European Spatial Planning: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract

Three stages have been identified in the development of the EU: the launch era; the doldrums era and the renaissance/boom era. Presently though, the EU is in a crisis. These stages serve as a framework for discussing the past, present and future for European spatial planning. Thus, during the launch era there were unsuccessful attempts to make spatial planning/regional policy part of the embryonic European project. During the doldrums era, such initiatives as were taken were channeled through the Council of Europe, leading to the adoption of the Torrelominos Charter on Spatial/Regional Planning, paralleled by continuing but fruitless efforts by the European Parliament to put regional policy on the agenda of the Community. Since the start of the renaissance/boom era, spatial planning has been an, albeit controversial part of the emergent cohesion policy of the European Union. The controversy concerned whether the Union should have a competence in the matter, or whether European spatial planning should be a matter for inter-governmental coordination. There was consensus, however, on the need for what was called a 'spatial planning approach' as formulated in the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999). Once the Lisbon Treaty covering territorial cohesion alongside with economic and social cohesion will be ratified, the competence issue will be settled, but uncertainty concerning the form which EU territorial cohesion policy will take continues. This relates to the future of cohesion policy undergoing fundamental review with a view to the period after 2013, being part of the sole searching which the EU is going through. Will cohesion policy be retained and, if so, what will the role of territorial cohesion policy in a revamped cohesion policy be? Will it barely be tolerated, as is the case now, or will territorial cohesion be, as it potentially might, a mainstay of future cohesion policy, providing it with a solid rationale? Naturally, the answer depends among others on the Commissioner for Regional Policy and his/her standing, but also on the future of the Union as such, etc., etc. However, the answer also depends on whether fundamental issues can be resolved. This requires academic reflection regarding: the nature of the EU in relation to its constituent parts, the nation-states; and the nature of space/territory and the role of spatial planning in the emergent context of the shifting target which is what the European project is.

Invoking European spatial planning as a term may seem disingenuous. In the context of the European Union (EU) the talk is presently of territorial cohesion policy. Spatial planning is said not to be a competence of the EU. However, the spatial planning that the EU wants no part of is statutory land-use planning, a function of a level of government with the formal competence to curtail initiatives contravening the public interest as embodied in a statutory land-use plan.

The meaning of words is not cast in stone but depends on who is using them when and why. Thus, whereas the EU presently has reasons – to be discussed – not to invoke the term spatial planning, the present author does have them: His peers in the profession entertain a broader view of what it entails, one that is compatible with the EU's concept of territorial cohesion. It is the view of spatial planning as formulating integrated strategic spatial frameworks to guide public as well as private action. This puts spatial planning more in the context of governance than government, a context where mutual understanding and commitment are as important as statutory powers. Seen in this light, there could be no objection against calling the emergent EU practice European spatial planning.

In fact, speaking to the ministers of spatial planning discussing the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) at Madrid in 1995, the then Commissioner for regional policy, Monika Wulf-Mathies, did use the term, arguing that this was implied in EU policy to strengthen economic and social ***cohesion*****.** This merely needed to be clarified in the pending reform of the European treaties. It was only after the refusal of member states as the masters of the treaties to do so that the Commission switched to invoking the concept of territorial cohesion.

The point of reminding the reader of this episode has not been to prove all those who now prefer to talk about territorial cohesion rather than spatial planning wrong. There is no right or wrong in such matters. The use of words depends on context and on intentions. The Commission's intention has been not break out of the impass concering a Community competence for spatial planning by shifting into the arena of cohesion policy. The author's intention is to retain the link with spatial planning and the relevant academic literature. That's all there is to it.

There is much discussion about what territorial cohesion is. Many see it as an umbrella concept. Balanced development, competitiveness, sustainability and good territorial governance are the chief elements. The first three are shared concerns. Territorial governance is the unique selling point of territorial cohesion policy. The focus is on what in EU jargon is called the ***coherence*** of sector policies as they affect territories: territorial cohesion requires such policies to be integrated. Such integration is, of course, the aim also of spatial planning. Wulf-Mathies talked about European spatial planning in precisely this sense, and so did the ESDP. (CEC 1999) One may thus say that under the guise of EU territorial cohesion policy European spatial planning is coming of age, but in the process the leopard has changed its spots: It no longer relies on statutory land-use plans. The preferred mode is ***cooperation*** in

formulating strategies or visions of various kinds. The purpose and mode of European spatial planning/territorial cohesion policy are thus encapsulated in three 'Cs': *cohesion, coherence, cooperation*. With its emphasis on cooperation rather than authoritative decision-making, territorial cohesion policy belongs to the realm of governance rather than government.

Before discussing this, it is useful to dwell on the difference as against land-use planning. Traditionally, the spatial planners' vehicle for achieving coherence has been the land-use plan. In the mid-20th centurty, the Schuster Report in the UK spelled out the assumptions:

> (1) that for nearly all its activities the community depends on land and that land in Britain is severely limited in relation to the demand made on it, and
>
> (2) that the location of development, particularly industrial, can have a profound effect on social, economic and strategic issues. (Committee on the Qualification of Planners 1950, 13)

Schuster continued by saying that, in preparing and implementing the statutory plan, local planning authorities needed to conform to the government's emergent regional policy, as well as pay regard to their own social, economic and strategic policies. (Op. cit., 15) He did not see this as a matter of design, as the setting out a fixed pattern of physical features. Rather, the "process of arranging a pattern for communities must be continuous and constantly adapted to changing conditions." (Op. cit., 20) The essence was to arrive at a synthesis – coherence!

The statutory land-use plan has lost its exclusive role. This relates to the rise to prominence of spatial planning in the UK. The term is Euro-English, meaning non-British concepts conveyed in English words (Williams 1996, 57). In the process, misunderstanding is ripe. Thus, spatial planning comes from the German *Raumplanung* and the Dutch *ruimtelijke planning*, but in both contexts it is associated with the preparation of statutory plans, so much so that planners there now prefer the term spatial development instead. As against this in the UK, where 'town and country planning' has been given a restrictive interpretation, spatial planning has acquired a progressive meaning. Indeed, referring to the RTPI's 'A New Vision for Planning' (RTPI 2001), Allmendinger and Haugthon (2008, 4) signal a "…shift from, broadly, regulatory planning to 'spatial planning'. While definitions of what constitutes spatial planning are diverse.... there is a broad agreement that it involves a focus on the qualities and management of space and place". Adding for good measure the element, mentioned above, of governance, these authors say: "With their clear focus on localities, planners arguably have a key role to play in bringing a clearer spatial dimension to the integration of a wide variety of policy sectors....". Many authors (Albrechts 2001; Albrechts, Healey, Kunzmann 2003; Healey 2007; Wiechmann 2008) see spatial visions as the vehicle for spatial planning.

One reason is the shift from government to governance. This stands for the state doing more than engaging in imperative coordination by developing "mechanisms and strategies of coordination adopted in the face of complex

reciprocal interdependence among operationally autonomous actors, organizations, and functional systems". (Jessop 2004, 52) To repeat, governance puts into focus the need for cooperation between a multitude of public and private actors. Planning has brought this into practice even before governance has become a term of good currency.

This paper traces the interplay between the pursuit of cohesion, coherence and cooperation in the European arena. The three stages identified in the development of the EU by Keeler (2005) serve as a framework: the launch era when the Treaty of Rome was coming into operation; the doldrums era after the 'empty chairs crisis' provoked by Charles De Gaulle bringing with it stagnation of integration, and the renaissance/boom era after the Single European Act until the Maastricht Treaty. Without saying so in so many words, Hooghe and Marks (2008) invoking Keeler add a fourth one: the present crisis of politicization and national boundary reconstruction. Jessop (2004, 68) relates it to the shift from the Keynesian welfare state to a Schumpeterian workforce post-national regime focusing on permanent innovation and subordinating social policy to the demands of the labour market. Policy making is shifting in all directions, in addition to which there is the shift to governance. The Europolity is thus an "integral moment in the de-nationalization of the state, the de-statization of politics, and the internationalization of regimes - without being the highest level to which national state powers are shifted upwards, at which new forms of partnership are being organized, or on which the internationalization of policy regimes is occurring."

Each of the four eras – launch era; the doldrums; boom era; crisis – will be discussed regarding the role of European spatial planning, followed by conclusions reflecting on fundamental issues. There is a hopeful perspective, too: Conceived as the formulation of spatial strategies, spatial planning can become a vehicle, not only for territorial cohesion, but for formulating EU policy generally. And, if so, interest in spatial planning is bound to increase.

I. The launch era

As indicated, this concerns the Treaty of Rome and its immediate follow-up. There were attempts to make spatial planning part of the embryonic European project. Already before the Second World War, albeit on a modest scale, planning conferences and exchanges had taken place. Planning in the US – metropolitan park systems and of course the Tennessee Valley Authority – and the UK – garden cities and later the green belt – had become sources of inspiration for Northwest European planners. Their vanguard had been contemplating spatial planning on the national and, in a few instances, even the international scale. Planners in the Third Reich, too, had been thinking big and, as pernicious war aims had seemed to come within reach, had been were swarming out to harness resources for an exploitative kind of European planning.

The war had brought much destruction and a newly conceived regional policy, also described as industrialization policy, became common. (Drevet 2008)

The European Coal and Steel Community was in fact an industrialization policy. Issues of urban growth management were expected to arise in the hotspots of coal and steel production, so planners wanted to be on board.

The Dutch were a major force in this. Industrialization policy in The Netherlands was not under their control, but managing urban growth in this densely populated corner of Europe was their province. So they wanted to coordinate industrial development, alongside with other sector policies, by means of an overall national spatial plan. In this respect, Dutch planners were still in the same tradition as the Schuster Report of regarding a statutory plan as the vehicle for achieving coherence. Dutch planners also positioned their urban agglomerations in their European context. With an eye on the Atlantic Seaboard of the US, they painted the scenario of a future megacity stretching from the Western Netherlands to the Ruhr Area and the Belgian urban agglomeration. Like in The Netherlands where the rapid development of the west of the country was a challenge, planners stipulated a technical planning imperative. There was an added incentive to do so: European institutions embracing planning could improve their standing nationally. It is safe to assume that what Dutch planners had in mind for this purpose was for these institutions formulating some form of, albeit broad plan for which a supra-national competence was required, but then, as the reader will learn, the Dutch planners concerned were Europ-federalists.

Now, in their budding international contacts, the small group of European planners from various countries discovered quickly that they were pursuing different planning ideas. As indicated, the Dutch and also the German planners saw a land-use plan, albeit on a large scale and thus fairly general in nature, as the vehicle for squaring the imperatives of economic development with the preservation of open space and of enhancing amenity. France pursued *aménagement du territoire*, the generative metaphor being that of “Paris and the French desert” (*Paris et le désert français*; Gravier 1947; see also Baudelle 2008). However, the French planning vehicle of choice was not a statutory plan. Rather, the Jacobin state funded projects designed to smooth out spatial imbalances directly. This difference is important in understanding European spatial planning where the French rather than the Dutch and German view – suitably modified to suit the context of France as the decentralized state that it has become since – prevails. With its French roots, European spatial planning as presently constituted under the territorial cohesion flag is not, and will not become, regulatory land-use planning.

There was no immediate need to sort out such differences. The emergent European planning community had to be held together. The European Economic Community (EEC) was in the process of being set up, and the Spaak Report, called after the Belgian foreign minister Paul-Henri Spaak, which laid the foundations of the Treaty of Rome, recommended setting up an investment fund to promote balanced development – the French view. Before then, the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community had already foreseen in such positive measures, co-financed by national governments, in regions where its policies would lead to the down-scaling of industry. As Husson (2002, 25) recounts, the High Authority had thus dealt

with industrial conversion in the Hainaut Region of Belgium decades before the European Community did.

The Spaak Report highlighted the need also for coordination between existing and future regional plans and those plans due to be developed by Common Market institutions (Pierret 1984, 32). In other words, from the word go two of the rationales for European spatial planning/territorial cohesion policy, balanced development and good territorial governance – cohesion and cooperation – were on the wish list, but this was certainly not a call for a statutory land-use plan.

Anyhow, the signatories of the Treaty of Rome went no further than declaring in the preamble that they were "[a]nxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions", and in Article 2 giving the EEC the task of "reducing the differences existing in various regions and by mitigating the backwardness of the less favoured" (EEC Treaty 1957) Under discretionary powers given to it, the Commission granted temporary relief to some regions from implementing measures to complete the, as it was then still called, Common Market (Pierret 1984, 32-34), but no positive measures were taken.

Spatial planners were largely absent in the debates leading to the Treaty of Rome. The only ones known to have expressed an interest were the Dutch. They proposed that the EEC should get involved in the kind of spatial planning that they were propagating for The Netherlands: drawing up an, albeit broad, plan with some kind of teeth. This was the result of personal initiative: One of the Dutch negotiators and co-signatory of the Treaty of Rome, Johannes Linthorst Homan, a member of the Eurpean Movement, had previously been chairman of the Dutch national planning commission. He was to be disappointed by the lack of attention to spatial planning.

II. In the doldrums

As far as European integration is concerned, the doldrums refers to the area of stagnation caused by the 'empty chairs crisis', to be discussed. Planning, too, was in a period of gestation in which in one form or another, Dutch national planners continued to explore options. They participated vigorously in a Conference of the Regions of North-West Europe which they themselves had helped setting up. Sponsored by national and regional planning establishments, this conference met regularly until the mid-1990s by which time most founding fathers had left the scene. In the 1960s, it did pioneering work, collecting data, mapping the European territory and formulating veritable transnational spatial planning proposals, with the Collège de l'Europe at Bruges sponsored by the European Movement providing support. Some of this found its way into Dutch national planning documents which, invoking data etc. provided by the permanent conference continued to position The Netherlands in its European context.

There were murmurings even of the need of a European planning agency, but of course to no avail. The Benelux Economic Union was more receptive to the idea of planning reaching beyond national boundaries, but it was to take until 1986 before it published its first Structural Outline Sketch – the first ever official transnational document it seems. Cross-border cooperation was another concern of the Benelux. In 1967, Germany and The Netherlands set up a joint planning commission which still continues to operate. There are other well-known examples of cross-border planning, like the Regio Basiliensis, a private intiative, and the Euregio straddling the Dutch and German border antedating cross-border and transnatonal planning under the Community initiative INTERREG.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Assembly – forerunner of the European Parliament – heard pleas for the EEC to engage in regional policy in 1961. It adopted a resolution, authored by a Dutch representative, the aim being to help less developed regions and also to arrive at a reasonable division of labour between the territories of the Community and to counteract the manifest tendency towards over-concentration in more or less all member states. One can read into this the rationales for, and preferred mode of European spatial planning: cohesion, coherence and coopertation.

The 1961 resolution also invited the Commission to organise a conference. Its First Vice-President, Robert Marjolin (a former close collaborator of Jean Monett) chaired this 'Conference on the Regional Economies', with Commission President Walter Hallstein giving an opening speech spelling out the rationale of a common regional policy in terms that sound remarkably modern. As Husson (2002) reports, there was even talk of asking the Commission to study the proposition of an *aménagement du territoire européen* – European spatial planning.

The rapporteur, Georges Pierret (1984, 36) from the Bretagne, recounts Marjolin as the second speaker having put his finger on the key issue: The highly developed core benefitting more from the Common Market than peripheral regions, an issue for the cohesion of Europe up until the present. Pierret describes the follow-up, the Commmission making proposals to the Council of Ministers in 1965. However, shortly before President Charles De Gaulle had instigated the 'policy of the empty chairs' causing the EEC to enter the doldrums. His aim was to counteract the Commission that in his eyes was arrogating to it rights of the member states. The Marjolin initiatie for the EEC to become active in the area of regional policy could not have come at a worse moment! In fact it seems to have contributed to neither Hallstein nor Marjolin receiving a second term. (Pierret 1984, 39) The 'empty chairs crisis' itself ended with the 'Luxembourg Compromise' giving member states a veto in all cases where a Council decision is purported to pose as threat to vital national interests. European integration became far less dynamic a process than its advocates had hoped for.

During this period, the Commission – always good for taking initiatives that would increase its sway over the member states – continued to study regional policy issues, forming even a directorate-general for this purpose.

Funding for European regional policy became available only in the mid-1970s De Gaulle had left the scene, opening the way for the United Kingdom, together with Denmark and Ireland to join the EEC in 1972. The UK could not profit from the Common Agricultural Policy in proportion to its contribution. It could do with assistance, though, for its declining industrial areas. So to compensate the UK, a regional policy of sorts, which Drevet (2008) mocks for being neither regional nor communautarian but a mere financial transfer to national governments to support whatever regional policy they wished to pursue was introduced. This restricted role of regional policy only changed when Jacques Delors introduced a programmatic approach, experimented with in the prior Integrated Mediterranean Programmes, and modelled on the evolving French regional policy, to be discussed below.

Meanwhile, the Council of Europe (CoE), set up in 1949, with the European Convention of Human Rights its most important achievement, offered an alternative avenue for European planners. Indeed, thinking about European planning shifted to this arena. Pointing to overconcentration of population and the resultant regional disparities, the CoE even passed a resolution in 1961 pointing at the spatial dimension of human rights. “Harmonious geographical development” – cohesion – was thus considered a task for European institutions. (Déjeant-Pons 2003) In 1964, the CoE set up a working party which published ‘Regional Planning a European Problem’ (CoE 1968). Importantly, regional planning as conceived by the working party was not restricted to any regional level of government. Rather, in this context region was a generic term referring to any kind of area. So regional planning stood for what presently is called spatial planning.

Set up jointly with the European Conference of Local Authorities, the working party provided a fully-fledged analysis of and programme for regional (spatial) planning in Europe – both on the level of individual states as well at the international level, from non-governmental cooperation to cooperation in international arenas, importantly including the arena of the EEC.

The report recounted also the failed attempt of the Commission, in pursuance of the initiative above by the Parliamentary Assembly, to get approval from the Council of Ministers for a form of regional policy. It also reported the establishment of a Regional Policy Directorate, initially merely to study regional issues, in the Commission. The main recommendation of the report was however directed at the Council of Europe itself. It pointed out the danger of the European continent being bifurcated:

> “Everybody is aware how serious it would be if co-operation in the field of regional planning, like co-operation in other fields, were to split Europe in two or be left to ‘Smaller Europe”. How could one leave out ‘strategically’ countries such as Switzerland, which ‘guards’ the Alpine passes, Austria, which is the crossloards of relations with Eastern European countries, Denmark, which links us with the Scandinavian countries, or indeed the United Kingdom at a time when the Channel tunnel is no longer a utopian dream.

> It would seem therefore that, in the present state of European co-operation, the Council of Europe might provide the framework – geographically the most appropriate – for a European Conference of Ministers responsible for regional planning." (CoE 1968, 88)

So the working party proposed, and the Council of Europe agreed, setting up this conference. The resolution even mentioned regional planning as an important field of inter-governmental co-operation, one of the "main axes of development of the European society of tomorrow", and one of the Council's four most important fields of action. (Op cit., 90)

The working party made no further recommendations as to the shape and operation of the proposed conference. Importantly, because of the nature of the Council of Europe which has no supra-national powers, regional planning was defined as an 'intergovernmental' task, one that the governments concerned should tackle jointly. This notion was to become important later when on German instigation the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), too, was defined in such terms.

Germany hosted the first meeting of this permanent conference in 1970. It became known by its French acronym as CEMAT (*Conférence Européenne des Ministres responsible à l'Aménagement du Territoire*). CEMAT produced numerous publications and a 'European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter', also known as the Torremolinos Charter (CoE 1984) and a series of publications thereafter, including the 'Guiding Principles for the Sustainable Development of the European Continent' (CoE 2000) generalizing the ESDP to relate to the whole of Europe rather than the EU15. The latter, however, relates to a different period to be discussed below.

The Torremolinos Charter was one of the high points in the development of European spatial planning during the period characterized here as the doldrums because of the lack of any real action. In the Charter, the ministers of the members of the Council of Europe identified common basic planning principles prepared by a 'Committee of senior officials'. These principles are: balanced social-economic development; quality of life; responsible management of nature and the environment and a rational use of land. Beyond this, the Charter underlines the right of citizens to participate and underscores the importance of horizontal and vertical coordination. Once again, one sees the themes of cohesion, coherence and cooperation reflected in the Charter. The ministers decided to have these principles translated into a European regional planning strategy.

Two CEMAT meetings further down the line, in 1988 at Lausanne, a draft written by an enthusiastic expert from Luxembourg did not even get a hearing, though. Meanwhile, due to cost-savings, the Council of Europe had curtailed the activities of CEMAT. In the margins of Lausanne, the Dutch and the French minister dedided to shift the discussion to the arena of the European Community, then undergoing its revival under Jacques Delors.

In parallel to CEMAT, the European Parliament, as the Parliamentary Assembly was called since its members had been directly elected, continued its lobby for planning. A major initiative came from a member from the Walloon Region of Belgium, P.H. Gendebien. His report (European Communities – European Parliament 1983) invited the European Commission "to implement an overall European regional planning policy which will give expression to the political determination to effectively administer and to preserve the territory of Europe as a common domain"**.** Once again, it is clear from the context that what is meant is a form of European spatial planning.

This proposed policy went beyond doling out support to disadvantaged regions. Three objectives were stipulated: coordination of existing Community measures; promoting balanced and integrated regional development; pursuing a proactive policy to guarantee the lasting survival of the European heritage. As will become evident, this is remarkably like the ESDP guidelines. It is also like what the Torremolinos Charter has said and thus represents the best thinking at the time.

Gendebien also set out the procedures to be followed and proposed the formation of a unit under the responsibility of one of the Commissioners. His report gave a comprehensive analysis of the rationale and the historical and legal context, on the way debunking the argument that the European Community did not possess a competence in the matter by pointing out that (a) regional and environmental policy were not explicitly mentioned in the Treaty of Rome either but had been set up, nevertheless, under its Article 232, and (b) that the Community already pursued a many-faceted de-facto regional planning policy which, however, needed to be rendered more transparent and effective.

In accepting the Gendebien Report, the European Parliament was mindful of the Torremolinos Charter. When the European Commission did not respond – the European Parliament had less clout than today – it passed two further resolutions. In a presentation to the Committee on Regional Policy and Regional Planning of the European Parliament in 1986, the chairman of CEMAT at the time who happened to be the Dutch planning minister advocated for both the European Community as well as the Council of Europe, each in its own area of responsibility, to engage in spatial planning.

As far as the European Community was concerned, this was still to no avail. This was why, as mentioned, at the CEMAT meeting at Lausanne, a new Dutch minister and his French counterpart decided to take yet another initiative which was to change the course of events. By that time, the Single European Act had become a fact.

III The boom era

At the end of the doldrums era, one can fairly say that a veritable European spatial planning programme existed. Coinciding with the two terms, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, of Jacques Delors as President of the European

Commission, the boom era inexorably raised the question of the role of this programme in relation to Community policies, in particular to cohesion policy under the Single European Act. The latter became serious business. After all, the 'cohesion countries' had made acceptance of the Single Market contingent upon a doubling of the Structural Funds and the addition of a Cohesion Fund. They had re-iterated what had already been a rationale for proposing European regional policy: the fact that countries in the core stood to benefit disproportionaltely from the Single Market and that they needed assistance in order to be able to compete. Spatial planning became an, albeit controversial part of cohesion polciy.

The controversy related to unresolved business. It was no accident that the Torremolinos Charter was called the 'European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter'. It combined the concern for balanced development with one for the rational use of land. This suggested that, as is the case in many countries, a land-use plan should be the vehicle for planning. As the reader knows, this was not, however, the idea behind French *aménagement du territoire*, which happened to be what the initiators of the next round of discussions had in mind when they raised the issue of European spatial planning. One cannot imagine for the participants on both sides to have been ill-informed about each other's way of thinking about planning. Nevertheless, neither side could break the mould of its own views.

Led by the Germans, the majority of the member states thus saw planning as a part of the sovereign control of nation-states over their territory. The French initiators, including French Commission officials, were after something else: an agreed strategic spatial framework for improving the governance of the Structural Funds. That framework might influence the management of funding programmes, but it would never take the form of a land-use plan of any description. Land-use planning could safely be left to the member states and their national authorities.

The first French initiative related to the regulations pertaining to same funds. The new regulations allowed the Commission to formulate the first spatial planning document of sorts pertaining to the EU12, as it then still was, called 'Europe 2000' (CEC 1991) followed by 'Europe 2000+' (CEC 1994). Meanwhile, the ministers of spatial planning and/or regional policy (designations and the allocation of powers differed, and continue to differ, as between member states) started their series of informal meetings with one at Nantes in 1989. (Faludi, Waterhout 2002) The purpose of the French hosts and their Dutch partners had been to lay the foundations for a Community policy proper. No dedicated formation of the Council of Ministers dealt with the Structural Funds, and so some may have seen this informal meeting as a forerunner of a regional planning council. Indeed, at some occasions, in 1993 and 1994, the informal ministerial meetings would style themselves as informal ministerial 'councils'. However, it never came to them becoming council formations proper. To this present day, the status of ministerial meetings remains an issue.

Returning to the first meeting at Nantes, the French planning agency DATAR had wanted to invoke spatial scenarios as a framework for improving European regional policy. (Faludi, Peryony 2001) The Italians organized a follow-up, and so did the Dutch in 1991. By that time the Germans had started their campaign for European spatial planning to be treated as a joint member state responsibility, the inter-governmental rationale as formulated previously by the Council of Europe. Thus, German planners wanted European spatial planning to evolve through voluntary co-operation, as with their own so-called 'Guidelines for Regional Policy' which were the joint product of the federal minister and the ministers of the German *Länder* responsible for planning. (Federal Ministry 1993)

This became the competence issue. Had the issue be framed as the formulation of a spatial strategy, or spatial scenarios, to underpin the delivery of the Structural Funds, it may not have arisen. However, once again the issue was framed in terms of control of land use, a sovereign right of nation-states.

That this should have been the case is something of a puzzle. Surely, it must have been clear to the planners of the member states involved that this sovereign right was not put into question by French-style initiatives of the Commission. Conceived as a matter of legal rights to self-determination, sovereignty remains a well-established principle, unimpaired by the EU. "The main unresolved issue pertains to the implications ... for autonomy in the sense of action possibilities – 'actual' independence or 'real' sovereignty....: [A]ll that is obvious is that the implications are contradictory and that internationalization [of which European integration is a part – AF] tends to deprive nation-states of some action possibilities while supplying them with others." (Goldmann 2001, 181) Clearly, EU cohesion policy nowhere affects sovereignty in the sense above, but in reality it circumscribes what member states can do, both through the conditionality of obtaining Structural Funds as well as through the link with EU competition policy. So the real purpose may have been to deprive the European Commission of the means to exercise its powers more effectively rather than any fear that the sovereign rights of member states might be impaired.

Be that as it may, from the moment the competence issue entered the scene, tension was ripe in the ESDP process. Whilst relying on technical assistance and administrative support from the Commission, the member states (some more than others) were guarding against a real or imagined Commission take-over. Having sustained the process until its final conclusion at Potsdam in 1999 (CEC 1999), the Commission called its support a day, re-framing the issue in terms of the pursuit of territorial cohesion. In Commission eyes the very concept of spatial planning had been tainted. Territorial cohesion avoids the connotations, never intended by the Commission officials concerned, of land-use regulation being intended. Rather, territorial cohesion policy seems a natural compliment to the well-established policy of the EU to foster economic and social cohesion.

Much has been made of the fact that the EU did not have a competence in matters of spatial planning. (For a comprehensive statement of German legal thinking in the matter at the time see Gatawis 2000) Whether this is true is open to doubt. Gendebien has already been quoted for pointing out that, making use of the catch-all Article 232 of the Treaty of Rome, EU regional and environmental policy had operated long before being enshrined in the Single European Act. However, there was no political will to do the same for spatial planning. There was consensus, however, on the need for what was called a 'spatial planning approach' as formulated in the ESDP: the pursuit of more coherence between sector policies as they were affecting space at various scales.

The ESDP made this point forcefully. It also articulated a set of basic principles, similar to what the Gendebien Report had proposed: the pursuit of polycentric development in Europe and urban-rural partnership; parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge throughout Europe; prudent management of the natural and cultural environment. On this basis, the ESDP formulated sixty policy options as a kind of menu for stimulating the ‘Europeanization’ of national, regional and local planning.

To the minds of the Commission officials concerned, spatial planning was implied in the Community competence to pursue economic and social cohesion, but after having, as reported at the outset, made this argument forcefully, but unsuccessfully, at the informal meeting of ministers held in Madrid in 1995, the Commission resigned itself to its role of hosting meetings and facilitating the completion of the ESDP, a process that took another four years.

Even though informal, the ESDP did have an, albeit diffuse influence. (Waterhout 2008) Among others, a transnational strand was added to the Community initiative INTERREG. Territorial cooperation at various cross-border and transnational scales became routine, so much so that tens of thousands of experts of various denominations are now involved in some form of ‘European’ project.

IV. Crisis

As indicated, merely assisting with the intergovernmental ESDP was not enough for an ambitious Commission. The concept of territorial, alongside with economic and social cohesion in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was designed to justify Community – and thus Commission – involvement. This was once again a French initiative designed in the first instance to counteract the liberalisation of public services considered essential to sustain the standard of living in thinly populated and de-populating French regions. The French Commissioner for regional policy at the time, Michel Barnier, turned this into the more comprehensive concept that it is now, and it became a stand-in for any European spatial planning for which the European Community was said to be lacking a competence. Importantly, reacting to the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy of making Europe the most competitive region globally, Barnier also factored competitiveness into the equation. In fact, the ESDP had already put polycentric development

forward as a way of enhancing the competitiveness of Europe, so this was no break with previous thinking.

This emphasis on competitiveness came in handy when the Sapir Report (Sapir et al. 2004) severely criticised cohesion policy. Barnier must also have been instrumental in including territorial cohesion in the Constitution which was eventually signed in Rome in October 2004. Its rejection by France and The Netherlands threw not just EU territorial cohesion policy, but the whole European project into disarray.

With the Lisbon Treaty in the process of replacing the Constitution, the competence issue as such may be settled – if at all – but cohesion policy is undergoing review, with the Commission pursuing territorial cohesion as one way of countering the imminent threat of its re-nationalization, a threat posed by net-contributors to the EU budget like the UK and the Netherlands wanting to do away with the 'pumping around of money' (net-contributors having to reclaim part of their contribution under Commission tutelage). Making the pursuit of competitiveness into one of its key concerns, the Commission responded by reorienting cohesion policy massively towards the Schumpeterian goals of the Lisbon Strategy. This is also reflected in EU territorial cohesion policy generally as laid out in the Commission's 'Green Paper' (CEC 2008), as well as in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (2007) of the member states. The Committee of the Regions, too, never gets tired of saying that regions and local communities have a vital role to play in realizing the Lisbon Strategy. So, in the guise of territorial cohesion, spatial planning could become a mainstay of cohesion policy.

Conclusions

If and when the Lisbon Treaty covering territorial cohesion alongside with economic and social cohesion will be ratified, the competence issue will be settled, but uncertainty concerning the form which EU territorial cohesion policy will take continues. This relates to the future of cohesion policy undergoing fundamental review with a view to the period after 2013, being part of the sole searching which the EU is going through. Will cohesion policy be retained and, if so, what will the role of territorial cohesion policy in a revamped cohesion policy be? Will it barely be tolerated, as is the case now, or will territorial cohesion indeed, as indicated it potentially might, become a mainstay of future cohesion policy, providing it with a solid rationale? Naturally, the answer depends among others on the Commissioner for Regional Policy and his/her standing – as from the end of 2009, there will be a new Commission - but also on the future of the Union as such, etc., etc.

One might even go further than just cohesion policy. In fact, the quest for more coherence of EU sector policies reaches beyond it. Potentially, as the Council of Europe working party has been quoted as saying, what it calls regional planning as an important field of inter-governmental co-operation could be one of the "main axes of development of the European society of tomorrow". In terms of the EU, cohesion policy could be a vehicle for co-ordinating the policies of the various directorates-general with territorial

impact. This is a tall order, especially in view of the notorious difficulties of coordination efforts at Brussels.

However, the adaptability and inventiveness of the Commission should not be underestimated. Asked by the European Council to formulate a Baltic Sea Strategy, it pulled its act together, with many directorates-general providing an input, with the Territorial Cooperation unit of DG Regio taking the lead. Already, there is talk of more of these regional strategies for the Danube River Basin, the Alpine Region and possibly also for the Mediterranean. So who knows, conceived as the formulation of macro-regional strategies, spatial planning will become a vehicle, not only for territorial cohesion, but for EU policy generally. And, if so, interest in spatial planning is bound to increase.

Such strategies are certain to represent examples of territorial governance beyond the divide between communautarian and member state competences. Indeed, planners need a dynamic understanding of EU governance, the role of space/territory in an integrating Europe, and the role of spatial planning in the context of the shifting target which is the European project. These are not problems that are unique to planning. In fact, experts of all kinds find it difficult to come to an agreement on them. However, there is a consensus emerging that one needs to surpass thinking in terms derived from the nation-state and, worse still, anachronistic ideas about how it should function, rather than how it functions under conditions of globalization. This also applies to the dreams of Euro-federalists about the formation, albeit in the long run, of a United States of Europe.

The unhelpful debate about whether the EU does, or should have, a spatial planning competence is but a reflection of the idea that control over territory is a defining characteristic of the nation-state and that relinquishing this control would undermine its sovereignty. This is patently untrue. Firstly, control over territory, including land use, is subject to many influences, including legal restrictions, coming from outside regimes. So, invoking the distinction above by Goldmann, in exercising their right to regulate land use, nation states and sub-national authorities are not autonomous. Secondly, a return to an idealized situation (if ever it existed) when nation states had control over their territory is patently impossible. In fact, what the very concept of governance stands for is the diffusion of control, and the need to cooperate across levels and sectors, with state authorities, as much as the institutions of the EU, nodal points in a complex network of relations. As Allmendinger and Haughton (2008) have shown, this diffusion is a defining characteristic, not just of European planning, but of spatial planning generally.

As the same authors argue, the role of space/territory in this context is also in need of re-conceptualisation. In fact, this is implied in the above. Although legally defined jurisdictions continue to be the object of statutory land-use planning, they are no longer (as the Schuster Report still assumed as being self-evident) the most relevant, let alone the exclusive reference frameworks for spatial planning. Rather, spatial planning relates to what, with a term speaking to the imagination, Allmendinger and Haughton call ‘soft’ spaces: configurations relevant to the real and shifting processes that are going on

and that become the object of formulating spatial visions or strategies. This is like Healey (2007) and Davoudi and Strange (2009) basing themselves on leading-edge geographers talking about relative rather than absolute space, relative space being the production of social constructions.

In fact, if one goes not by the legal definition but by the real reach of its influence and responsibility, the European Union as such it, too, is a 'soft' space: Beyond the territories of the twenty-seven members, there is the European Economic Area where EU law applies; there is Switzerland which is constantly negotiating its participation in the EU space; there are recognised and would-be candidates diligently trying to get ready for accepting EU law and in the process becoming part of EU space, or some aspects thereof; there is a Barcelona Space (so called after the city where it was created) around the Mediterranean; and there are multifarious other arrangements of a diffuse nature extending the reach of the EU north, south, east and west, and there is the highly differentiated global reach of the EU documented by Didelon, Grasland and Richard (2008).

It seems vitally important for planners to re-think what the planning of these 'soft' spaces involves. They need to rid themselves of their fixation on statutory plans relating, as they do, to strictly delimited sections of the surface of the globe. Of course, those parcels of land over which authorities exercise jurisdiction exist, and statutory planning will continue to play a role, but it is no longer of the essence of spatial planning. In fact, it increasingly becomes the province of litigating lawyers.

Beyond the statutory planning which will thus continue to exist, 'soft' spatial planning is the order of the day. However, traditional planning tools continue to be relevant, like spatial analysis and 'spatial positioning' (Williams 1996), which requires the formulation of spatial strategies or visions. The difference is that these are no longer exclusively visions for existing, 'hard' territories. Rather, there can and should be many spatial visions for many 'soft' spaces. In terms of Graham and Marvin (2001), there should be visions for the many spaces into which the environment is splintering. Naturally, such planning is a confusing prospect, but no more confusing than the splintering reality of Europe.

The above underlinges that what is needed is academic reflection regarding: the nature of the EU in relation to its constituent parts, the nation-states; and the nature of space/territory and the role of spatial planning in the emergent context of a shifting target – which is what the European project is.

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