore this reality and are therefore gradually becoming obsolete, or at least incapable of the adequate management of space and spatial development in contemporary polynuclear urban regions. Not only spatial concepts and policies, but also institutional frameworks need to be adjusted to be able to cope with the interfering and multi-level nature of urban dynamics (according to Albrechts & Lievois (2003), no specific scale stands out above the others with regard to the question of how to deal with contemporary urban dynamics). The currently existing frameworks are often too static and hierarchical to recognise and deal with this complex, multi-scalar interplay of trends and forces. What is needed is more interactive planning on the basis of dialogue, cooperation, and coordination by both public and private stakeholders. The foundation of a new administrative layer would definitely not suit this interactive type of planning; another layer would only extend the already existing bureaucracy. Rather, the need is for the formation of flexible networks of stakeholders adapted to the dynamics of the polynuclear urban region concerned. The major difficulty is that, even if many stakeholders could be convinced of the added value of planning on a regional level, the understanding of how multi-level governance can or should work in polynuclear configurations is rather limited. The various contributions compiled by Meijers and colleagues (2003) put forward some interesting thoughts about how spatial planning and decision-making for strengthening competitiveness and the quality of life in polynuclear urban regions could be shaped. Of course, these proposals are to a considerable extent tuned to the prevailing institutional structures in the respective regions (and so they vary to some degree). However, a closer look reveals some interesting similarities as well. They can be summarised in five points:

1. Overcoming intra-regional barriers – A prerequisite for realising a regional approach to strengthening competitiveness and quality of life is that a majority of relevant stakeholders should be receptive to the idea. Looking at attitudes expressed by stakeholders in the four regions (see Ipenburg & Lambregts 2001b) it can be concluded that the situation in this respect varies across the four regions. Especially in RheinRuhr, the responsiveness of stakeholders to the idea of RheinRuhr as a polynuclear urban region worth planning and acting for is at best mixed. The lack of a shared region-

al identity (see previous section) is an important background factor. To overcome the intra-regional barriers raised by such factors, the importance of establishing a '*regional discourse*' through which the advantages and disadvantages of conceiving RheinRuhr as a suitable arena for cooperation in planning and decision-making can become clear could be emphasised (Schmitt *et al.*, 2003). Shaping this prerequisite should not be taken as a 'project' that should first be implemented before any attempt to establish an actual regional approach could be started. The two can, and in fact *should* go hand in hand from the very start, although drawing a clear distinction between the two processes and their respective stimuli remains crucial. For RheinRuhr this would mean 'enhancing the regional discourse' and 'shaping organising capacities and regional (self-)governance structures' within one 'Regional Strategic Framework'. The obvious hypothesis here is that participation in region-wide networks of stakeholders, where dialogue, consultation, and cooperation help to create mutual understanding for stakeholders' issues, interests, and approaches, helps to overcome intra-regional barriers resulting from fragmented identities and would eventually make the region a goal for which joining efforts would be considered worthwhile.

2. Flexibility – Such region-wide networks should preferably be flexible arenas where public, private, and possibly other stakeholders cooperate on a voluntary basis. Much emphasis is being placed on the participation of stakeholders that have not been involved in political decision-making and implementation thus far (specific interest groups, representatives of particular business sectors, semi-public institutes in charge of a specific spatial interest, and so forth). These stakeholders come mainly from outside the traditional government organisations; such people may have an important input by bringing in new ideas, interests, and visions to the process.
3. Incentives – In most of the regions examined, experiences in the field of region-wide cooperation are only limited. In order to facilitate the difficult start-up period of setting up a cooperative framework, it can be argued that any governmental body, whether a coalition of local governments, the regional, or the national government, should provide some starting capital or other resources needed. In this way, initial practical barriers can be overcome and the willingness to cooperate enhanced.
4. Position in existing structure – These new voluntary networks should supplement rather than replace the existing administrative structures, if only for the democratic legitimacy of final decision-making. On account of the importance of mutual understanding and respect by the various stakeholders, in particular the public versus the private parties, some vehicle for intercommunication has to be established for each other's interests and points of view. This vehicle may be an intermediary agency, such as the Delta Metropolis Association in the Randstad, which moderates, facilitates,

and nourishes the cooperation and coordination between the existing administrative hierarchy and new stakeholders, preferably by 'guiding key players from both sides into the networks'.

5. Simple start – Networks for regional cooperation should start with small and/or relatively simple projects that offer clear and immediate benefits to all the stakeholders involved. Eventually the networks may tackle the more complex key issues discussed in this chapter, but these may well require too much in terms of procedures and debates and entail too many involved interests at the start. For example, in the case of the Flemish Diamond, it is clear that 'an open decision-making process, in an atmosphere of mutual consent and trust' is needed. Trust among partners who are used to thinking in competitive rather than cooperative terms needs to be built up carefully, for example, by starting with easy 'win-win' situations. In later stages of what is essentially a stepwise approach, more complicated dossiers can be introduced.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter started by elucidating the important role that is reserved for polycentric urban regions in both the ESDP and in the NWE Spatial Vision. In brief, they are expected to evolve in more coherent metropolitan regions that may counterbalance the dominant positions currently taken by 'classic' metropolises such as London and Paris and, as such, help to strengthen (North West) Europe's international competitive position (cf. CEC, 1999; NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000). Building on the detailed regional studies performed in the course of the EURBANET project, we examined the extent to which the prototypical polycentric urban regions of the Randstad, the Flemish Diamond, RheinRuhr, and Central Scotland are ready to assume this role. We made clear that present practice in the four regions is still far from the bright perspectives painted in the ESDP and the NWE Spatial Vision. In line with the observations made by the French Presidency (2000), we found that, in spite of the fact that in recent years some promising initiatives have been seen, the regions still lack the organising capacity to give shape to such aspirations proactively. The dominant picture is still one of deficiencies in policy coordination across neighbouring districts, the lack of fora for strategic thinking at the regional level and, in relation to this, political actors' incapability of recognising complementary aspects in the problems and challenges that face different parts of the polynuclear urban regions.

In the remaining part of the chapter, we make it clear that a larger scale perspective could really be of help in overcoming the shortcomings associated with the local scale of current arrangements in the regions studied. We have

done so by discussing a number of key planning challenges the regions are facing, arguing that a regionally coordinated approach might well be the key to success. In addition, we have put forward some suggestions on how to give shape to such an approach.

Building governance capacity at the scale of the polycentric urban regions would without doubt be a challenging experiment for each of the four regions examined here. While the Randstad appears to be in the process of embarking on this road, the other regions are still only at the threshold. In proceeding along this road, each of the regions can either choose to follow its own trajectory in relative isolation, or it can decide to widen its frame of reference by trying to learn from the experiences of the other regions. The best arguments seem to be in favour of the second option: the regions share a number of important characteristics (polynucleated morphology and fragmented administrative settings, for example) and they are struggling with a number of largely similar problems while achieving mixed results at best. Of course, in spite of these similarities, each of the regions also remains a unique case. Copying each other's responses is therefore no guarantee for success and the aim of the learning process should not be to reach universal solutions for safeguarding and strengthening competitiveness and the quality of life in polynuclear urban regions in general. Rather, by engaging in a process of inter-regional learning, the regions should aim, for example, to exchange and evaluate successes and failures with respect to their respective policy strategies addressing the key spatial issues discussed above, or share useful information and experiences on the thorny issue of promoting a regional approach (see also Lalenis, Mamadouh & De Jong, 2002). In Chapter 5, the question is addressed of how such a process of inter-regional learning between the four polynuclear urban regions can be shaped.

4 Visioning North West Europe as a networked space

Wil Zonneveld

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the analysis moves beyond the scale of each of the four individual polynuclear urban regions. There are several reasons for undertaking such an exercise. First, we may discover new policy issues by zooming out to areas larger than the individual polynuclear regions. Second, and in relation to the first point, new building blocks for improved policy making may possibly be developed. Third, new objects for cooperation between polynuclear urban regions, or between polynuclear urban regions and other regions, may be identified. The level of scale of this section is North West Europe (NWE) as a whole (although a focus on the more central areas is inevitable), taking into account processes and events on the European and even the global level. Comprehensiveness is not the main goal here. Our main aim is to obtain insight into the various ways the spatial structure of NWE can be conceptualised. In this way we present different views on spatial realities in NWE. We are interested, amongst other things, in the question whether our four polynuclear urban regions can be grouped into urban systems of a higher order as planners have suggested over the years. If this is the case, there are reasons for new sorts of cooperation.

As a tool to support the structure of our analysis, we distinguish three types of spatial network:

- natural networks formed by, for instance, river basins, scenic areas, and nature reserves;
- infrastructure networks formed by roads, railroads, waterways, and the ICT networks;
- urban networks: not only encompassing cities and urban regions, but also land use patterns.

The distinction drawn between these three types of network is not new; it can be found in many planning documents, although the distinction is sometimes implicit. The order in which these networks are usually presented in relation to each other is definitely not random. Planners have often pointed out the influence natural systems have on spatial decisions, especially in the past when building and agricultural technologies were less advanced; nevertheless, planners would prefer to avoid accusations of spatial determinism, or even thinking in the tradition of the classical geography of the nineteenth century (Claval, 1976). Nowadays, pleading for ecologically more sound development, many planners and designers shake off such caution, stating that the characteristics of natural structures are setting the conditions for infrastructure development and land use, while infrastructure should form a kind

of carrying structure for human activities. In our presentation of conceptual discussions in relation to the three types of networks, we follow the common order, starting with natural networks and rounding off with urban networks. We have to stress that we are not interested in the question of what the networks look like precisely, or how they could be delimited. Our interest remains on the conceptual level. We are interested in the way in which these networks might be framed and what the repercussions would be for polynuclear urban regions, the object of the EURBANET project. What will be emphasised is the observation that, when looking from particular network perspectives, the map of NWE looks different for each case.

In the next section, before we present our conceptual analysis of the three network types, we will discuss conceptualisation in general terms. We do this because, in so many projects aiming at cross-border and transnational cooperation in the domain of spatial planning, a main goal is the production of a spatial vision – or whatever term is used. Sometimes such a vision is brought about; however, there is often disappointment about its quality, especially among professional planners. The question then arises, whether we have to revise our goals fundamentally in this respect, a question to which we return in the final, concluding section.

4.2 The thorny task of conceptualisation at the transnational level

Unravelling the spatial structure of North West Europe for the purpose of spatial planning, as complicated as it is analytically and politically, already has a history of about half a century. As explained in section 2.3, a critical role is played by spatial concepts which can briefly be described as policy oriented perceptions of the spatial structure of a particular area, possibly including its position in a wider spatial context (Zonneveld, 1989; Zonneveld, 2000). In addition to general perceptions of geography and spatial structure, there is an important element of action involved in spatial planning concepts. They convey clues, sometimes even guidelines, for action. To attract political attention and to convey a call to intervene, spatial planning concepts present themselves as metaphors (Zonneveld, 2000, p. 267). Because of their communicative power, deliberate use is made not only of striking terms, but also in many cases of diagrams and symbols. Spatial concepts are therefore often expressed as iconographic metaphors. Not surprisingly, maps form a basic tool, because they 'are necessary for the two-way translation between the diagrammatic abstraction of the metaphor and the concrete realities of geographic location' (Alexander, 2001, p. 92; see also Kunzmann, 2000). After all, spatial planning is about space, which is the reason why this policy domain is

particularly susceptible to 'framing with figures' (Faludi, 1996; see also Zonneveld, 2002).

Concepts, particularly when accompanied by maps, often lead to political discussions or even controversies, because they convey perceptions of an area that may not invariably be found acceptable. To reach consensus over the desired spatial structure of a large-scale area, where very many actors are stakeholders, would seem to be exceptional. So to arrive at spatial concepts that have a political status is also exceptional. At the national level only The Netherlands is a clear exception, where for several decades the twin spatial concepts of the Randstad and the Green Heart have been so powerful they have been designated as a planning doctrine (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). In Flanders, planners have put great efforts into establishing such a doctrine as the cornerstone of strategic spatial planning at this level; this did not exist before the bearer of this 'doctrine', the Flanders Spatial Structure Plan, acquired formal status in 1997 (Albrechts, 1999). At the national level, spatial concepts that picture the desired spatial structure of the country are often laid out in informal documents having no – direct – political effects. German and Danish examples can be given (see, for example, Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, 1993; Ministry of Environment and Energy; Spatial Planning Department, 1997).

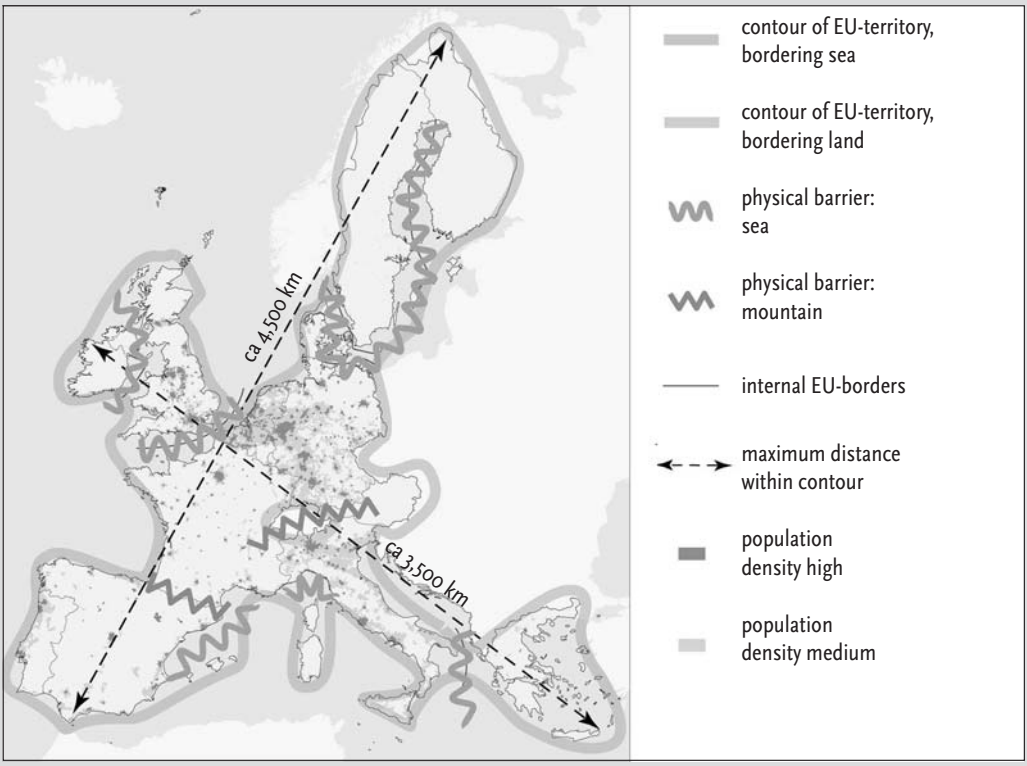
Some successes have been achieved at local and regional levels. There are quite a number of urban regions where some sort of strategic planning vision has been widely accepted and even translated into planning guidelines and instruments, as is the case with, for instance, the metropolitan greenbelts around major British cities. Where such planning doctrines exist they are in most instances based on a – clear – distinction drawn between urban areas and rural areas that should be left undeveloped. Although such policy claims could be part of cross-border cooperation, they are less meaningful at the transnational level. Here other policy issues spring to the fore, as is shown later in this chapter. At this level it seems almost impossible to reach a broad consensus on spatial concepts, let alone maps, which in some respects form the pinnacle of conceptualisation. The difficulty is simply the result of the fact that maps, like spatial concepts in general, always leave out certain characteristics and qualities while emphasising others. Maps construct and do not reproduce the world and therefore bear considerable power (Wood, 1992; Crampton, 2001).

It is for these reasons that constructing images of a – large-scale – territory is such a highly sensitive matter, especially when several countries are involved. This message can be derived from the efforts to arrive at spatial visions at the transnational level, as we have seen in chapter 2. To give an

example, one of these 'visions' is the Second Benelux Structural Outline. This outline, drawn up by the three Belgium regions, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, gives images of the desired spatial structure of the Benelux area (Van den Broeck, 1997). Some of the conceptual proposals developed by the project team responsible for the Benelux Structural Outline appeared to be highly controversial. One of these was the north-south chain of urban networks formed by the Randstad, the Flemish Diamond, the Brussels metropolitan area, and the Walloon Central Area (Brussels-Mons-Charleroi-Namur). The rationale behind this concept stemmed from the observation that in none of the participating countries or regions is there any awareness that, considering the competitive position of the Benelux in its entirety, the most competitive urban regions in each of the countries and regions form a kind of chain. The proposal was certainly not to develop this chain as some sort of mega-linear city, but to cherish the urban regions when it comes to, for instance, instruments to improve the qualities of the business environment. In each of the countries and regions concerned, reasons were put forward to reject the north-south chain. In Dutch spatial planning, for instance, there is a west-east direction in terms of the form and position of the urban structure. The Randstad is seen (or rather was seen, because this image no longer prevails) as part of a large urban network, the Netherlands Central Urban Ring, where the main transport axes run in the direction of Germany. So here we have a concept, the north-south chain of urban networks, which appeared to be incongruous with the prevailing images of the spatial structure at a level below that of the Benelux (see also De Vries, 2002).

These difficulties with conceptualising large areas do not mean that no examples of conceptualisation on an even larger scale than the Benelux can be found. The most obvious recent example is the European Spatial Development Perspective. In the first official draft of the ESDP, the Noordwijk document (Dutch Presidency, 1997), named after the location where this version of the ESDP was discussed by the EU ministers responsible for spatial planning, several maps were included which did not appear in the final document. One of these looks, at first sight, as innocent as any map taken from an elementary geography textbook. The map (see Figure 4.1) can be interpreted as an effort to conceptualise the structure of the European territory in terms of spatial hindrances to integration. (Zonneveld, 2000, p. 279; see also Faludi, 2000 and Faludi & Waterhout 2002). This particular map illustrates the shape of the European territory and uses a number of spatial dimensions as criteria. Because of the highly fragmented nature of the European continent when compared with, for instance, Australia, inland seas such as the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean are pictured as physical barriers. Also, in terms of the size of the landmass of the European continent, distances are relatively long. The maximum one can travel is the distance between the very north of Finland

Figure 4.1 Physical barriers across Europe as seen in a draft version of the European Spatial Development Perspective (Dutch Presidency, 1997).



and the very south of Spain, a 'line' of 4,500 km. Although this map only made apparent what everybody already knew, it sparked off all kinds of controversy and was eventually thrown out of the ESDP. Worthy of mention is the disclaimer accompanying the main four maps of the 1997 version of the ESDP, all of which are more analytical than policy oriented. It is stated at the bottom of each map that the map in question 'in no way reflects actual policy proposals' (Faludi & Zonneveld, 1997, p. 275).

Other transnational and cross-border projects focused on cooperation in the field of spatial planning show evidence of the politically sensitive nature of developing spatial concepts and translating them into maps. In chapter two we have discussed the spatial vision for North West Europe. Another clear example is the endeavour – also an INTERREG IIC project – to arrive at a spatial vision for the North Sea Region, one of the neighbouring regions of the North Western Metropolitan Area. Here the vision is basically formed by ten vision statements, mere verbal expressions of goals with a spatial dimension (Spatial Vision Working Group, 2000, p. 8-9). Although the whole endeavour of drafting 'NorVision' can be described as an exercise in communal language building, it is striking that spatial concepts, often appearing as iconographic metaphors as Alexander describes them, are not part of the NorVision docu-

Figure 4.2 The one and only present European 'global economic integration zone', the Pentagram, an image which has never entered the ESDP but quite easy to draw

Source: Schön, 2000

ment, with the exception of concepts already politically legitimised by their insertion in the European Spatial Development Perspective. 'Balanced competitiveness' and 'polycentrism' are the prime examples (Jensen & Richardson, 2001). The same can be said of the spatial vision being prepared by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning, known by its French acronym CEMAT. Active since the beginning of the 1970s, the CEMAT has adopted 'Guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent' (CEMAT, 2000). Again, this is a document paying tribute to the ESDP, an indication that a policy document does not necessarily have to be based on formal legal regulations to be authoritative. As the ESDP bears some clear perceptions of the structure of the EU territory, above all the concept of the pentagram (see Figure 4.2), this is less the case with the 'Guiding principles'. Nevertheless, the CEMAT 'vision' does contain several more descriptive concepts to address Europe's spatial structure, this time on the level of almost the whole of the European continent, because all democratic European states are members of the Council of Europe. Eventually, these building blocks could lead to a more developed and intricate conception of Europe's – envisioned – spatial structure.

Implicitly, the ESDP exhibits such a conception, related to the existing spatial structure: the pentagram. The way the 'pentagram' is dealt with is noteworthy for two reasons: first, because the concept is elaborated on the verbal level only. Although it would have been quite easy to do so, the ESDP does not present any image of the pentagram. The German planner Peter Schön (2000) has drawn such an image using the pictorial style of the ESDP (Faludi & Waterhout 2002, 152 ff.). Second, the verbal language of the ESDP also shows that conceptualisation is problematic: the term 'pentagram' does not appear in all language editions of the ESDP. In the French edition the term has been removed, because of its connotations with the American Ministry of Defence. In the Dutch version the term has been deliberately left out, because it has the potential to be used as a spatial planning concept, which the Dutch National Spatial Planning Agency, authorising the Dutch version of the ESDP, would prefer to avoid. So vision in general, and particularly visioning at the transnational and European scale, is politically sensitive and therefore not

practised very often. We return to the subject of visioning in the concluding section. The next three sections deal with the three types of networks distinguished in the introduction.

4.3 Visioning nature and natural networks

As far back as 1958, North West European planners, regularly meeting each other in the context of the standing Conference of Regions in North West Europe (CRONWE), showed that it is possible to look at the North West European area and arrive at new images of spatial structure, thinking away national borders. Particularly where the natural environment is concerned, these borders are hardly recognisable, so it was asserted (Van Gorcum, 1958, p. 3). Looking for common issues to be tackled through cross-border cooperation, they framed NWE as a water system. Because their geographical scope encompassed only the mainland side of the continent, they only gave half a glance to the river basins of the Ems, Rhine, Meus, and Scheldt with all their tributaries, one of the nine large water catchment areas of Europe (CEC, 1994, p. 92). By departing from river basins, NWE indeed seems to be largely a delta area.

With hindsight, the plea coming from the CRONWE looks very modern. For several years now NWE has been plagued by serious flood conditions and, ironically, the opposite in 2003, partly as a result of a changing climate. It is clearly recognised now that combating the threat of recurring floods (or possibly droughts) makes it necessary to look at entire river basins. Since major urban areas are often located downstream, with in many cases large conurbations situated at the mouth of a river or in a delta region, a surplus of water in a river basin could have disastrous results. The CRONWE planners of a few generations ago advocated international cooperation. In those days of industrial expansion and vastly growing environmental pollution, the quality of the water flowing through river basins was seen as the most valid object for cooperation. But the issue of water quantity also called for cooperation. Because the CRONWE planners were generally in favour of establishing new authorities and institutions with considerable powers, they called for the establishment of an international public authority on the level of the river basins (Van Gorcum, 1958, p. 10). It was more than forty years before their demands were met, although a special international commission focusing on the quality of the Rhine water has indeed been established. On a lower, cross-border level, (water) authorities have collaborated closely. The Community Initiative INTERREG IIC, the IRMA programme (Interregional Rhine-Maas Action programme), laid the foundations for a broader sort of cooperation, also focusing on issues that are directly related to land use. For instance, the

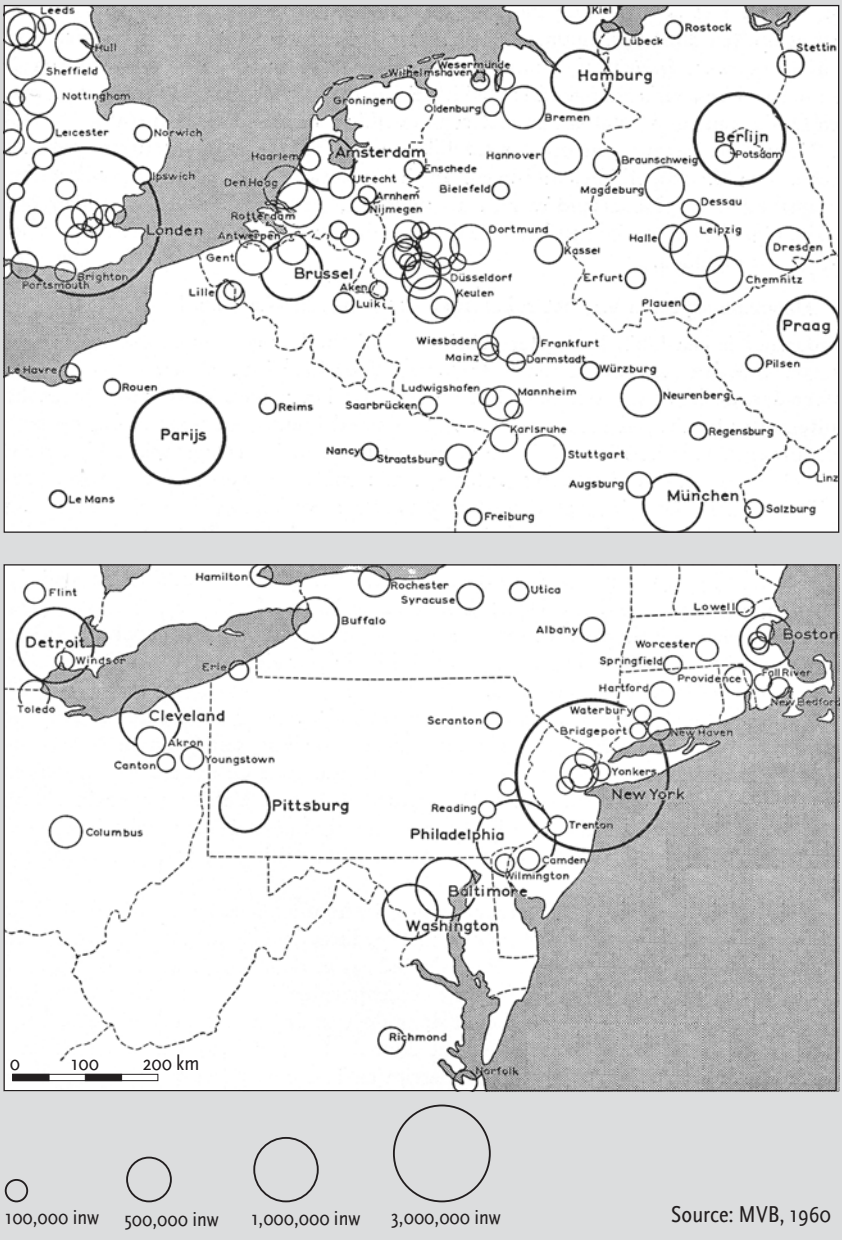
Dutch province of Gelderland has invested part of the allocated IRMA funds to the German side of the border to create overflow areas whenever the water table of the Rhine reaches critical levels.

A new phase of institutionalising the concept of the water system will be introduced by the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council in October 2000. The aim of this directive is to prevent further deterioration of water quality and to achieve a 'good status' in all waters. To emphasise the need for integrated international water management, the directive not only recommends, but even demands cooperation between member states at river basin level. A strict implementation schedule is attached to this EU-wide river basin approach, implying, for instance, various sorts of plans. A 'spatialisation' of water system policies will probably be the effect of the integration of a water programme in the INTERREG III programme, while the previous IRMA programme, although part of INTERREG II, was not integrated in the INTERREG IIC programme on transnational cooperation in the field of spatial planning. (Some people feared that this would lead to a marginalisation of the water issue in transnational cooperation.) Although an improvement of the interconnectivity between policy sectors is a challenging task, this development is highly relevant for the future development of urban networks. Rivers cut across the polynuclear regions of RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond and, above all, the Randstad. The Randstad is nowadays even re-framed as a Delta Metropolis, although others would like to preserve this concept – the Great Deltametropolis – for the entire constellation formed by Randstad-Flemish Diamond-RheinRuhr (Zonneveld, Van Est & Van Eijndhoven, 2000, p. 460 ff.).

Water basins, or 'blue networks', are not the only natural systems that stimulate the conceptualisation of urban structures. For a short period in the early 1960s, when the concept of the megalopolis was much discussed, the complex of cities and urban regions on both sides of the North Sea was referred to as the North Sea Board. The obvious source of inspiration here is the notion of a megalopolis that became highly popular after the publication of Jean Gottmann's famous paper 'Megalopolis, or the Urbanisation of the Northeastern Seaboard' (Gottmann, 1957). Gottmann did not include the North Sea Board in his list of areas where one could see the formation of a vast urban structure, where an 'exceptional growth' (ibid. p. 190) was taking place. North West European planners claimed that a Megalopolis – as a stage in urbanisation – can also be found in Europe (see Figure 4.3).

The 'European Megalopolis', as they preferred to call this region, more or less occupies the area later known as the Central Capital and Cities area, or CCC Area (CEC, 1996). In this designation, the relationship between coast and sea

Figure 4.3. According to North West European planners not only North America could boast a megalopolis, but also Europe



Source: MVB, 1960

on the one hand and with cities on the other is obviously lost, the opposite of what European planners forty years earlier would have proposed, noting some causal relationship between geographical position in a maritime area and the density of urban networks and the speed of urbanisation and economic growth. Nowadays the concept of a seaboard megacity, if it were to be used, would have entirely different connotations. What at present springs to

the fore is the vulnerability of large urban areas lying in the immediate vicinity of a sea, especially when combined with a location in a delta area, as is the case with the Randstad. The (expected) rise of the sea level has everything to do with this. A calculation by the 'Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis' (*Centraal Planbureau*) has shown that the damage in a worst-case scenario – a complete flooding of the Randstad – would cost the astronomical figure of more than €350 billion.

So sea, coast, and coastal location have recently been more or less reinvented as policy issues – not as driving forces of urbanisation, nor as a part of a megacity approach, but as issues in themselves. And indeed, by departing from such issues as these, the map of (North West) Europe is again different. Nowadays, conflicting issues involving natural qualities and occupational patterns spring to the fore. As stated above, the delta-areas in NWE are heavily urbanised, as they are everywhere else in the world. This situation has lead to various policy regimes and cooperation, notably between Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands in relation to the Wadden Sea. The concept of wetlands is particularly relevant for NWE. Interestingly, the North Sea itself is becoming the object of discussions on planning (the term land use is, of course, inappropriate). Lying as it does in between large urban concentrations on nearly all its coasts, the North Sea is almost an inland sea. Dense networks of shipping routes and cables and pipes on the seabed run in all directions. There are oil and gas platforms and areas where sand is extracted, or where sludge is deposited, and there are areas that are used for military purposes. In addition, there are plans to build offshore windmill parks. The Dutch even have a long-term option to build a new airport at the edge of the territorial waters.

Few of these occupational patterns, or the policy issues connected with them, can be related directly to the (spatial) development of urban areas and polynuclear urban regions in particular. Indirectly, these issues are highly relevant, since they are part of the ecological footprint of an urbanised society. More directly important are the natural and scenic areas situated in and around cities and urban networks. In many polynuclear urban regions of NWE, in the previous century a process of inversion took place in which the ratio between urban and green areas was completely reversed, most obviously in RheinRuhr and the West Midlands and, at lower levels of scale, in important parts of nearly all other polynuclear urban regions. When planners first started to discuss the spatial structure of NWE they were already concerned about this development, but their worries were concentrated more on the loss and fragmentation of large open, green areas for recreational purposes, such as the area labelled the Green Heart of the Randstad (see section 4.5). But in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the process of inversion

deepened and agriculture was modernised (also leading to a serious decline of ecological qualities), a new concept emerged, influenced by ecological theories such as the stepping stone theory. This is the concept of ecological networks, based on the idea that isolated scenic areas and nature reserves can only exist if they are connected with other areas, enlarging the range of species. In Flanders and the Netherlands this concept became the cornerstone of nature conservation policies. Something similar on the transnational level is earnestly advocated. The Second Benelux Structural Outline makes a plea for such a step; the concept of a pan-EU green network called Natura 2000 is the idea behind the Habitat Directive. The ESDP does in fact enlarge the meaning of green networks by pointing out the necessity of the wise management of the natural and the cultural heritage. In doing so, the ESDP recognises the cultural heritage embodied in the green networks, the present European landscape, as the imprint of European history. The theme has been explored in the context of the spatial vision for North West Europe, but was dropped in the finalisation stage, mainly because of the lack of sufficient time to elaborate the theme in a manner that was sophisticated enough to lead to a consensus.

4.4 Visioning infrastructure networks and flows

Infrastructure networks have always been at the centre of discussions on transnational cooperation. The reason is obvious: traditional networks such as rail and road systems cross national boundaries. So national governments are forced to negotiate about, among other things, trajectories and the sharing of costs when a new road or rail line has to be constructed, or inland waterways have to be built or maintained. Borders are however breaking points in many ways: first, because road and rail networks are mainly national networks, only interconnected at a limited number of locations and routes. The interconnection of railroad systems is seriously hindered by different technical regimes in terms of overhead power and safety and other systems. The construction of HST systems is a leap forward in this respect, although the European HST system is basically formed by at least four national systems: the French, German, Italian, and Spanish systems.

When it comes to the construction of cross-border connections, infrastructure often forms a *casus belli* at the diplomatic level, since negotiations are seldom easy. There is a clear tendency, for instance, for a national government to prefer a trajectory that is either the shortest, or the least environmentally damaging when seen from the perspective of the country in question. The bilateral negotiations on the HST connection between the Randstad

and the Flemish Diamond are an obvious example of this practice. A final solution came within reach through combining various bilateral issues in one single package. Because bilateral negotiations of infrastructure construction take place on the national level, public authorities and other stakeholders on local and regional levels are sidelined, although the important consequences and side effects are felt precisely at this level (Romein, Trip & De Vries, 2003; De Vries & Priemus, 2003).

Throughout the past few years infrastructure has became a centrepiece of European integration, not just for the reasons above, but even more so when the provision of infrastructure came to been seen as vitally important within the concept of Europe as a level playing field (Hajer, 2000). The European Spatial Development Perspective has chosen 'parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge' as one of its three central aims. Returning to the issue of conceptualisation and framing, we see maps of Europe depicting the spatial structure of the continent as a system of networks and nodes. This returns in the NWE Spatial Vision. Worthy of note is the indication of numerous corridors and axes that should be strengthened and the designation of various polycentric urban regions as 'counterweight global gateways and economic centres'. The Flemish Diamond in combination with the Lille-Kortrijk regions is designated as such, as are the West Midlands combined with Merseyside and Leeds and Sheffield. Although this pattern could be linked to the assumption that the provision of adequate infrastructure is a precondition for economic development, which in itself is questionable, attention is focused on the pattern of infrastructure in North West Europe in general and the internal and external accessibility of (polynuclear) urban regions. An important feature of this pattern is the grouping and concentration of infrastructure in mega-corridors, especially in the heavily urbanised area referred to in the Spatial Vision as the Central Zone. Here the provision of, or access to infrastructure is not the most important policy issue, but rather congestion and the lack of connectivity between the various infrastructure modes. There is a clear tendency for some mega-corridors gradually to become multimodal. This applies in particular to the corridors between the Randstad and Rhein-Ruhr and the Randstad and the Flemish Diamond. Multimodality within a corridor does not necessarily mean that there will be multimodal transport. This is only possible when there is connectivity between the various modes, so that there are nodes where changes between modes are possible. This matter is obviously a case for transnational cooperation, since haulage companies simply look at patterns of origins and destinations and ignore national boundaries. This attitude contrasts sharply with that of public authorities on the other hand, important stakeholders where the construction of multimodal nodes is concerned. In terms of competition between regions and countries, a national border is often of crucial importance. So there is much

to be achieved: the pattern of infrastructure lines and multimodal nodes and platforms should fit neatly into the pattern of transport largely maintained by private sector companies.

Since mega-corridors connect the main (polynuclear) urban regions in NWE, their development and expansion form an obvious object for cross-border and transnational cooperation (see the various papers in Priemus & Zonneveld, 2003). Mega-corridors are not, however, just large bundles of infrastructure. There are signs that economic activities are locating in mega-corridors areas, for example in the sphere of influence of important transport nodes. In some cases even entire urban regions could transform themselves into transport regions, as happened with Venlo in the Netherlands and, on a larger scale, with Lille/Kortrijk. It is now becoming clear that the spatial structure of mega-corridors is turning out to be highly complex. This is even more the case since new infrastructure has been concentrated in the same fabric of corridors. A clear example is the networks of HST lines, which form an extremely important addition to the NWE networks in total. HST lines are also leading to radical alterations in terms of space and time at multiple levels of scale. The changes taking place in terms of the connections between the three continental polynuclear urban regions of the Randstad, the Flemish Diamond, and RheinRuhr are particularly important since these three regions will be joined together by one interconnected high quality rail system. Vast shifts in travel time could occur, involving sharp differences on the mega-corridor level. The time span per HST from Brussels to Lille, for example, has been reduced to just 35 minutes, while the internal accessibility of the Lille regions involves travel times which are often much longer. Some urban regions not connected with the new generation of railway lines could become 'outdistanced'. This could apply, for instance, to Glasgow/Edinburgh. Whether this is a real threat to the level of economic competitiveness remains to be seen, because the quality of external accessibility has to be judged against other, endogenous qualities.

A network approach in terms of infrastructure could bring new building blocks for improved policy making to the fore. Where many urban regions, for instance, are striving for accessibility through the air, implying the development or expansion of airports, the system of HST lines can be put forward as a potential alternative to some categories of air transport. However, the spatial pattern of airports is avoided as an object for discussion in NWE. The present location of many airports could often be explained by historical coincidences. Airports have been growing, resulting in a mainport position for a limited number of them. In many cases the interconnectivity between an airport and the railway system is sub-optimal. Relocation is often not considered, because of the vast costs involved and the fact that economic clusters

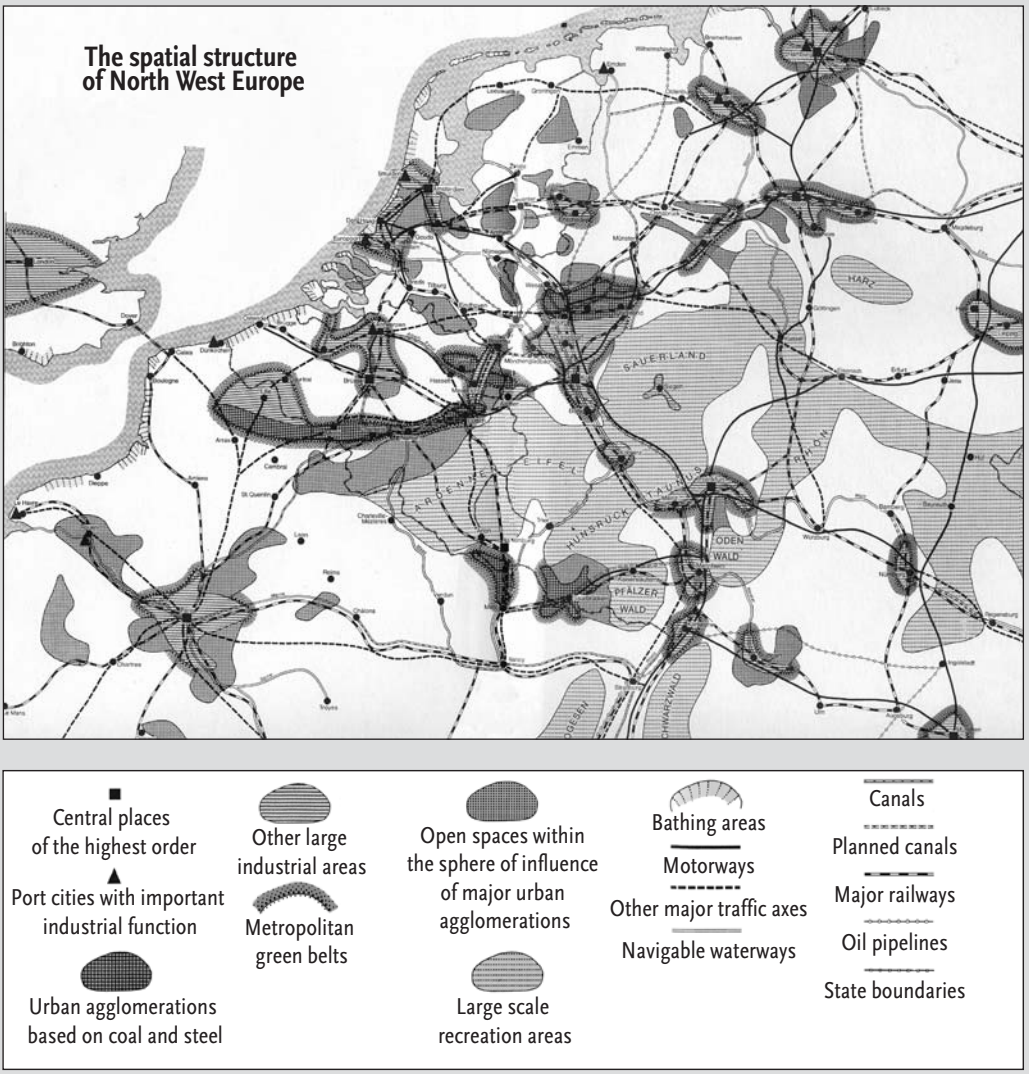
have developed in airport regions. Where there is a need for new airport capacity (runways, terminals) there is the potential to rethink the spatial pattern of airports (here the discussion of the new Paris airport comes to mind). Such rethinking is often not considered however, because competition between countries and national flag carriers gives rise to purely national policy approaches. A transnational perspective on infrastructure networks would, in theory, bring to the fore solutions to issues that would differ from the (likely) outcome of a mere national perspective.

The networks of infrastructure encompass more than such traditional line infrastructure as rail, roads, and waterways. The speed at which ICT networks have been developed in recent years is a clear example of the vast changes that can occur on the level of networks of infrastructure. The basic structure, once put in place, could well be durable over time. If we look at the map of Europe, at the pattern of Internet nodes and data streams on the European continent and between Europe and (especially) North America, there is an undeniable impression of hierarchy here, presumably conflicting with the ESDP goal of polycentricity. Only a limited number of cities could be labelled as an Internet node, the largest in Europe being London and – on the continent – Amsterdam. The main node in Germany is Frankfurt, which means the position of RheinRuhr is minor, as is also the case for Central Scotland, or the largest polynuclear region in Britain, the West Midlands. This limitation might indicate a comparative disadvantage of polynuclear regions that could only be offset by 'softer' characteristics such as the socio-cultural characteristics of a particular city; such considerations explain to a large extent the important position of a city like Amsterdam.

4.5 Visioning urban networks

There is a clear distinction between current and past conceptualisations of the urban structure of NWE. The planners of the late 1950s and 1960s, whom we have met several times in the previous analysis, concentrated overwhelmingly on the course of urbanisation, on the spread of urban functions over ever-larger areas. They were very apprehensive about this development, fearing a loss of the open areas that provide opportunities for leisure in the open air. They also presumed that city dwellers would feel uncomfortable living in vast cities. So they advocated a contained form of urbanisation: cities and urban regions would have to be surrounded and 'veined' with green open spaces. Although the concept of the megalopolis was used to describe the future situation, the North West European megacity was thought to be formed by numerous free standing 'urban villages'. These ideas, focusing on an urban pattern, were in many cases accompanied by assumptions with

Figure 4.4 A spatial planners' image of the desired urban structure of North West Europe developed in the sixties, based on a dichotomy between urban and rural areas



Source: Ley, 1967

respect to activity patterns, with city dwellers living in spatially confined daily urban systems as they would be called by modern geographers. Many plans made in this period pay witness to these premises, especially the plans and schemes drawn up for the urban regions growing most rapidly within a country, in most cases the capital region (see for instance Bosma & Hellinga, 1997). The various functions distinguished can be reduced to a simple dichotomy between urban and non-urban functions. These ideas and concepts were projected on the NWE scale, for instance in several maps produced by senior civil servants meeting together in the 1960s in the context of the CRONWE (see Figure 4.4).

Since spatial planning and other forms of strategic planning on the national level have become more preoccupied with the competitive position of cities and urban regions with respect to each other – from the late 1980s to the present – the meaning of the concept of urban networks has changed dramatically, although the fear for urban sprawl has remained. Conceptualisation is not so much of the actual or desired building pattern, but of the competitive power of cities and regional city networks, often using a highly abstract language of symbols (for a sample, see Waterhout, 2002). The most famous image is that which became known as the Blue Banana. This image has been used by many people, especially on the political level, either to claim that a region is within the economic core area of Europe, or, in contrast, lies outside with disastrous consequences if, through government investment programmes, the competitive position were not improved. On the European level the concept of polycentricity has been introduced as both the outcome of a discussion on the characteristics of the large scale European urban and economic network and the wish to overcome simple centre-periphery schemes – such as the blue banana – that have proven to be counterproductive in discussion of the stance of the European Union. The 'fruity' image used here is a bunch of grapes (Kunzmann & Wegener 1991). The concept of polycentricity, or a European network of cities and global economic integration zones, can disguise the fact that an urban hierarchy does indeed exist in Europe. There is clearly a 'champion league of Eurocities', as Kunzmann (1996, p. 146) calls it. Moreover, the relative position of cities only changes very gradually over time.[11]

The Vision Diagram of the Spatial Vision (see Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2) clearly tries to balance the emergence of strong, competitive cities and (polynuclear) urban regions, while others function on a lower level of competitiveness. Here we see spatial planning struggling with the idea of geographical position, because this is a main entry for drawing distinctions. Cities and (urban) regions having a central position in either Europe or just NWE have better chances than cities and (urban) regions having, in this way of framing, a more remote position, such as Central Scotland. The counter strategy is deceptively simple, basically entailing a plea for altering the time-space of NWE through an improvement in the connections between, for example, Central Scotland and the 'Central Zone'. From the point of view of spatial planning, including infrastructure planning, such a choice seems obvious, because the construction and improvement of infrastructure is within the control span of these

11 See for instance Pumain, Saint-Julien, Guérios, Hall, Davoudi and Stead (2000) 'Review of comparative studies on the networks of European towns and cities', Annex 1 to the *Typology of cities and urban-rural relationships – summary report*, as published on a CD Rom attached to Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, 2001.

policy domains. But there seems to be a great division between the knowledge base of this strand of spatial planning and that of modern regional and urban economics where, for instance, the qualities of the general *milieu* are emphasised and, in particular, the innovative powers (Porter, 2001) or the organising capacity of metropolitan regions (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1997b; Keating, 2001). The question arises whether spatial planning should become less spatial on the conceptual as well as on the instrumental level.

There is another factor complicating the concept of urban networks, also in relation to the polynuclear urban regions that are at the centre of the EURBANET project. The concept of polynuclear urban regions as interpreted in this project advocates the level of the urban networks of the Randstad, Flemish Diamond, RheinRuhr, and Central Scotland as a relevant level of policy making, which is new in one case (Central Scotland), or relatively new in another (Flemish Diamond), and in the cases of the Randstad and RheinRuhr certainly not new, but becoming more urgent as the result of the growing spatial coherence on these levels. That having been said, caution is called for not to emphasise a particular level of scale too strongly. The concept of urban networks is without scales. It does indeed cover the full range, stretching from the level of a single (large) urban agglomeration, with an internal structure that in many instances is becoming polynuclear, to the system of cities and urban regions on the global level, interacting in physical or in virtual space. The concept of polynuclear urban regions stresses the fact that many functional relationships maintained formerly on the level of a city with its (sub)urban satellites are now scaled up to the level of areas with a radius stretching to a hundred kilometres or so. That does not mean that proximity is as important as it used to be, but that it is now on this larger level of scale. In many instances the importance of proximity has entirely evaporated, for instance in the case of companies reorganising their activities, including in- and outsourcing, making use of the competitive advantages of regions and nations on a continental, or even the global level. But in other instances economies of agglomeration are still present, or have even been intensified, especially where face to face contacts are necessary, or where the urban surroundings provide, as Michael Porter (2001) puts it, positive externalities like, for instance, ready access to local institutions. Also, the nature of the 'space of place' is emphasised in relation to the 'space of flows' (for an interesting case study see Albrechts and Coppens 2003). Such a 'meeting' of the global and the local level is often referred to, somewhat grotesquely, as glocalisation (Swyngedouw, 1997). This does not mean that a particular scale, more specifically that the scale of the urban networks of the EURBANET project, has become less relevant, but that an awareness of relationships breaking out of the perimeters of these networks is absolutely necessary.
On another level of thinking, the concept of urban networks stands for the

entire pattern of urban functions. In large parts of NWE this means that one also has to look at (former) rural areas, since in many ways the classic distinction between rural and urban areas and rural and urban functions has become obsolete (see for instance Stead & Davoudi 2002). Consequently, the challenge for spatial planning and planners is tremendous, since planning culture in almost all the countries of NWE is imbued with this distinction. But societal changes have led, amongst other things, to an enormous differentiation in the characteristics of place and space. Morphologically, functionally, and culturally it is increasingly difficult to draw a clear distinction between urban and rural areas, so the relevance of these two spatial categories ceases to exist.

In spatial planning on the other hand, the distinction between urban and rural areas is maintained in contrasting built and vacant land, urban and non-urbanised land. But even then difficulties remain unresolved, since large parts of NWE, even outside the urbanised areas, are densely populated. Since a high density of population goes hand in hand with built artefacts, the 'rural' areas situated between the urban networks of RheinRuhr-Randstad-Flemish-Diamond (plus the Lille-Kortijk-Tournaix area and the old Walloon industrial axis) and between the Southeast, the West Midlands, and Merseyside do undeniably have urban characteristics. Here large areas have the characteristics of a 'thinly populated city' (Frieling, 1997). Classic policy concepts such as greenbelts, buffer zones, and Green Hearts form a sort of final foothold in the ongoing struggle to contain urbanisation. The success of these concepts is not unequivocal, since development often crops up at other, unexpected locations. So the challenge here is to transcend traditional approaches and search for new amalgamations between urbanity and rurality (Hidding, Needham & Wisserhof, 1998). One may, for instance, explore the potentials of infrastructure, in particular of high quality nodes, in the search for a re-agglomeration of urban functions. Instead of accepting urban sprawl, or fighting against it with blunt instruments, using updated but in fact classic zoning regulations, a more effective policy might consist of attracting urban activities to highly accessible, multimodal nodes in infrastructure systems. This approach could lead to new urban centres that could be labelled internal edge cities (Hall, 2001) such as the South Axis of Amsterdam, an area the attraction of which stems from its location relatively close to both the city centre and the international hub of Schiphol, plus excellent accessibility resulting from a motorway location and a growing supply of mass transit. In other instances the new urban node has to be accepted as well beyond the perimeter of the built-up area, but highly accessible with various transport modes. To suppress urban sprawl, a stepped up polynuclearity seems a promising strategy.

4.6 Towards improved network interaction

Taking a network perspective implies a search for the various ways in which spaces and places are interconnected with each other. A portfolio of policy issues can clearly be attached to all three categories of networks presented and discussed in this chapter. On top of that, we are interested in the ways in which the various networks interact with each other and how the polynuclear urban regions that are the object of the EURBANET project are positioned within these networks.
To return to the network interaction, we have identified a host of – potential – conflicts. Many issues involve conflicts between natural networks on the one hand and the infrastructure and urban networks on the other, because the latter two networks have been superimposed on the former. Particularly in the more heavily urbanised parts of NWE we see, for instance, the fragmentation of nature and scenic areas. This fragmentation holds even more strongly for polynuclear urban regions where the urbanisation pattern has already been historically dispersed. 'Blue' networks have emerged in recent years as extremely relevant, because their characteristics have been denied in the past. For example, extensive building has been taking place in areas where there are serious flood risks. As we have pointed out, the three continental polynuclear urban regions are partially located in river basins, or even in delta areas ('Delta Networks'); this is true for the Randstad or 'Delta Metropolis' in particular.

In general a new, more prudent interaction between natural networks and infrastructure and urban networks is called for. That is not to say that the separation of the networks is the obvious and proper course of action. Since many areas in NWE are heavily urbanised, this would hardly be feasible. So there is a need here to find examples of good practice where the development of one network can profit from the development of other networks. It has, for instance always been assumed that the extension of port areas always takes place to the detriment of nature; indeed, in many instances this has been the case. But it would seem that the extension of Rotterdam Mainport into the North Sea (the plan to realise a Second 'Maasvlakte') could benefit the ecological values of the coastal area, providing that new wetlands and dune areas are 'constructed' that would be a net addition to the ecological values of the region. In many cases these win-win situations, as they are often described, do not come without financial costs, as is the case with the Rotterdam Maasvlakte. Not only will a new harbour area be built into the sea, but also vast nature areas, a 'compensation' partially related to the EU habitat directive. The main challenge here is probably not finding additional funds, but rather the bringing together of various flows of money at the appropriate time slots and the accompanying setting up of cooperation in complex networks of public and private actors, each having their own goals and value

sets. Superimposing physical networks on each other, as this strand of policies can be described, makes the construction of soft networks necessary. This improved network interaction necessitates leaving behind traditional conceptualisations of space and urban form. This step is particularly urgent in dealing with the complex interaction between urbanisation, infrastructure development, and natural networks. Traditionally, planning strives for a containment of urbanisation in clearly delimited cities and urban areas and the separation of 'red' functions from 'green' functions. As has been argued, such a simple dichotomy is no longer valid. Friedmann (2001, p. 123) lists the bewildering set of multiple collective needs of a modern large city: 'They include urban satellites (such as New Towns and Edge Cities), reservoirs, water and sewage treatment plants, solid waste disposal facilities, oil and chemical complexes, electric power plants, open recreational spaces and amusements parks, wetlands, intensive agriculture, horticulture and small livestock production, airports and harbours, industrial and warehousing districts, wholesale markets, tourist attractions, historical landmarks, and more besides. All these elements can usually be found within a radius of forty to sixty miles from the central city.' In the case of polynuclear urban regions we could add that the majority of these elements can be found in the areas between the cities making up such a region. The resulting fragmentation is at a level that in principle is much higher than for regions in which large monocentric cities are located. In Dutch planning discussions, the high level of fragmentation of Dutch urban areas led to the poignant metaphor of the 'carpet metropolis' proposed by the Dutch architect Neutelings, who claims that the Randstad is a metropolis characterised by a juxtaposition of different activities, apparently without any order. The implications of such a development for planning and policy is not yet fully understood and is difficult to make clear, in particular because even today, planning the answer is still sought in traditional policy measures aiming at a separation between urban and rural functions. We advocated above some sort of deliberate, guided form of polynuclearisation, involving, for instance, the development of new urban centres or zones, located on high quality, multimodal nodes in the transport system. This approach could be just one element of a new urban-rural relationship. Particularly in North West Europe, where there are so many smaller and larger polynuclear urban regions and where traditional monocentric cities like London are becoming embedded in a polynuclear megalopolis, the concept of an urban-rural relationship is a highly urgent topic needing to be explored extensively in urban and planning research. The subject has rightfully been chosen as one of the main themes of the ESPON 2006 programme carried out under the umbrella of the INTERREG III initiative.[12]

12 ESPON: European Spatial Planning Observation Network.

Exploring the interaction between the three types of networks, as in this section, makes it opportune to pose the question whether some sort of novel spatial structure is emerging beyond the level of scale of the (four) individual polynuclear urban regions. For several reasons, speaking in terms of a network of polynuclear urban regions formed by RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond, and the Randstad makes sense. We would like to call this area the Urban Delta. Not only is the proximity of these urban networks very high; the interconnecting infrastructure networks have a very high density that is mainly the result of the high overall population density. Also, within a range of about 150 kilometres, a 'string' of harbours is located, two of which are of mainport size, serving a large hinterland and implying large flows of goods moving through the three urban networks. Common planning tasks in the Urban Delta are obviously related to transport management and infrastructure building. Main policy issues can therefore be identified on the level of infrastructure networks. First, there is the issue of infrastructure planning where governments have to deal with the construction of cross-border infrastructure lines. Second, there is the issue of transport flow management. Third, there are the related issues of multimodality, referring to the creation of a supply of various sorts of infrastructure and means of transport, and interconnectivity, referring to the physical connections between different modes of transport. The issues related to the level of infrastructure networks probably form the most important motive for cooperation on the level of the Urban Delta. But the interference between the three types of networks is also an obvious case for cooperation. Because both the infrastructure networks and the urban networks are so dense, pressure on natural networks is increasing.

Here, moving beyond the scale of individual polynuclear regions and transcending national borders can lead to new insights facilitating the finding of the right policies. Coastal areas of the Netherlands and Flanders, for instance, can be conceptualised as a public domain of a wide area that is already partially recognised for wetlands such as the Wadden. But the North Sea Coast is also of extreme importance in terms of leisure, comparable in this respect with the Alps, for instance. Commencing from the notion of the public domain, whether ecological, or in terms of landscape, or potential for leisure, other areas also become more prominent. The Ardennes, for instance, are of great importance for Dutch holidaymakers; a scenic area of this size cannot be found in the Netherlands. And the lake areas of the Dutch province of Friesland are of great importance for German water sports enthusiasts, since such an area cannot be found in Germany. The list can easily be extended.

The above comments are not to say that the Urban Delta is some sort of set of daily or weekly activity systems for its inhabitants, or that those are what

should be aimed for. Moreover, the actual coherence within the Urban Delta is not uniformly spread. Using transport flows and the density of cross-border infrastructure networks as indicators, the coherence between the Randstad and RheinRuhr and the Flemish Diamond and the Randstad is seen to be much greater than for the Flemish Diamond-RheinRuhr. But there is an additional argument in favour of the concept of the Urban Delta; it is one of the prime economic core areas in Europe. This position should be cherished, as Dieleman and Faludi (1998) for instance plead. That the strengthening of the business environment makes it necessary to transcend traditional local boundaries and cooperate is gradually becoming recognised. This is one of the reasons that makes the notion of a polynuclear urban region relevant for policy-making. Decision-makers of global enterprises do not look at individual cities, particularly not in the early stages of decision making on the location of branches. The scope is much wider, taking in macro regions at an early stage of locational decision-making. There are several reasons that make the Urban Delta such a macro region. These include population weight, the relatively close distances between the individual polynuclear regions, the high density of infrastructure networks, and the general internal and external accessibility, not forgetting the many non-spatial factors that play a part in locational decision making. An obvious weak point of the Urban Delta is its governmental fragmentation, since we are dealing not only with divisions on the level of local government, but also with national borders. To bring the concept of the Urban Delta to the fore does not mean that we advocate elaborate forms of cooperation on the transnational level, while it is obvious that cooperation on the sublevel of the individual polynuclear urban regions is weakly developed or completely absent. What we do recommend is a further enquiry into the relevance of an Urban Delta approach and the construction of a portfolio of policy issues that could be dealt with on this level.

What we are discussing here is the positioning of an individual polynuclear urban region in a wider setting guided by the question of whether new (key) policy issues present themselves that cannot properly be dealt with on a lower level, which is in fact the rationale underlying the concept of the polynuclear level. With respect to Central Scotland, the issues concern the position *vis-à-vis* other British metropolitan areas or the position in relation to the continent. Accessibility is clearly the main issue here, involving such indicators as the pattern of origins and destinations, impedance, constraints, barriers, transport mode, and spatial scale, as is pointed out in the Study Programme on European Spatial Planning (SPESP, 2001, p. 69). Relevant issues include the dominance of London in the transport systems and the fact that many relationships involving the physical transport of passengers or goods have to pass through the London area. This does not mean that the competitive position of Central Scotland is highly dependent on its physical accessi-

bility from the continent, as the Spatial Vision on North West Europe suggests by emphasising the barrier function of the capital regions so strongly. Positioning an area in a wider context could also lead to the comparison of characteristics of the region in question with spatial and non-spatial characteristics of other regions, for instance through benchmarking. The relevant regions for Central Scotland might not even be situated within NWE. One could also focus on regions that share some of the basic locational characteristics ('remoteness', or 'peripherality').

To conclude, we return to the subject of visioning. We have emphasised the political character of developing a spatial vision of a specific territory. An indication of this is the discordant art of mapmaking. In a process such as the compilation of the European Spatial Development Perspective, mapmaking was sometimes referred to as a technical task (Faludi, Zonneveld & Waterhout, 2000, p. 122). To consider visualisation in this way is equivalent to adopting an ostrich attitude. More importantly, this attitude blurs ways of dealing with the fact that maps are nothing less than social constructions. When we add to this our analysis that an area like North West Europe is a complex networked space, visioning and visualising planning concepts through maps seem a daunting task. The latest trends of internationalisation and globalisation of culture and the economy, going hand in hand with the ICT-revolution, make mapping extremely difficult, with natural networks relatively easy to map so it seems and urban networks well-nigh impossible. Retreating to such simple dichotomies as a differentiation between urban and rural areas might give the impression that it is still possible to visualise planning goals. But since this distinction has been replaced by a much more complex, fragmented reality, even this is an illusion. The only way to deal with this situation is by considering visioning and visualising as it is, a complex social and political process that might lead to unifying concepts and images, (Faludi, 1999) and more often than not in just one single step, even if such a step is as long as the process that ultimately lead to the Spatial Vision of NWE. Instead of striving for just one single vision of an area like NWE, for which no common planning culture, let alone a common planning subject exists, the aim should be to develop an array of visions and images, each unveiling a 'reality,' or a desired future. By combining and confronting these visions and images it would be possible to detect and scrutinise conflicting issues instead of concealing them under a seemingly consensual spatial image. This multiple visioning could be put into practice by assembling different coalitions of key stakeholders according to a principle referred to by Teisman (1997) as creative competition. The complex reality of North West Europe as a networked space can only be framed from certain angles. Perhaps after (thorough) discussion a single image might rise to the surface, but in a non-institutionalised region like NWE this is not something we desperately have to seek.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have followed various trajectories of spatial visioning above the scale of the four individual polynuclear urban regions investigated in this book. The increasing spatial relationships between the three continental polynuclear urban regions make this spatial visioning particularly important. This chapter makes it clear how difficult it is to conceptualise, or construct a vision of the spatial structure of North West Europe. An important reason for this difficulty is that the exercise in spatial planning has been approached from the wrong direction, namely through a (desperate) search for consensual images. At the present time, spatial visioning at both the North West European and the entire EU level has come to a standstill. The current generation of community initiative programmes associated with transnational cooperation in the context of INTERREG IIIB puts a strong emphasis on implementation and concrete policy actions. Only in the programme for the Northwest Europe area is it explicitly stated that a new trajectory of vision making could be initiated. It is not yet clear whether this will indeed take place, or if so how. Elsewhere, in other transnational cooperation areas, little or nothing is happening in this area.

There is an important reason deserving mention for stimulating the practice of European and transnational vision formation: the effectiveness of in particular the European structure funds in terms of providing a contribution to the improvement of the competitive position of Europe could increase enormously if countries and (urban) regions had a better insight into the structures and qualities of areas and, on the basis of these insights, could arrive finally at a choice with respect to these structures and subspaces which should receive priority. We can identify this as the essence of European and transnational vision formation. The period behind us has shown that this type of vision formation is very difficult to get off the ground. Learning to think spatially at various scale levels, including the acquisition of an image of the relationships between these scale levels, becomes a core task of every policy directed to territorial cohesion, the new buzzword when it comes to the future orientation of the spatial planning at the transnational and European level.

5 Future trajectories for transnational cooperation

Evert Meijers, Bart Lambregts & Wil Zonneveld

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have produced two important starting points for transnational cooperation in spatial planning issues. In Chapter 3, the scope for learning between polynuclear urban regions was revealed by elucidating a number of key planning and institutional issues that the regions face and struggle with in common. In Chapter 4, an approach for visioning the spatial structure of North West Europe was proposed together with important implications for transnational cooperation. The aim of the present chapter is to take these two starting points for transnational collaboration one step further by presenting mechanisms that could be employed to bring actual forms of transnational cooperation within closer reach. First, we briefly sketch the context in which we are operating and pay attention to some guiding principles. Next, in section 5.3, outlines for putting into operation a network aimed at learning between polynuclear urban regions are presented. Section 5.4 takes further the issue of transnational cooperation at the North West Europe level.

5.2 Transnational cooperation in North West Europe

Cross-border and transnational cooperation in spatial planning is not something imaginary; it already occurs. At the highest level (that is, pan European Union), the ESDP and related activities such as the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) provide important examples. But also at lower levels, the European integration process has functioned as an important catalyst for cross-border and transnational initiatives. In North West Europe one may find some comprehensive transnational arrangements between countries (the Benelux and the NDCRO [13], for example) as well as a large number of cross-border cooperative endeavours and networks between local and regional actors. The latter can be divided into a number of categories, including the 'Euregions' and the 'cross-border urban networks'. Examples of the

13 The Benelux, through its Special Commission for Spatial Planning (BCRO, founded in 1969), was responsible for producing the first official transnational spatial planning document voluntarily developed by several sovereign states: the *Benelux Structural Outline* (1986). A draft of a follow-up, the *Second Benelux Structural Outline*, was issued in 1996. See Mastop *et al.* (1995) and De Vries (2002) for details. The NDCRO stands for the Dutch-German Commission for Spatial Planning.

latter in the area between the Randstad, RheinRuhr, and the Flemish Diamond include the networks of MHAL and ANKE and the Rhine-Scheldt Delta project. In addition, transnational cooperation between a variety of local and regional actors in North West Europe and the Urban Delta in particular was given an extra boost by the Community Initiatives INTERREG IIC/IIIB. Yet another type of international cooperation (or better perhaps: exchange) takes place through various kinds of pan-European city-networks. 'METREX' and 'Eurocities' are two of the better-known examples (see also section 5.3).

The road to cross-border and transnational collaboration in spatial planning is full of pitfalls and dangerous bends. The initiatives that have successfully been developed into effective and sustainable forms of cooperation are relatively few; many remain rather hollow constructions. Several studies have been carried out in the past few years to establish a better understanding of the factors determining the success or failure of such projects (Mastop *et al*., 1995; Sotarauta, 2001; Reymen *et al*., 2001; De Vries, 2002, for example). Several factors seem to bear an almost 'universal' validity. They include the critical importance of there being a joint perception of a need, problem, challenge, or potential gain that cannot be addressed or capitalised on within the conditions set by the existing administrative structures; the existence of some degree of correspondence between the policy agenda of the transnational cooperative network and the policy agendas of the individual members of this network; the presence of mutual awareness among the participants of each other's different traditions, competencies, communication habits, and so forth, and the organisation and design of the cooperation in a way that ensures that concrete results will be obtained in due course. We use these success factors loosely as a set of guiding principles in the next two sections where we unfold our ideas on transnational cooperation between polynuclear urban regions and across North West Europe.

5.3 A learning network of polynuclear urban regions

5.3.1 Why a learning network of polynuclear urban regions?

A polynuclear urban region, as a relatively new spatial construct, poses important challenges to planning authorities. In their present form, polynuclear urban regions have only appeared on drawing boards quite recently and planners and policy makers in several such regions are now struggling to give content to the concept and find ways of using it as a framework for the development of new spatial policies and the steering of new processes of institu-

tionalisation. Thinking in terms of polynuclear urban regions implies, among other things, defining new types of relationships among cities and between urban and rural spheres, communicating with and taking into account the interests of new sets of actors, becoming aware of new (regionally defined) potentialities with respect to competitiveness and the quality of life, and so forth. In this process, the exchange of ideas and experiences with peers from other polynuclear urban regions might proof valuable.

Encouraging learning between polynuclear urban regions amounts to encouraging the development of a system of relationships between polynuclear urban regions through which learning can take place. Such polynuclear urban regions are typically not adjoining in spatial terms, which invites us to describe such a system of relationships as a network-like arrangement, with the links primarily serving to facilitate the exchange of information between the nodes (that is, the polynuclear urban regions). While the network's main objective should be to facilitate and stimulate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and experience in various fields and between various actors, a secondary function could be to engage in (North West) European spatial development discourses. Rather than an innocent pastime, this strategy may well turn out to be a necessity should (North West) European spatial development perspectives or visions play a more important part in the distribution of European funds. The latter message is among those recorded in the 'Consultation report on the Vision Document' (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001), although it is fair to say that such use of transnational visions is not likely to take place in the near future: there is no consensus on the content of the NWE Spatial Vision and only a rather limited group of stakeholders had access to the visioning process (Zonneveld 2002, 2003).

The development of a network of polynuclear urban regions fits within a more general trend of European cities organising themselves into networks, for instance the Eurocities and METREX networks. Eurocities is primarily occupied with convincing the EU institutions that promoting urban affairs is more than worthwhile, but in addition, it stimulates and facilitates the exchange of expertise on urban issues among its members. In the METREX network, the emphasis is on spatial planning and the exchange of knowledge on strategic metropolitan planning issues and development. In principal, both networks might offer opportunities for polynuclear urban regions to form a subcommittee or expert group on polynuclear urban regions. METREX, for instance, offers membership to cities or groups of cities and their surrounding regions or areas and has previously shown interest in polynuclear urban development. However, while joining the METREX network would offer the advantage of connecting to a network infrastructure that is already in place, setting up a separate network of polynuclear urban regions would offer

better opportunities for developing an approach more tailored to the aims discussed above.

5.3.2 Activities: benchmarking and monitoring

There should be a close relationship between the *raison d'être* of a network and the type of activities organised in its name. If the main objective is to encourage learning between polynuclear urban regions, a network's primary focus in terms of activities should be on the exchange of expertise with regard to the different typical aspects, challenges, and possible responses related to spatial planning and governance in polynuclear urban regions. Such ambitions could, for example, be materialised through setting up projects aimed at the collection and comparison of good and bad practices in specific fields and/or through benchmarking. The latter can be described as an open method of coordination. It is increasingly receiving attention in the EU, because benchmarking is not oriented to setting up binding arrangements, which is the usual purpose of much European decision making (see Hodson & Maher, 2001 for instance). Within such projects, efforts could, for example, be directed at comparing the nature and severity of specific problems, the objectives and contents of spatial policies, the implementation of such policies and/or the effects of policies. In order to bring the agenda of the network into line with those of the members as much as possible (to retain the interest of members), the three key issues formulated in the EURBANET project – internal and external accessibility, unequal economic development, spatial diversity – provide interesting points of departure for such activities. In addition, the subject of regional governance is relevant to all polynuclear urban regions in the EURBANET project. Benchmarking would require the identification of an ideal polynuclear urban region that on the one hand poses quite a challenge, but on the other might form an interesting experiment of ideas. Other concrete activities that could be undertaken by the network include the monitoring of spatial developments (for example, complementary to and/or in coordination with the activities to be initiated under the umbrella of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network) and the identification of opportunities for setting up concrete projects under European programmes (for example, the INTERREG IIIB Initiative or the European Framework programmes). The establishment of a practice of learning between polynuclear urban regions might function as an overture for polynuclear urban regions gaining some degree of 'self-understanding' and 'self-awareness,' which in turn could enable them to play a more active and influential part in European and North West European spatial planning debates and processes.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the more strategic the operations of the network become, the more important becomes the quality and strength

of the relationships between the network partners. If politics enters the network, aspects such as trust, transparency and coordination between interests become essential. The quality of personal ties will then make a difference. Building such relationships is not easy and needs time. Having frequent meetings in the phase that the network dedicates primarily to learning (as a relatively neutral activity) might contribute to the construction of a solid base for such relationships.

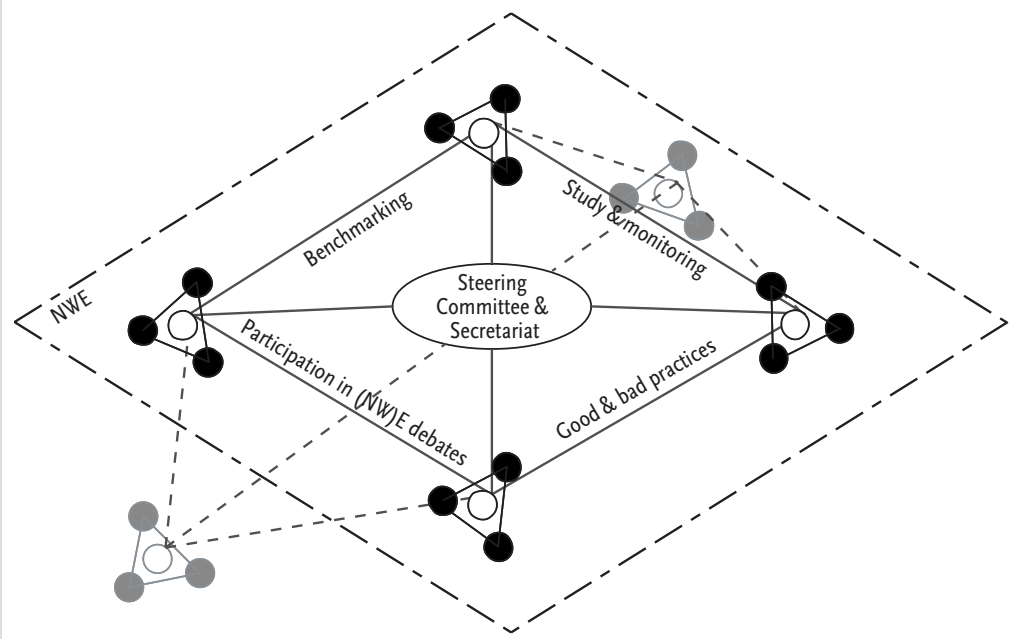
5.3.3 Organisational structure: membership, management and practicalities

Membership of a network of polynuclear urban regions should in principle be open to all local and regional stakeholders (public and private) who are willing to participate in a discussion of the potentialities associated with 'a regional approach'. The network should not necessarily be confined to the polynuclear urban regions included in the EURBANET project. It makes sense to try to interest actors from the polynuclear urban regions in North West Europe as a start, but enlargement with other polynuclear urban regions in Europe should be welcomed, especially regions located in the accession countries where the regional level of government is on the whole weak, or (virtually) absent (note that North West Europe itself, in its definition as an INTERREG cooperation area, is a rather arbitrarily delineated territorial entity the borders of which are far from stable). Even polynuclear urban regions from outside Europe could provide an interesting contribution to the network. Criteria for admission to the network could be formulated and included in, for example, a 'memorandum of understanding'.

While membership of the network is in principle open to all public and private stakeholders in polynuclear urban regions that identify themselves with the network's objectives, some actors could be charged with a special role. These should probably be the (public) actors who represent the individual polynuclear urban region best. Such actors (one from each region, for example) could be invited (or at least warmly encouraged) to take a seat in something approaching a 'steering committee'. This could form an efficiently sized executive committee for the network. Typical activities of the steering committee could include:

- considering and determining applications for membership;
- setting out a broad programme of activities, initiatives, and projects for the forthcoming period, for consideration by all the members of the network and, thereafter, monitoring of the implementation of the approved programme;
- organising meetings of the network;
- monitoring developments at the European level, identifying chances for

Figure 5.1 Schematic presentation of a network of polynuclear urban regions aimed at learning (black: the four Eurbanet regions; grey: possible other urban networks)



funding and coordinating action to obtain funding for projects, as well as safeguarding the position of polynuclear urban regions in European policies.

Rotating the presidency of the steering committee between its members might promote commitment among them. The establishment of a small secretariat to support the activities of the steering committee and to manage communication in the network could be very convenient. To ensure the continuity of the network, this secretariat should preferably have a permanent status. The members of the network should provide the secretariat with funds or manpower (possibly through INTERREG III). The staff of the secretariat could be partly fixed and partly flexible, with the flexible part nominated by the president of the steering committee of the time. By having the network's meetings in alternating polynuclear urban regions, the commitment of members would be promoted (organising parties would feel responsible) and specific learning effects could be exploited (through fieldtrips, for example). While the steering committee should be responsible for the general design of the network's meeting schedule, the organisation of individual meetings could be left to one or more stakeholders from the hosting polynuclear urban region. These meetings would be basically plenary, but, depending on the themes dealt with, members of the network would be able to send delegates if they so wished. Figure 5.1 summarises the above.

5.3.4 Initiating a network of polynuclear urban regions

The development of a network for learning between polynuclear urban regions that takes for granted the assumption that such regions indeed exist and that the mere idea of a polynuclear region is a valuable spatial concept. The presence of policy-relevant actors who are able and willing to represent 'their' region and rally round the idea of their regions being better off if certain issues are dealt with from a regional perspective is also assumed. The problem is, of course, that currently such actors are rather thin on the ground. The Randstad, home to an informal alliance of local stakeholders (the Delta Metropolis Association) and a more formal 'Administrative Commission for the Randstad' that is supported by an executive office (the 'Bureau for the Randstad Region'), is perhaps best equipped in this respect. For the other regions to prepare for participation in a network as discussed above, a major task lies in mobilising actors from local, regional and possibly national organisations who are prepared to consider seriously the thought that 'their' region might be more than a loose bundle of cities and settlements. The existence of a strongly developed practice of intra-regional cooperation would not seem essential for setting up an inter-regional network (although matters might be made easier). For a start, if there were a group of actors seeing the possible advantage of such an initiative (including one or two really distinctive actors who were capable of stirring enthusiasm in other actors) and a premium in the form of, for example, INTERREG III financial support might just suffice. The initiative itself (that is, the setting up of a network of polynuclear urban regions) could then in turn provide a stimulus for strengthening intra-regional relationships and possibly cooperation. This process, however, would need some time.

5.4 Strengthening transnational cooperation in spatial planning in North West Europe

5.4.1 Defining the need

The arguments for cross-border transnational cooperation in spatial planning in North West Europe need hardly be repeated. The enormous social and economic dynamics and the high density of (transnational) network relationships in the area pose great challenges to planning authorities. An increasing number of issues with a spatial dimension exceed the scale of individual regions and even nations, as interdependencies between regions and nations in North West Europe (but also beyond) increase in strength and differentiate in nature (see also CEC, 1994; ibid., 1996; NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2000; Doucet, 2002).

Cross-border and transnational spatial issues are being addressed today, but many of them remain untouched. Addressing issues generally seems to happen on a more or less *ad hoc* basis, sometimes under the umbrella of a Community policy programme or framework (the Trans European Networks programme, for example), and often by coalitions that are typically issue-oriented. It would seem that the issues dealt with are often relatively well defined in terms of subject matter, goal and final result (the planning and construction of cross-border infrastructure, for example). This, however, does not mean that solutions are always easily achieved. Cases can rapidly become more complicated if one of the parties involved does not see how it can gain by the intended project. A cooperation process then easily turns into a negotiation process into which other issues can also be dragged as a means of exchange. Not surprisingly, complex issues, notably those without clearly visible (short-term) gains for all parties involved (win-win issues), are often left untouched.

The expectation that transnational spatial planning issues will continue to rise to the surface on an increasingly frequent basis renders the potential benefits of more enduring frameworks for transnational cooperation ever more obvious. Several frameworks for discussing and dealing with cross-border and transnational spatial issues are already in place in Europe. They range from cross-border urban networks and Euregions at the lowest levels, via bilateral or trilateral agreements between countries, to INTERREG cooperation zones (North West Europe, for example) and the European Union as a whole (for example, the present Spatial and Urban Development Committee, successor to the Committee on Spatial Development which prepared the ESDP).[14]
New ideas for other frameworks are launched from time to time. Recently, for example, the Dutch national government announced its ambition to establish a 'Transnational Administrative Consultation forum' (*Transnationaal Bestuurlijk Overleg*) for the development of joint spatial action programmes for transnational issues (VROM, 2001, p. 267). The Netherlands, the German *Länder* of Niedersachsen and Nordrhein-Westphalen, the Belgian Regions, Luxemburg, and the Nord/Pas de Calais region are the envisaged partners in this forum, so a territory encompassing what is referred to here as the Urban Delta (see chapter 4 in particular). For the design of the transnational consultation process, several options are being considered including bilateral consultations, joint consultations, or a combination of both (De Haan, 2001).

14 SUD is officially a sub-committee of the Management Committee for Development and Conversion of the Regions (CDCR). One of its main tasks at present is elaborating and defining the principle of territorial cohesion.

The question is whether there is a need for yet another territorially defined framework for cooperation. On the one hand the answer could be in the affirmative. Only in a few cases does the territorial reach of existing frameworks seem to match the spatial scope of the issues in need of a response. Pan European frameworks seem to be too wide and involve too many participants and interests to function as an effective basis for organising transnational cooperation on spatial issues that occur on lower scales. At the other end of the range, the various cross-border frameworks for collaboration in North West Europe are generally defined too narrowly in spatial terms to be capable of acting as adequate platforms for dealing with truly transnational spatial planning issues. For example, the reach of a relatively large cross-border cooperative body such as the Rhine-Scheldt-Delta, which incorporates the ports of both Antwerp and Rotterdam, does not suffice to address such a major, almost by definition transnational issue as the quality and expansion of the ports' hinterland connections. The intermediate level, finally, is occupied by the 'programme areas' defined as part of the Commission's initiatives aimed at promoting transnational cooperation (INTERREG), of which NWE is one. There is however an element of arbitrariness in defining the boundaries of such programme, or cooperation areas. Most of the current INTERREG (IIIB) programme areas are based on simple, classical geographical notions such as 'sea' (North Sea Region). In addition, these (INTERREG IIIB) areas have become so large and internally so diverse ('Little Europes') that it is not obvious what the clear-cut cases for cooperation are. A more issue-oriented, thematic approach, commencing from much smaller cooperation areas (but larger than the classic cross-border cooperation areas) could be an alternative should there be an INTERREG IV programme for the period after 2006.

In response to a call for yet another territorially defined framework for cooperation, we may refer to the observation that contemporary conditions call for arrangements that facilitate cooperation across spatial scales and administrative tiers rather than *at* a specific spatial scale or tier. The many transnational spatial issues calling for attention in North West Europe occur over different spatial scales and affect different segments of society and space. The actual need therefore would seem to be for a transnational framework for cooperation in which actors from different administrative tiers were enabled to deal with transnational spatial issues occurring on a variety of spatial scales in a more effective and sustainable manner than is possible today. For efficiency reasons, the most obvious option would be to let this framework coincide with the scale of North West Europe as a whole, connecting it to the 'infrastructure' established under the INTERREG IIC/IIIB Initiatives. It should, however, also allow full play for smaller coalitions to deal with specific issues, or cover specific areas, and even encourage such coalitions to be created: a thematic, sub-space approach, focusing on specific areas. One can

Table 5.1 Examples of concrete activities

	Scope	
Scale	**Thematic**	**Comprehensive**
North West Europe	■ North West Europe's High Speed Train Network	■ 'Spatial Development Perspective' for North West Europe
Sub North West Europe	■ Hinterland connections ports of Antwerp/ Rotterdam/Amsterdam	■ 'Spatial Development Perspective' for the 'Urban Delta'

think of the Central Zone, one of the NWE Spatial Vision zones, or indeed of the Urban Delta.

5.4.2 Activities: spatial analysis, scenario analysis, vision making, and dealing with key issues

The overall objective of the transnational framework should be to enable actors in North West Europe to respond better to the transnational spatial planning issues and challenges confronting the area. To meet this objective, the framework should facilitate the identification of key transnational spatial issues, stimulate discussion about these issues among relevant actors, and encourage these actors to take action, for example, through jointly establishing concrete research or policy-oriented projects.

The activities developed within the framework fall into two categories: activities of a more permanent nature aimed at the analysis/monitoring of spatial trends and developments across the North West European territory; alternatively, more concrete activities that address specific, clearly defined transnational spatial key issues and projects. The latter may include issues or projects that concern either the entire North West European territory (for example, making a spatial vision or development perspective for North West Europe), or only parts thereof. Similarly, they may be comprehensive in scope, or may just address a specific theme (see Table 5.1).

The permanent activities aimed at the monitoring and analysis of spatial trends and developments across North West Europe may be extended with a future-oriented dimension in the shape of scenario analysis and visioning. Such an analysis could be made from time to time, once every two or four years for example. It could be an excellent means of stimulating thinking and discussion on transnational spatial development and the need for coordination policies as problems and challenges that are only looming on the horizon at present become painfully clear, should trends be extrapolated ten or twenty years ahead. The same kind of analysis may also be used to obtain insight into the possible/probable effects of specific policies and so facilitate the making of spatial visions or spatial development perspectives. Such visions or perspectives, in turn, should perhaps be focused more strongly than currently is the case on the identification of cross-border and transnational spatial issues that call for some kind of response (strategic or concrete, comprehensive or thematic). The 'layered network' approach to conceptuali-

sation as presented in Chapter 4 may be used as a source of inspiration. In this way, such a vision or perspective could serve as the basis for prompting specific sets of actors to engage in some kind of coordinated action or cooperation project. In a similar fashion, such a document could function as a framework for transnational decision-making and the distribution of European funds. It could, for example, provide the criteria for the selection of projects under future INTERREG initiatives. The current spatial vision document could function as a starting point or frame of reference. It should however be stressed that currently there are many interpretations of the existing spatial structure of North West Europe. It would therefore make sense to scrutinise and compare these interpretations before any vision were to function as a point of reference in such operational decision making as deciding on applications for INTERREG subsidies for instance. At the present stage of (European and) transnational cooperation, an approach like multiple visioning as described in the previous chapter could be advocated.

5.4.3 Organisation

What would a North West European framework for the promotion of cross-border and transnational cooperation in spatial development look like? As argued above, the framework should enable cooperation on spatial planning across spatial scales and administrative tiers while at the same time hosting both concrete projects and long-term programmes such as multiple visioning. With regard to the legal competencies, we do not envisage the creation of a new, fully equipped administrative layer. We prefer to propose a framework that would help bring representatives of different administrative tiers, backgrounds, and countries together to meet, discuss, develop knowledge, and encourage or initiate cooperation projects. Actual decision-making competencies should remain with the national and regional authorities or, where applicable, their subsidiaries.

As noted above, the most obvious choice is to connect to the infrastructure that has been established to manage and monitor the NWMA/NWE programmes executed under the INTERREG initiative. Its mission largely complies with the objectives developed above. This infrastructure includes, in addition to a secretariat and a network of National Contact Points, a Steering Committee and a Monitoring Committee made up of representatives of the national and regional authorities of the North West European member states. By way of these committees, a considerable fraction of the intended participants in the transnational platform would already have a meeting forum at its disposal. Moreover, one of the Steering Committee's responsibilities is the development of a Spatial Vision for North West Europe and related studies (NWE International Working Party, p. 69). The Monitoring Committee is

responsible for decisions on any follow-up activities to the NWE Spatial Vision under the INTERREG IIIB programme and the consideration of the results of any such work for the programme (ibid., p. 68). To date (mid 2003), no concrete decision has been taken. There seems to be a stalemate with respect to the approach to be followed in relation to visioning.

While providing a forum for transnational actors, these committees are not specifically equipped for achieving the objectives or executing/initiating the activities described. Currently, their tasks and responsibilities are limited to managing and monitoring the implementation of an INTERREG programme. A necessary step would be to expand their tasks and responsibilities in order to equip them for setting up broader studies – visioning, identifying transnational spatial issues – and for encouraging cooperation in the field. Depending on the progress made with regard to its creation, important synergies could possibly be achieved if a connection were established with the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON). Advantage could be taken of the network of 'European Contact Points' established for the purpose of ESPON 2006 programme. Although this programme only started fairly recently (2002), it may be possible to make use of the experience of the contact points of the North West European countries. The activities carried out under ESPON correspond well with the spatial analysis and monitoring activities proposed for North West Europe in the previous section.

As was also recorded in the consultation round that was organised as part of the NWE Spatial Vision project (NWE Spatial Vision Group, 2001), local and regional administrative units need to be better represented in the NWE Steering and Monitoring Committees. However, to avoid unrestrained expansion of the number of actors having a vote in all kinds of processes, such administrative units would perhaps be better represented by their national or regional umbrella organisations. One can also think of trajectories below the level of North West Europe, as was suggested in the spatial vision consultation round. This step could very well be combined with future visioning exercises.

Another step could be the strengthening of the political dimension. The engagement of politicians is of crucial importance for the framework and whether the studies and initiatives evolving from it are to be taken seriously in the constituent member states and regions. Currently, the staff of the Steering and Monitoring Committees of the NWE are civil servants, but the idea seems worth considering of establishing a supplemental committee as a meeting and possibly decision-making platform for leading politicians in North West Europe (the ministers for spatial planning of the respective member states and regions, for example). This suggestion is more or less in line with ideas currently embraced by the Dutch Ministry for Spatial Planning,

described as a 'Transnational Administration Consultation Forum', discussed in section 5.4.1.

Finally, and logically, the NWE secretariat should be extended in order for it to be capable of supporting the widened range of activities adequately, not only in terms of staff, but possibly also in terms of the mandate. A thought provoking idea is that of a development trajectory from the secretariat, via an executive office, to a North West European spatial planning office.

5.5 Conclusion

The arguments for cross-border transnational cooperation in spatial planning in North West Europe no longer need to be defended. While certain cross-border and transnational spatial issues are indeed being addressed today, more complex issues, notably those without clearly visible (short-term) gains for all parties involved, are often neglected. The expectation that transnational spatial planning issues will continue to rise to the surface on an increasingly frequent basis renders the potential benefits of more enduring frameworks for transnational cooperation ever more evident. The question is whether there is a need for yet another territorially defined framework for cooperation. On the one hand the answer might be affirmative. The territorial reach of existing frameworks (mostly of cross-border and pan-European scope) seems only in a few cases to match the spatial scope of the issues asking for a response. On the other hand, however, it must be accepted that the transnational spatial issues calling for attention in North West Europe occur over different spatial scales. Contemporary conditions seem therefore to call for a framework that facilitates cooperation across spatial scales and administrative tiers rather than at a specific spatial scale or tier. For efficiency reasons, the most obvious option is to let this framework coincide with the scale of North West Europe as a whole, connecting it to the 'organisational infrastructure' that has been established under the INTERREG IIC/IIIB Initiatives. It should, however, also allow full play for smaller coalitions to tackle specific issues or cover specific areas and even encourage the creation of such coalitions – both under the umbrella of the INTERREG/NWE programme(s) and beyond.

The overall objective of the transnational framework should be to enable actors in North West Europe to respond better to transnational spatial planning issues and challenges confronting the area. To meet this objective, the framework should minimally facilitate the identification of key transnational spatial issues, stimulate discussion about these issues among relevant actors, and encourage these actors to take action, for example, through jointly establishing concrete research projects, policy programmes and/or investment

strategies. The activities that could be developed in such a way fall into two categories: activities of a more permanent nature (programmes) aimed at the analysis/monitoring of spatial trends and developments across the North West European territory; and alternatively, activities that are more concrete (projects), addressing specific, clearly defined transnational spatial key issues and spatial planning projects.

The permanent activities aimed at the monitoring and analysis of spatial trends and developments across North West Europe may be extended with a future-oriented dimension in the shape of scenario-analysis and visioning. Problems and challenges that are only looming on the horizon at present may become painfully clear if trends are extrapolated ten or twenty years ahead. The same kinds of analysis may also be used to obtain insight into the (possible/probable) effects of specific policies and, as such, be helpful in the making of spatial visions or spatial development perspectives. The process of vision making itself could be made more creative if a more flexible attitude were to be adopted to the objective of capturing the (proposed) spatial reality of North West Europe in a single vision. The present INTERREG IIIB programme emphasises projects leading to tangible results. This is a sensible approach, especially because the previous programme could have shown a better track record in this respect. Nevertheless, the fact should not be overlooked that spatial planning also serves other goals, including the provision of interpretative frameworks, of spatial structures, or spatial developments. The effect of planning in this case must then be sought mainly in changes in the reference framework of actors. One of the most crucial changes concerns the way in which actors and the area for which they stand position themselves spatially. But that is no simple task on a scale level that goes above that of a country: "The capacity to conceptualise or think about one's location or situation within the spatial structure of Europe as a whole is a skill which often needs to be developed. Spatial positioning is the term [...] for this skill." (Williams 1996: 97). Improving such a skill among stakeholders in the spatial development of North West Europe is also a tangible result of transnational cooperation, albeit without the usual connotations with immediate changes in the physical world.

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This third volume on the EURBANET project focuses on the 'building blocks' for transnational planning in North West Europe. This research which looks at the different aspects of polynuclear urban regions in a North West European context shows the crucial importance of putting spatial issues in a wider perspective and seeking connections between different spatial scales. The first building block is a synthesis of the regional case studies carried out in the Randstad, RheinRuhr, the Flemish Diamond and Central Scotland. The message is that the polycentric urban regions examined still have a long way to go before they can come up to the high expectations articulated in the most recent generation of transnational spatial planning documents, and that there is considerable scope for learning between the regions. The second building block deals with visioning at the transnational spatial scale. This contains a thorough discussion of the difficulties involved in vision making at this scale and outlines of a network-oriented approach. The third building block deals with the possibilities to give shape to specific forms of cooperation in order to tackle policy issues relevant for polycentric urban regions.
The EURBANET Reports 1 and 2 have been published in Housing and Urban Policy Studies volume 18 and 25.

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ISBN 90-407-2462-8
9 789040 724626

OTB RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING, URBAN AND MOBILITY STUDIES
DELFT UNIVERSITY PRESS