Reinventing spatial planning in a borderless Europe: emergent themes

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Abstract
This paper is a follow-up to the Chicago Round Table ‘Emergent Research Themes on European Territorial Governance’ in 2008 questioning the view of EU territory as the sum of mutually exclusive territories under nation-state control and pointing out the existence of overlapping jurisdictions. Themes were: (1) the relationship between the EU and its members; (2) what space and territory means under Europeanisation; and (3) the role of spatial planning wedded to the idea of an integrated vision. This paper points out that rescaling and the emergence of ‘soft’ spaces beyond jurisdictional boundaries are general phenomena (Allmendinger, Haughton 2009), and so are the responses in terms of borderless strategic planning. This gives the concept of multi-level governance, originally developed in the EU context, more general relevance. It also relates to poststructuralist views of spatiality and territorialisation as seen from a relational perspective putting emphasis on fluidity, reflexivity, connectivity, multiplicity and polyvocality as documented by Davoudi and Strange (2009). This comes down to rethinking the role of strategic, as against statutory spatial planning, drawing on examples from EU (where it goes under the flag of territorial cohesion policy) and from various member states. So the paper comes in three parts: 1) Relational space and place and the search for meaningful spatial concepts, 2) Multi-level governance: the question of scale, 3) Strategic spatial planning. The conclusions give directions for future research.
1. Introduction

The implosion of the territorial order of modern government requires us fundamentally to rethink the basis of effective political intervention, and hence of policy making. (Hajer 2003: 183)

Ever since what is often described as the Westphalian state model became the norm, national borders have crucially determined our lives, identities and geographical reach. However, more often than not, borders sit uneasily with spatial structures, processes and the way in which we use territories. This may be nothing new, but globalisation and the rise of the network societies make this problem appear particularly acute. Indeed, the model of the ‘modern’ nation-state has come under pressure and with it our models of governance that are based on it. Post-war governance was for a variety of reasons “supported by the fact that political institutions, cultural adherences and societal processes converged on the level of the nation-state”. However, as Hajer (2003: 183) continues, “now that this territorial synchrony is broken, the classical modernist institutions lose the implicit support and assisting power of aligning socio-economic and cultural adherences.” If this is true for governance in general, then this is certainly true for spatial planning. Being about the optimal allocation of the resource space to various ‘functions’, classical spatial planning is thus prefigured upon the existence of a bounded space under the jurisdiction of an authority.

Are we talking about the demise of the nation-state? In common with various other commentators (e.g. Swyngedouw 2005, Brenner 1999, Hajer 2003), we suggest not. Policy interventions are still dependent on the institutions of the nation-state, and these form the main reference for governance-beyond-the-state arrangements (Swyngedouw 2005). However, both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of nation-state institutions are seriously constrained. The concept of a nation-state, even if it is multilayered, as a power to intervene in social processes is increasingly at odds with today’s geographies and socio-economic processes, which extend way beyond the borders of the nation-state and, in fact, any jurisdictional border. Social processes can no longer be characterised or easily be demarcated in geographical terms, let alone in borders. Many processes find their origin in local as well as global trends (and everything in between) and can hardly be dealt with at one particular geographical scale. As a result of multiple overlapping and conflicting processes taking place at various geographical scales, our societies have become fluid or splintered (Graham & Marvin 2001) and territories have become fragmented (Allmendinger & Haughton 2007). The idea of the nation-state having complete control over its territory may have to be consigned to history.

The rescaling of governance has been a common response to these socio-economic, cultural and geographical developments. Rescaling takes various directions: ‘downscaling’ of the state and ‘upscaling’ of municipalities. The powers of nation-states, too, are being shifted upwards to the European Union and other international organisations, as well as, to a lesser extent, to global NGO’s. A range of formal and informal arrangements exists to adjust to the larger scales at which socio-economic developments take place and are framed. At the urban-regional scale typical answers are municipal amalgamations and the creation of formal and informal platforms where municipalities meet and decide on a number of issues. Similarly, governance arrangements are being created, both with and without EU help, along national borders and at transnational level. As well as the ‘hollowing out’ of government (see for example Allmendinger & Tewdwr-
Jones 2000), we have also experienced the ‘filling in’ of government as new scales of governance have been created or strengthened (see for example Goodwin et al. 2005).

There has been a ‘restless search’ for the appropriate governance of place (Healey 2007: 171). Hooghe and Marks (2003) for example distinguish between two basic types or models of governance, which they label as Type I and Type II. The former consists of non-intersecting general-purpose territorial jurisdictions arranged in a hierarchical way (as in federal systems), while the latter views governance as a complex, fluid, patchwork of innumerable, overlapping jurisdictions. Type I governance is designed around human (usually territorial) community while Type II is centred around particular tasks or policy problems. Under the Type II model, jurisdictional borders do not determine the development of governance arrangements; the material object at stake does. This material object can vary widely in terms of geographical scale. Type I multi level governance is strongly related to territorial borders and jurisdictions nested in hierarchical fashion but, as many observers once again argue (e.g. Amin 2004; Salet 2006; Gualini 2006), there is no perfect ‘fit’ or ideal scale to address spatial issues in today’s network society. Reality veers towards Type II multi-level governance.

The nature and scale of governance have important consequences for spatial planning. Spatial planning took shape within the boundaries of the modern nation-state characterised by territorial synchrony (i.e. Type I governance). Most planning systems, therefore, are based on the concept of territory as a neatly ordered space within definite boundaries. Each scale has its own appropriate instruments such as land-use plans, strategic spatial plans and general guidelines. Although this may be an exaggerated stereotype of planning ‘within borders’, it can be argued that post-war planning systems are based on a conception of space as a geographical entity, that could be territorially managed by means of comprehensive integrated forms of planning, or by regional economic strategies (CEC 1997). Planning approaches that treat space and place in such absolute ways are sometimes dismissed as ‘Euclidian planning’ (Friedmann 1993), or ‘container’ approaches that are in “…contrast with the focus on fluidity, openness and multiple time-space relations of ‘relational-complexity’ ideas.” (Healey 2006: 535). Indeed, the territorial synchrony of our states seems at odds with these observations and the immediate consequences may be serious: “The conventional concept of planning is so deeply linked to the Euclidian mode that it is tempting to argue that if the traditional model has to go, then the very idea of planning must be abandoned” (Friedmann 1993: 482). Whereas in reality many nuances can be observed that depart from this stereotype (Nadin & Stead 2008), it goes without saying that planning in Europe as a political activity, a profession and a field of academic research is in a constant process of reinventing itself.

In general, the shifts and changes in spatial planning can be understood as attempts to gain or regain control and effectiveness. Whilst the geographical ordering of administration has its advantages and will remain necessary in order to provide, amongst others, for legal certainty to citizens as regards land use, forms of territorial governance that are organised around fixed scales gradually loose their steering capacity. This becomes particularly clear in what Delanty and Rumford (2005) refer to as ‘borderlands’ and Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) as ‘soft spaces’ and ‘fuzzy borders’. These are the spaces where various activities converge, but which do not correspond with administrative units. Currently, soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries are mostly
being dealt with in pragmatic ways. The question for the future is how to deal with them in a more fundamental way.

This paper aims to present a broad framework for research into the issue of how spatial planning can adapt to the geographies and governance trends of our times. Before we proceed a short note should be made on the terminology used. 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 Haughton (2009: 620) 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”. To avoid misunderstanding, in this paper we reserve the term ‘strategic spatial planning’ (Albrechts 2006) for referring to new interpretations. In so doing, ‘planning’ is used as an umbrella term.

In the remaining part of the paper we will elaborate in three research angles that we consider fundamental for understanding today’s context and what this means for planning. The paper as such does not stand on its own and makes part of a sequence of past and future initiatives. Amongst them are a workshop organised in June 2008 at Delft University of Technology, our home institute, and a round table on a research agenda for European spatial planning at last year’s ACSP-AESOP conference in Chicago. For the coming years we hope to be able to proceed on this road and to join forces with other members of the international academic planning community. The current paper forms another building block in this process. As will become clear our interests in the meantime have also shifted towards lower administrative levels, and now concern the broad topic of strategic spatial planning in general. The three broadly defined themes that will be discussed next concern:
1) Relational space and place and the search for meaningful spatial concepts;
2) Multi-level governance: the question of scale
3) Strategic spatial planning

2. Relational space and place and the search for meaningful spatial concepts

“…whilst planning still needs its clear legal ‘fix’ around set boundaries for formal plans, if it is to reflect the more complex relational world of associational relationships which stretch across a range of geographies, planning also needs to operate through other spaces…” (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009: 620)

In many cases, planning is based on perceptions of spatial organization. Such perceptions often form the foundations for planning policies and instruments. Although the array of spatial
concepts and their content differ from place to place and from country to country, the vast majority of spatial concepts rest on some idea of spatial order. For example, perceptions of the spatial structure of urban regions can often be traced back to analytical concepts such as the functional urban region (FUR) or travel-to-work areas (TTWA), which assume a leading urban centre and some sort of clearly defined surrounding catchment area, where the FUR or TTWA ends and some other spatial entity takes over so to speak. The reality is more complex than this: FURs and TTWAs have no clearly delineated boundaries and there are overlaps between these regions. Surface-related interpretations of socio-economic and cultural dynamics are increasingly being challenged by contemporary thinking about geographical and spatial-economic processes. The consequences for planning seem profound.

Current ideas about geographical and spatial economic processes can be captured under the label of ‘relational space and place’. Because of the growing importance of networks and the ever increasing geographical reach of these networks due to technological progress (Castells 1996; Brenner 1999), the production of space and place is increasingly understood as a result of a complex interplay of multiple socio-economic processes taking place at multiple and overlapping scales. In this view, conceptions of spatiality and territorialisation are seen from a relational perspective, putting emphasis on fluidity, reflexivity, connectivity, multiplicity and polyvocality (Graham & Healey 1999; Healey 2007; Davoudi & Strange 2009). A place thus can have different meanings and uses for different stakeholders and at different spatial scales. In Western states with open economies “[t]he boundary separating spatial scales is (...) becoming so blurred that it may be increasingly appropriate to conceive the scalar organisation of contemporary capitalism as a continuum of glocalised interaction...” (Brenner 1999: 438) Clearly, the notion of relational space and place fits uneasily with ‘Euclidian’ or ‘container’ perceptions of space and place.

Some years ago Healey (2004) explored whether spatial planning is taking on board some of the new, relational concepts proposed by for instance geography and spatial-economics as an alternative to classic concepts. One of her conclusions was that to a great extent planning seems to cling to traditional concepts of spatial organisation. This has been underlined by a more recent set of case studies into strategic planning at higher levels of scale (Davoudi & Strange 2009). The reasons which may explain this are not discussed here. In this section we confine ourselves to briefly exploring some key developments and the challenges facing spatial planning.

The first challenge is the changing relationship between urban and rural areas, the various notions of this and, at a more fundamental level, the meaning of underlying concepts such as urbanity and rurality. The main cause is a combination of developments which can differ from country to country like: the retreat or industrialisation of agriculture and resulting changes of the landscape; the shrinking of population and employment or the reverse due to suburbanisation; the influx of all sorts of functions especially in rural areas within the vicinities of urban areas; tourism, leisure, second homes and so on. Many notions underlying planning policies rest partly or wholly on the idea of the preservation of the ‘borders’ between open and built-up areas or between rural and non-rural areas. Policies and instruments are becoming increasingly difficult to define as these notions are becoming increasingly borderless, hence the emergence of soft spaces, fuzzy

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2 Aspects that explain the variety of spatial concepts in Europe include territorial diversity, planning history, planning culture and the institutional position of a planning system within the wider system of governance including the ruling social model.
boundaries and borderlands. This calls into question the validity of a range of policy concepts like for example urban containment, green belts and growth centres.

The second challenge for planning concerns urban form as such and is related to the changing structure and shape of cities and urban regions. A key development here is the development of polycentric city regions. Even city regions which used to be thought of as classically monocentric – like London or Paris – are gradually becoming polycentric (Hall & Pain 2007). Many concepts and ideas have been put forward to explain the changing city form. For example, the concept of the urban field, used three decades ago, was an early attempt to grasp the emergent multi-centred, patchwork pattern of supralocal urbanisation (Brenner 1999). Since then we have seen a range of spatial definitions of the urban form. Many of them are inspired by the morphology and structure of urbanised regions. For example, Sudjic (1993) refers to ‘100-mile cities’, Garreau (1991) to ‘edge cities’, Soja (1992) to ‘exopolis’. Exopolis, according to Soja (1992, p. 95), is not simply a city without a centre, but a city turned “‘inside-out’ and ‘outside-in’ at the same time (Brenner 1999: 444). Other attempts to delineate urban form or characterise the city’s roles in the world show progressively increasing geographical scale: metropolises, world cities, global cities, megacities, metropolises, city regions, megalopolises, metapolitan regions, metacities, gig@cities (see for an overview: Neuman & Hull 2009). In Europe the multi interpretable concept of polycentricity (Davoudi 2003; Meijers 2007; Lambregts 2009) is increasingly used to articulate new (and desired) forms of urban centrality.

The third issue we would like to identify goes beyond the structure and morphology of cities and urban region, namely their position in a wider spatial-temporal context. This concerns the power and importance of networks, from local to global scale. The combination of global networking and the decreasing importance of national borders, thanks to international trade agreements, leads to further independence of geo-economic power of cities and a disarticulation from the state system (Scott 1998; Taylor 1995). It is now widely acknowledged that contemporary cities are embedded in transnational flows of capital, commodities and labour (or power). According to Friedmann (1995: 25) the “space of global accumulation” is something that no state can fully control and capital valorisation within cities does not necessarily translate into national economic growth. “Cities can therefore no longer be conceived as the sub-national components of self-enclosed, autocentric and nationally scaled regimes of accumulation, but rather as nodes within global networks …, as the regional motors of the global economy …, and as flexibly specialised locational clusters within a global mosaic of regions” (Brenner 1999: 437).

This all leads to the question whether strategic spatial planning can provide answers or solutions to increasingly complex geographical dynamics and whether (and how) planning can formulate strategies to “…re-imagine the city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the result into priorities for area investment, conservation measures, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land use regulation.” (Healey 2004: 46) As Healey (2007: 3) points out, “…this goes further than an analysis of the spatial patterns and activities as organised in two-dimensional space, the space of a traditional map.” In order to remain effective, strategic spatial planning needs to find ways to reflect the relational complexity of space and place. A mere two-dimensional spatial concept or vision will not be sufficient (although such concepts will remain necessary in relation to regulatory planning to demarcate, for example, green belts, open areas, building zones and so forth). At least such concepts and visions should reflect the multiple scalar
and space-temporal characteristics and meanings of the places they address. But can this be done? As indicated, recent case studies (Healey 2007; Davoudi and Strange 2009) show that planners experience great difficulty with imagining space and place in relational ways and that the sheer complexity outgrows them. One reason for this is the lack of suitable data describing the characteristics of a place and the intricate ways of how it is linked to its wider surroundings. Evidence about geographical processes, to underpin powerful concepts and strategies, may well become one of the most sought after issues in tomorrow’s strategic spatial planning. Therefore, contemporary planning practices may actually take us in the other direction by concentrating on a limited number of place characteristics (but in deliberate and explicit ways so that no false expectations are created). In terms of research probably the most compelling question is whether today’s spatial complexity can be translated into spatial strategies and in meaningful conceptualisations of the urban-rural relationships, the urban form and the spatio-temporal position of places?

3. Multi level governance: the question of scale

Anyone who wants to be effective in the European polity, whether local politician or radical NGO, now must know the game of ‘scale jumping’: the art of putting in each intervention at the appropriate level. This is more complex than the currently popular concept of ‘multi-level governance’ suggests. (Hajer 2003: 179)

Post-war planning within the public domain mainly is recognised for its coordinative and/or allocative powers. However, now that, as a result of the changing nation-state, the spatial dynamics become more difficult to control, this traditional position of planning is increasingly becoming questioned. Both from the public and the private domain the governance capacity of planning is influenced. The rescaling of governance and the change of scope and significance of other policies, not in the least European policies, requires planning to adopt bottom-up approaches. Likewise, private stakeholders and investors are becoming of increasing importance as financers, designers and implementers of planning objectives. Meanwhile, citizens and interest groups increasingly challenge the legitimacy of planning interventions. Planning, therefore, is no longer a condition sine qua non in today’s society.

Important in this process of change if the loss of territorial synchrony and the fragmented pattern of governance in which it results. Diverse institutional configurations and multiple overlapping institutional levels of governance are becoming increasingly apparent across Europe. Marks (1993:392) for example describes the situation as a ‘system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional and local’. This state of ‘multi-level governance’ (Type I) implies that no unit is actually ‘sovereign’ in the sense of being a superior, exclusionary source of power (Colomer 2008). According to authors such as Swyngedouw (2005: 2003), shifts from government to governance, combined with increasingly shared and overlapping responsibilities for different policy areas constitute an important and far-reaching socio-political innovation. Moreover, these shifts also have important implications for spatial planning and add a further layer of complexity for planning policy and practice.

Lidström (2007) identifies four general trends in the recent evolution of territorial governance and each of these has clear, direct impacts on spatial planning processes:
1. Redefining the role of the nation-state. The establishment and gradual expansion of the EU has limited the role of national borders and transferred decision-making powers. In addition, states are challenged from inside, by groups with strong ethnic or regional identities demanding separatism or at least self-government.

2. Strengthening lower levels of self-government. In many countries, functions have been decentralized from central government to local and regional levels of government. In some countries, this has gone hand-in-hand with reorganizations of sub-national levels of government, either by amalgamation of municipalities or regions or by introducing new regional levels of self-government.

3. Accepting increasing diversity, variation and even asymmetry between how territories within the nation state are governed. This tendency towards diversity can be seen as the empowerment of the lower levels of self-government but may also lead to greater differentiation. Not only is the scope for variation between sub-national units greater, some units are also permitted to follow their own paths that may differ quite considerably from the general national pattern.

4. Increasing marketization of the public domain. Many functions that were seen as fairly stable public responsibilities during the peak of the welfare state era have either been privatized or are run jointly by public and private providers. Public organizations are increasingly limited to ‘enabling’ other actors to offer services. Sager (2009) gives an account of what this means for planning.

This situation of multi-level governance is very much reflected in current European policy. Quotes from the 2001 White Paper on Governance and a recent speech by Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, serve to illustrate the point:

“In a multi-level system the real challenge is establishing clear rules for how competence is shared – not separated; only that non-exclusive vision can secure the best interests of all the Member States and all the Union's citizens” (CEC 2001: 34-35)

and;

“…economic growth in a global economy is increasingly driven by multiple co-operation structures involving different types of actors and different levels of the government. This means that no single territory can be treated as an island which develops in isolation: building links, coordinating activities, networking and cooperating is essential” (CEC 2008a: emphasis in the original)

In practice, the multi-level nature of governance in Europe is a combination of Hooghe & Marks’ (2003) Type I and Type II models. While Type I continues to have a hold on planning, Type II may often be more appropriate: i.e. within fragmented territories, soft spaces and borderlands. The nature of governance is not just of academic interest – fundamentally contrasting outcomes are also at stake (Hooghe & Marks 2003). Jessop (2004:50) reminds us that the “manner in which divisions are drawn between states and societies can affect political processes and the effectiveness of power.” Hooghe & Marks (2003) suggest that policies of one jurisdiction often have spillovers (negative or positive externalities) for other jurisdictions. These factors all pose critical challenges for the governance of cities and regions and also increase the complexity of governance. In addition, as indicated, and perhaps because of this, the relation between
government and private sector and citizens is also changing. All this increases the importance of policy coordination in order to avoid perverse outcomes.

Although it is premature to announce the death of the state in the wake of the emergence of these new forms of governance (Swyngedouw 2005: 2002), closer attention needs to be given to the changing nature of governance and its implications for spatial planning. Planners need to conceptualise the structure and position of differently constituted territories and “find the keys to unlock the connections between different spheres of action” (Salet & Thornley 2007: 191). Arranging them in coherent fashion remains its rationale but no longer exclusively within fixed territories. This requires selectivity, choosing the right scale of intervention, identifying the linkages with other geographical structures at other scales and including the appropriate stakeholders. The result is likely to be spatial visions, strategies and planning approaches of various kinds, including, but not limited to, the strategies of national and sub-national authorities, and, importantly, of the EU as such. This will not lead to anything like a neat set of visions fitting seamlessly into one agreed overall picture. Rather, the result will be a set of spatial planning efforts of various kinds and on various scales that are not always consistent or comparable – but hardly more confusing than the current reality!

A key issue for the planning research agenda is the manner and extent to which the various changes in governance taking place affect the implementation and legitimacy of current planning policies and approaches or, putting it a different way (quoting Jessop, 2004:73), examining ‘the manner and extent to which the multiplying levels, arenas, and regimes of politics, policy-making, and policy implementation can be endowed with a certain apparatus and operational utility horizontally and vertically; and how this affects the overall operation of politics and the legitimacy of the new political arrangements’.

4. Strategic spatial planning

“The contribution of the spatial planning movement and the planning policy community is not, as imagined in the past, to produce a ‘comprehensive’, all-encompassing, strategy for the evolution of a place or territory.” (Healey 2006b: 77)

So, if comprehensive integrated plans cannot deliver anymore, what then should be the contribution of the spatial planning movement? Indeed, with the ‘implosion of territorial order’, planning, at least regulatory planning, seems to have lost some of its foundations. Whether the increasing irrelevance of Euclidian space means that we, as Friedmann (1993) provocatively states, should start to think about abandoning the very idea of planning, remains to be seen. According to some commentators, with whom we agree, we should not abandon planning, but we should start to sharper distinguish, at least analytically, between two types of planning: regulatory planning, to which Friedmann was referring, and what we propose to call strategic spatial planning (Albrechts 2006), with the latter complementing the former (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger 2006; Healey 2007; Allmendinger Haughton 2009).

Most planning systems and acts already foresee in some form of strategic spatial planning, but the situation is ambiguous. Planning instruments are a case in point: “The difficulty planners face (...) is that, in many planning systems, a formal development plan serves the purpose both of
generating a conception of a city and the locales within it and of defining the legal and spatial parameters within which rights to develop sites and properties are established.” (ODPM, 2004 in: Vigar et al. 2005: 1408). Likewise Allmendinger and Haughton (2009: 621) observe that “…at one level, planning remains a part of the formal regulatory apparatus of the state and could be seen as rigidly hierarchical, a classic case of ‘government’ (…) But when we look beyond this, we can see how spatial planning is also being reconstituted so that it can and must operate within new associational networks, becoming deeply embedded in governance systems at all levels.” They see planning, which they use as an umbrella term referring to both regulatory and strategic spatial planning, as both “…an expression of old-style ‘government’ and new-style ‘governance’, an intriguing hybrid.” (Ibid: 621). While these quotes merely refer to the UK, other European countries face similar hybrid situations (Salet et al. 2003; Albrechts 2006; Salet 2008; Healey 2007; Wiechmann 2008). In terms of research this leads to the question whether planning systems indeed are hybrid and if so, whether this hampers the effectiveness of strategic spatial planning.

A first question to answer therefore concerns the meaning of strategic spatial planning. Along with some of the aforementioned commentators we understand strategic spatial planning as the effort to relate in time and space the various independent initiatives by public and private actors into a collective governance strategy. Such planning can be regarded as active place shaping. It involves ‘scanning’, filtering, knowing the ‘market’ and seizing opportunities. Already in 1993 Friedmann hinted that such strategic spatial planning “…should be normative, innovative, political, transactive and should be based on social learning…” Comprehensive integrative plans bound to jurisdictions, but also regional economic strategies do have a lesser role in such type of planning. Rather emphasis should be put on selectivity, integration, action and vision (Albrechts 2006), on institutional capacity building (Healey 2007) and on resource mobilisation, rather than allocation, on real time, rather than imaginary time, on multi-level governance Type II networking. Planning in this sense should be entrepreneurial. All this is very close to what Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) observe in practice around Thames Gateway: it is about making pragmatic choices and getting things done. Planners become entrepreneurs relying on skills such as building trust, negotiating, mediating, compromising and so forth. Going one step further we may also imagine this type of planning, like private sector entrepreneurs, taking risks, while remaining publicly accountable (Friedmann 1993: 483). However, what such a planning looks like requires further analysis. Particularly, as Amin (2004) points out, organising political accountability and legitimacy may be a moot point.

This brings us to a second research question: how does strategic spatial planning relate to the formal regulatory system, and how to make best use of it. Strategic spatial planning is not about making spatial plans or formal policy documents, instruments that regulatory system foresees in, but rather about visioning, framing and providing informal governance contexts for ‘communities of practice’ (Healey 2007: 185). A key issue in place shaping processes is flexibility. What we see happening in the shaping of soft spaces, fuzzy borders and borderlands are skilful planners seeking the very edges of the regulatory system. For example visioning processes, like Randstad 2040 (MHSPE 2008; Burg & Vink 2008), ignite place-shaping processes, propel networking and lead to the forming of coalitions around various themes. However, as Albrechts (2006) concludes there is still a long way to go. Plan-making still seems the dominant mode of planning, but “…in strategic spatial planning the plan is just one vehicle amongst others…” (Albrechts 2006: 1163). Wiechmann (2008: 444) observes that the absence of an explicit strategy
or plan in fact helps to create an atmosphere of strategic flexibility (see also: Friedmann 2004; Boelens 2006). In the end, however, decisions about space and place have to be formalized in plans and documents subject to public involvement.

In the meantime, we must not forget that also the regulatory planning system is not static. Planning acts are revised (Needham 2005), new regulations issued, planning cultures adapted (Shaw & Lord 2007) and governance contexts change – for example, through internal pressure for more cost-efficient and effective policies (Sager 2009). Some of these changes are explicitly made in order to respond to new territorial and institutional dynamics. This forms an indication that strategic spatial planning practices already institutionalise and influence the formal system. Whether this will lead to generally accepted forms of strategic spatial planning and a further stretched out regulatory system remains to be seen.

In terms of research there is a clear need to further explore how planning should respond on geographical and governance trends and how it should deal with soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries. Some authors already provide us with ideas and directions for further research. These paths need to be further travelled along. For the moment there seems to be a need for both theoretical and empirical research to what strategic planning is and how it fits within the changing governance landscape. In particular there is a need for rich case studies of strategic spatial planning in fragmented regions as it is in such complex governance contexts that innovations take shape. Inspired by Allmendinger and Haughton (2009: 631) we propose that a leading question for such research can be how can the regulatory planning system be made more flexible in order to provide room for informal, unexpected, complex associational and across time and place moving strategic spatial planning exercises.

5. Conclusion

This paper proposes a few broad lines for future research to spatial planning. For a number of reasons traditional planning approaches are gradually becoming less suitable to deal with today’s spatial governances challenges. With the loss of territorial synchrony, underlying most planning systems, we believe that planning needs to reinvent itself. Planning should find answers to at least three issues related to this implosion of territorial order: the notion of relational space and place, the trend towards multi-level governance type II arrangements and the meaning of strategic spatial planning in relation to the regulatory planning system.

Plan-led spatial development approaches seem to be less effective in this new context. Rather we see situations emerge in which several governance arrangements work in parallel within the same region. Each arrangement in itself can be interpreted as a strategic spatial planning effort to align, for a selective number of purposes, the jumble of initiatives in fragmented territories. In turn, the complete picture shows a jumble of strategic spatial planning arrangements of various size and geographical reach that overlap and intersect at several occasions, most notably within soft spaces and along fuzzy borders. A major challenge in such a governance context concerns the issue of legitimacy and public accountability.
In terms of research we singled out three questions that seem crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of strategic spatial planning:

1. Can today’s spatial complexity be translated into spatial strategies and in meaningful conceptualisations of the urban-rural relationships, the urban form and the spatio-temporal position of places?

2. To what manner and extent do the various changes in governance taking place affect the implementation and legitimacy of current planning policies and approaches and how can policy implementation be endowed with a certain apparatus and operational utility horizontally and vertically?

3. How can the regulatory planning system be made more flexible in order to provide room for informal, unexpected, complex associational and across time and place moving strategic spatial planning exercises?

As indicated this paper follows upon a number of previous initiatives. Other initiatives be they organised by ourselves or others, will follow. Hopefully the paper will prove stimulating and will lead to further elaboration and research to strategic planning in Europe. We believe that planning in Europe in order to remain effective in shaping our spaces and places needs to adapt and fundamentally to the new circumstances. This is all the more necessary because of the emerging European territorial cohesion policy (CEC 2008b), which alongside with other EU sector policies may change the conditions for domestic planning practices. Planning academics can play a role in these processes by analysing and reflecting upon current practices, by comparing them nationally and internationally, by seeking innovative ways and modes within the limits of present regulatory systems and by preparing students analytically as well as in terms of designer and communicative skills.

References


CEC – Commission of the European Communities (2008b) Green paper on Territorial Cohesion


