THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING: HOW IT WORKS IN DIFFERENT PLANNING CONTEXTS

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I. Introduction

Visualization is a key concept for spatial planners since, after all, the very discipline is about territories[2]. Although a variety of media can be applied for visualization – such as 3D images, sketches, diagrams— the most suitable medium seems to be maps for the representation and visualization of territories.

Maps are powerful tools in that they can lead to consensus or conflict. The so-called consensus or conflict can be attributed to what maps represent: A map is *"...a cumulation of choices made among choices every one of which reveals a value"* (Wood 1993 cited in Jensen and Richardson 2003). Map-making, according to Jesen and Richardson, involves activities of selection, omission, simplification, classification, creation of hierarchies and symbolization. Their point can be linked to plan-making --as it also involves the very same activities--: The visual language of plans[3], too, can lead to consensus or contradictions among the relevant parties, namely central government; local government; property owners; land developers; professionals related to planning, design, conservation, engineering and the like. This implies the necessity of well-developed cartographic representation so as to transmit the very ideas of the plans as intended, and avoid conflicts.

Plans at city, metropolitan or regional scales are strategic ones. They aim at showing the general spatial organization for territories. Hence, they are *intentionally* selective (Mazza 2010, Friedmann 2005); i.e. their scope is limited to key issues, which decisively pave the way for further lower scale plans.

This paper aims at exploring the visual language of strategic spatial plans. In the face of the rapid changes that cities have had to tackle since the 1980s --thanks to ever globalizing socio-economic relations--, planning community has assumed that cities can attain a desired future state only through more flexible plans; i.e. strategic spatial plans. These plans, as mentioned above, simply and purposefully general, selective and comprehensive; implying a different way of representing the space than the

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[2] This study uses the terms territory, city, space, urban, etc. in place of one another.
[3] Obviously, contradictions or consensus on plans do not simply refer to the visual language selected; yet, the scope of this paper is limited to that.

traditional land-use plans. The study first portrays the intention of strategic plan-making and how this intention is represented visually through examples from different planning systems; and then elaborates its interpretation in the Turkish context.

II. Representation in Strategic Spatial Plans

Visualization of the territory is an inseparable component of spatial planning. Dühr (2003) mentions that images are used to either directly express the intention of an urban policy and/or support the policy. Kunzmann (1996 cited in Dühr 2003) suggests that visualized spatial presentation, despite its vagueness, can reduce complexity to a great extent.

Mazza identifies three typical characteristics of strategic spatial plans: **Generality, selectivity** and **comprehensiveness**: The strategic plan has to be **general**, because its frame has to be both precise and flexible at the very same time. The stability and durability of strategies should be secured in a way to provide a certain framework for the investors. Concurrently, they should allow margins for maneuvering (or flexibility) for the realization of policies and projects in the face of changing conditions. The plan should be simple in order to keep its strength over time, be easily understood and communicative. Meanwhile, the strategic plan should be **selective**. It should not face all the phenomena related to urban development; but should stabilize the priorities in time and space, and select a few primary spatial problems. Finally, the strategic plan should be **comprehensive** in a way to bring the solutions and selected problems together in a spatio-temporal framework. This framework should allow the assessment of opportunities and constraints, advantages and disadvantages (Assessorato allo Sviluppo del territorio, Comune di Milano, 2000).

Salet and Faludi (1999) talk about the "revival" of the strategic spatial planning rather than the birth of it. It is because the strategic approach in plan-making had already been experienced during the establishment of the welfare state after the Second World War and in the 1960s. How the contemporary strategic planning differentiates from the one experienced in those years lies in its **policy agendas** and **institutional relations**: Vis-a-vis the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions and the accompanying sustainable development discourse, the present policy agendas of strategic planning oscillate between two poles; namely competitiveness agenda and environmental agenda (Albrechts 2003). A multiplicity of aims, directly or indirectly related to spatial development, take place in between these two poles (Figure 1).

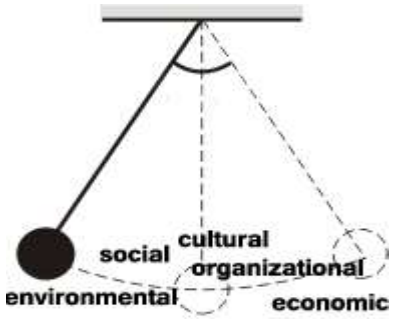

Figure 1-Multiple Aims of Strategic Spatial Planning

Under the impact of the global mode of capital accumulation, the aims of strategic spatial planning practices of the last two decades seem to go beyond physical development; including improvment of competitiveness capacity of localities while providing urban sustainability. These two new agendas have led to a new visual language for spatial planning which go beyond mere coloring of different land-uses.

I.1. A Metaphoric Imagery

Many practical cases around the world reveal that the generality, selectivity and comprehensiveness features of strategic plans are often associated with metaphoric visualizations. These metaphoric images are believed to increase the power of the spatial strategy. Dühr (2003) states the metaphor of "Blue Banana", representing a developed area from the south-east of England to the north of Italy (Figure 2). She notes it as a successful one in raising awareness and understanding about complex spatial development trends.

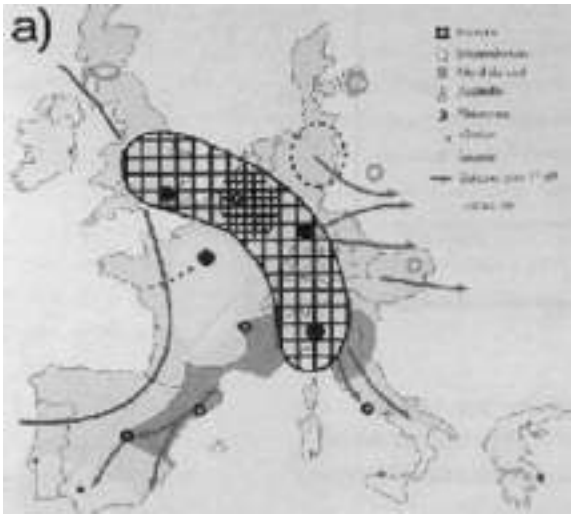

Figure 2- Blue Banana
(Dühr 2003)

Likewise, the metaphor of "Reversed T" (T rovesciata) in the Strategic Plan of Milan represents a spatial strategy based on a reversed T-shaped transport corridors (Figure

3). The "Reverse T" connects Milan's three airports; Malpensa, Linate and Orio al Serio. Part of the strategy is to locate private and public investment in these axes to improve the public infrastructure and transform the surrounding areas. These axes also aim at linking new developments in the periphery with the city centre, providing more green areas, improved services and accessibility across the City, and producing new alliances with the stakeholders across the urban area (Mazza 2007). Another example is that of Lyon's Schema Directeur: The territories in Lyon are represented by the petals of a flower including the centre. The petals show a balance between the different territories of the urban area (Figure 4).

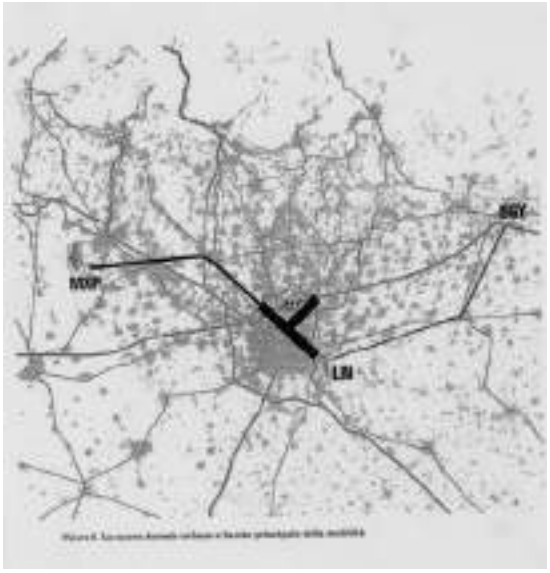

Figure 3- Reversed T
(The Framework Document of Milan)

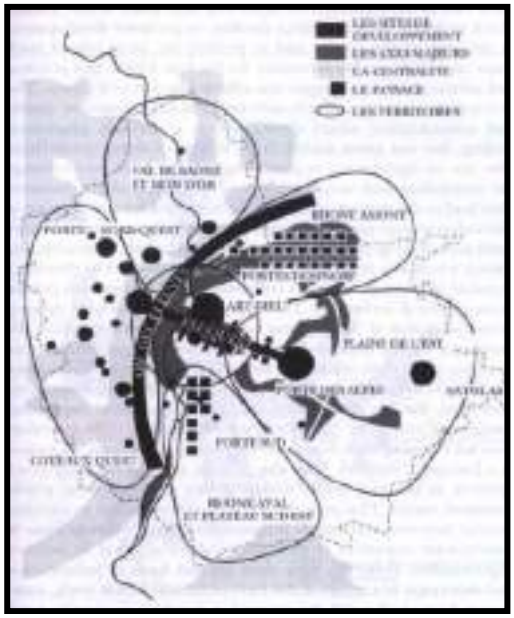

Figure 4- Five Petals
(Le Schéma directeur de l'agglomération Lyonnaise approved in 1992)

Many people, even without reading the plan reports, can capture the visions, core values and spatial relations which are embedded within such metaphors. They carry powerful messages about the organization of space within a certain locality (Jensen and Richardon 2003). Planning systems in many European countries, under the impact of the EU's common spatial development agenda[4], increasingly apply metaphoric imagery in strategic spatial plans.

Use of metaphors are often applied for strategic projects that are supposed to create brand new images for cities. The waterfront design competition held for Doha Waterfront guides to the competitors with the idea of "Three Corniches"; a metaphoric image for the waterfront development strategy (Figure 5).

[4] The efforts towards a European scale spatial policy in the EU promote the use of metaphors in spatial planning, since they describe the spatial structure of Europe in a way to be easily understood.

Figure 5- Doha Corniche
(Design Brief for Doha Corniche, 2003)

The metaphoric language, in fact, improves the communicative capacity of the strategic plan: It is through the metaphors that the major concern of the plan is transmitted to decision-makers, investors and general public. The use of metaphors comply with the generality, selectivity and comrehensiveness principles of the strategic spatial plan. A metaphor reflects the general idea of spatial development; it is selective only focusing on certain issues; and it is comprehensive in that problems/potentials of the territory can be grasped within it. Obviously, metaphoric imagery is not an obligation in strategic plan-making. However, practical cases prove that they are very powerful instruments to transmit the aims of a plan to interested parties.

II.2. Use of Logos and Slogans

Likewise the metaphoric representation of space through catchy images, use of logos with sloganlike statements is also common in strategic spatial plan-making. As extensively discussed in the planning literature (eg. Harvey 1989, Brenner 1999, Hall and Hubbard 1996, Gordon 1999, Williams 2000, Vanolo 2008, Zimmerman 2008), one major impact of globalizing socio-economic relationships is the rise of interurban competition. Localities compete with one another in order to attract the globally wandering capital (Şengül 2003). The logos accompanied with slogans are supposed to disseminate "how the city should be perceived" as proposed in the strategic plan. Figure 6 shows the logo of the Strategic Plan of the Bologna Province, which is in fact an abstraction of the strategic plan itself.

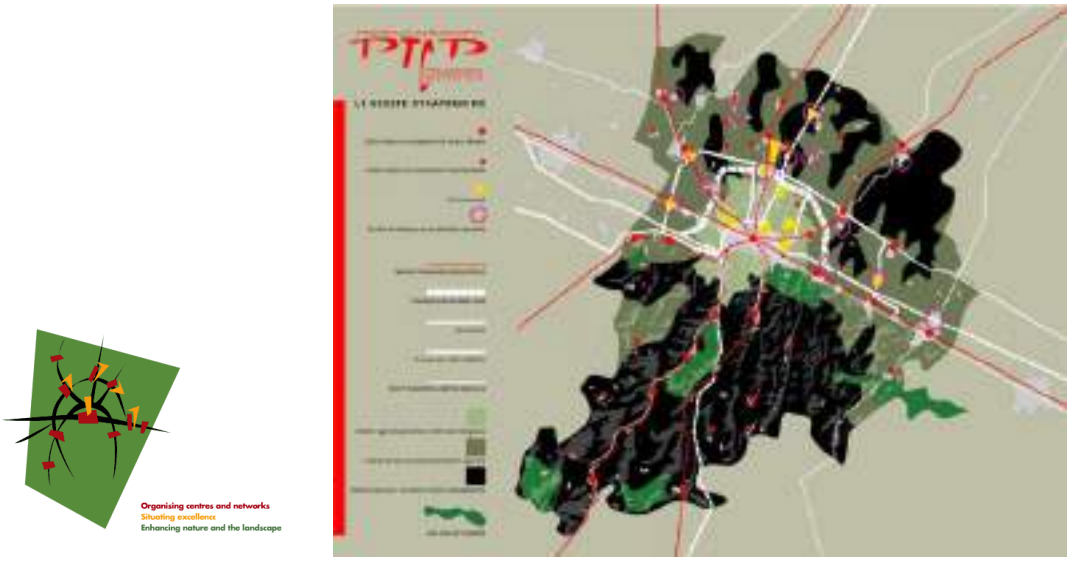

Figure 6- The logo for the Bologna Province Strategic Plan (left) is an abstraction of the plan itself (right). (URL: www.provincia.bologna.it)

Figure 7 and 8 show the logos for the strategic plans of Rio de Janerio and La Spezia. Both logos are accompanied by slogans; "Rio forever Rio" and "Verso la citta nuove" (Towards a new city), which are easy to remember by the general public.

Figure 7-The Logo for the Strategic Plan of Rio de Janerio
(The Strategic Plan of Rio de Janeiro 1996)

Figure 8-The Logo for the Strategic Plan of La Spezia
(The Strategic Plan of La Spezia 2011-http://pianostrategico.spezianet.it/Documenti/visioni_ottobre_2001.pdf)

II.3. Representation of Strategy

The second step, after the metaphoric imagery, is the representation of the spatial strategies on maps. It should be noted that some plans demonstrate both the metaphor and strategies on the very same scheme, while some others show them in successive schemes. As mentioned before, the strategic spatial plan --while providing a definite framework—should be flexible enough in the face of the rapidly changing socio-spatial conditions. Salet and Faludi (1999) makes an analogy between the "territorial space" and "war space": The role of strategy in a military plan is to never lose sight

of the final objective despite the ever-changing conditions of the battlefield. The troops have to adopt to the changing conditions, but should not leave the main strategies of military action. Similary, a territorial strategic plan has definite strategies, which are flexible enough to respond and adopt to the changing socio-spatial conditions without losing sight of the desired future goal; namely the **vision**.

What does the strategic plan aim at with the strategies it possesses? A strategic plan basically demonstrates **1) no-go areas** (natural and archaeological heritage sites, valuable agricultural land, immediate coastal areas, etc. are under this group), **2) areas for development** (obviously the way and degree of development are differentiated in different areas) **3) major hubs and corridors** (showing the interflows among territories). The strategic plan, with its vision and strategies, guides the preparation of lower-scale land-use plans (with precise forms, widths, heights, densities, and coordinates of land-uses). In other words, it is not an alternative to the land-use plan; rather, it provides a framework for the preparation of land-use plans.

As it is not the alternative of the land-use plan, the strategic plan should have a language of its own. Examples around the world show that the three strategic groups mentioned above mostly represented via symbols, icons, signs, geometric forms (triangles, circles, etc.), lines with arrows. The illustration does not have to fit the geographic space, some significant functions can be exaggeratedly drawn. Within the EU countries, there are attempts towards developing some iconographies to represent common spatial policies; eg. Figure 9 shows the polycentric and balanced development of European territories, while Figure 10 represents the policy of urban-rural partnership (European Commission 1999).

Figure 9-Polycentric and balanced urban development

Figure 10-Urban-Rural Partnership

Obviously, there are national differences in the application of iconographic language, because of cultural differences and long-established planning traditions (Dühr 2003). Still, as the below examples indicate, it is possible to talk about a common tendency towards the use of this style.

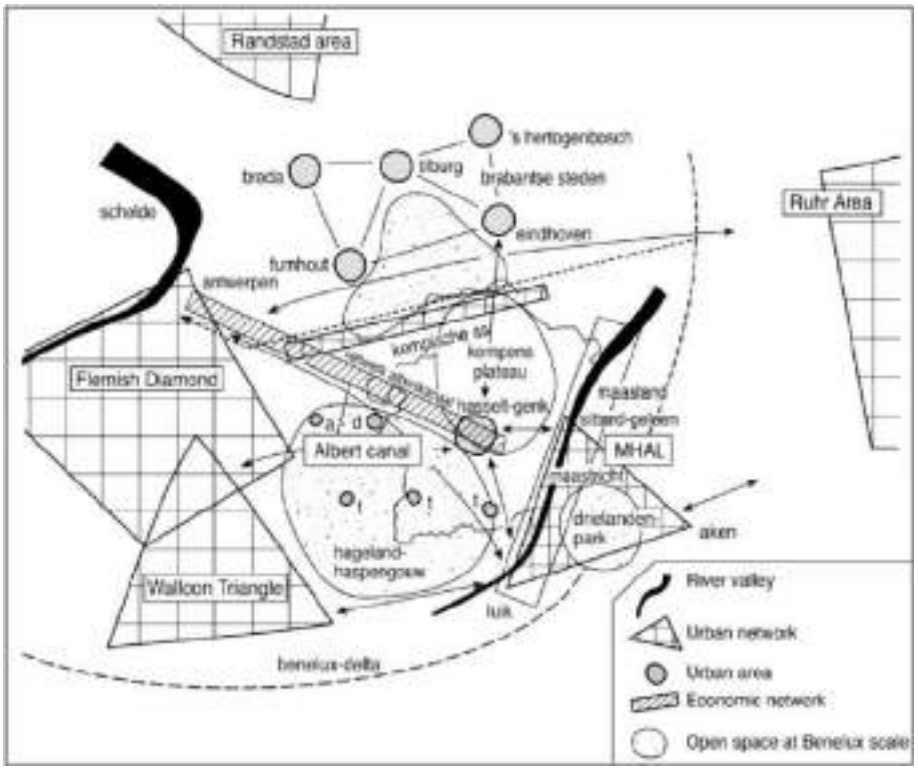

Figure 11-"Flemish Diamond"
(Albrechts and Lievois 2007)

Figure 11 illustrates the application of the "diamond" metaphor in spatial planning. The plan adopts a simple iconography to demonstrate the spatial strategies, which are supposed to have strong impacts on territories like creating economic networks, urban networks, etc. The legend items imply the two basic agendas of the current era: Both economic and environmental aims are strongly included in the aims of strategic spatial planning of the Flemish Diamond.

Two other recents example are that of Northern Ireland (Figure 12) and London (Figure 13). Likewise the above example, their strategic plans show important hubs and corridors, protection and development areas with reference to specific locations. The legend of the London plan also includes some policy issues in parantheses, which can be referred for detailed explanations of illustrations.

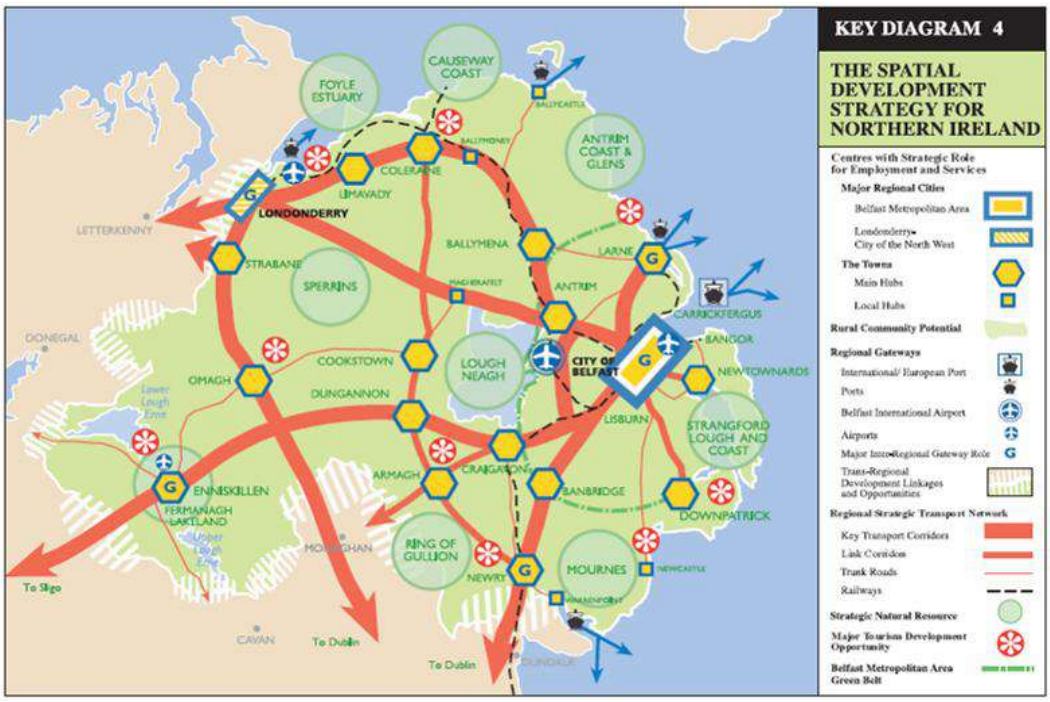

Figure 12-Northern Ireland's Spatial Development Strategy

(Shaping Our Future-
URL: http://www.drdni.gov.uk/rds_adjustments.pdf)

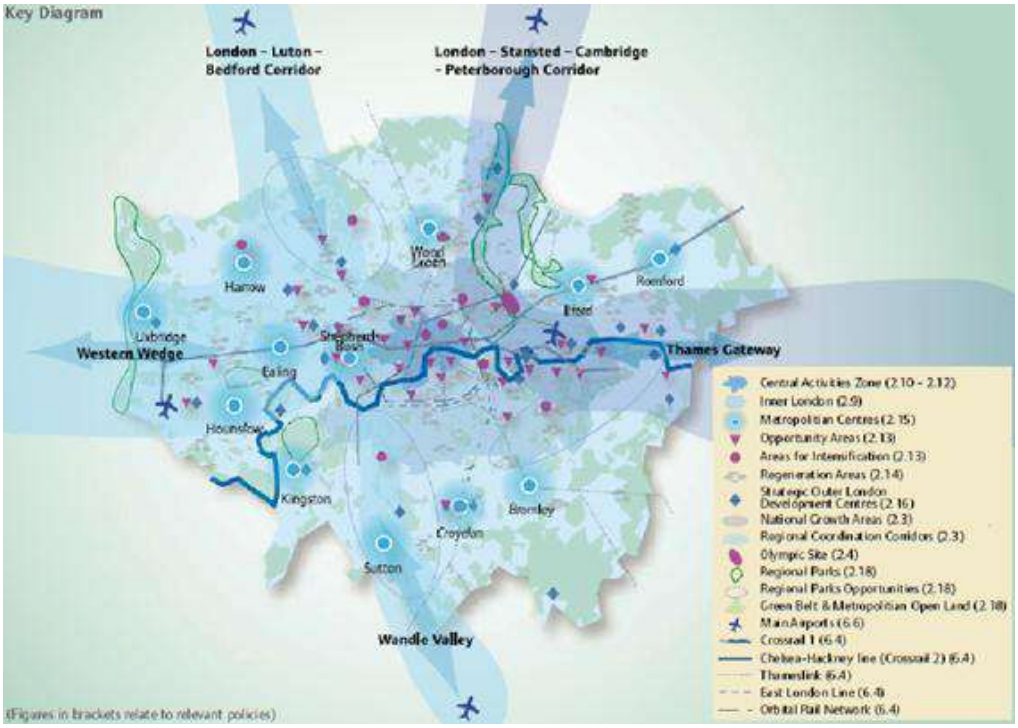

Figure 13-London's Spatial Strategy

(The London Plan-
URL: http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/The%20London%20Plan%202011.pdf)

The examples above show the general spatial strategy in a selective way. Actually their very language also proves why they cannot be the alternatives of land-use or urban design plans. They do not indicate any spatial form, any coordinates, any code for urban development. With the simple iconographic language they have, what they do is to guide the lower scale plans.

III. Strategic Planning in the Turkish Context

Until the beginning of the 2000s, strategic plan-making did not take place in the Turkish planning legislation. Therefore, there was not a nation-wide recognition of this approach, except for the attempts of a few local governments. It was in the early 2000s that the strategic planning has been declared in national official documents and legislation. In 2004, a series of laws were enacted related to public administrations, obliging them (including local governments) to prepare strategic plans and performance-based budgeting with reference to the plans (Gedikli 2009).

This paper is not to elaborate the above-mentioned strategic plans, since they may or may not be related to the spatial development; therefore may or may not have physical schemes with them. Another plan type in the Turkish planning hierarchy – the subregional land-use plan[5]-- is intended to carry the message of a strategic spatial plan as described in literature. Over 15 years ago, this plan type was introduced between regional and urban development plans within the spatial planning hierarchy. The authority for preparing it changed hands several times; now belongs to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanism.

The new law on Provincial Special Administrations (2005) introduced a new type of Subregional Land-Use Plan – namely the Provincial Land-Use Plan[6], without a clear explanation of its content and scale, therefore conflicting with the existing Subregional Land-Use Plans (Ersoy, 2006). The Urban Development Law defines the "subregional land-use plan" as *"the plan that determines housing, industry, agriculture, tourism, transportation, etc with respect to national and regional planning decisions".* It is problematic that it does not tell anything for heritage conservation, and leaves its consideration to regulations. Moreover, the multiplicity of upper level plans (subregional, provincial land use plans not much differentiating from one another) leads contradictions and inefficiencies in practice.

Leaving the authority conflict aside, the visual language adopted in subregional plan-making also leads to confusions. These plans are prepared at the scales of 1/100000, 1/50000 and 1/25000, i.e. they are upper level structure plans. Examining the plans, they (maybe not all) seem to adopt some new legend items in line with the contemporary strategic spatial planning practices around the world; eg. *"special project area", "innovative industrial zone", "R&D area", "ecologic impact boundary"*. Moreover, they do comprise symbols for some functions, perhaps not as

[5] Çevre Düzeni Planı
[6] İl Çevre Düzeni Planı

strong or exaggerated geometric images, therefore not holding a strong visual message.

However, most of them are still prepared with the logic of comprehensive land use plans, covering everything related to the territory under concern. Because of the language they adopt, general public tend to comprehend them as physical land use plans with accurate coordinates and forms; and plans can occasionally be the subject matter of court cases.

A plan at the mentioned scales can only be a *structure (or strategic) plan* guiding to urban development plans. Although the related legislation mentions the guidance role of subregional land-use plans, they are drawn with a visual language not much differentiated than that of urban development plans, which, first of all, causes conflicts in practice; and second of all, creates a chaotic situation in the planning hierarchy.

Although the present paper points out the obstacles related to representation of space in upper level plans, it does not propose an immediate modification of the existing visual language. If the visual language problem of these plans is not handled together with a review of the language of urban development plans, the problem will remain, even get worse. Therefore, a careful review and revision of their language, too, should go together, so that they could adequately interpret the decisions of strategic plans at settlement scales.

IV. Conclusion

Map making (or plan making as the subject matter of this study), as Jesen and Richardson (2003) mention, is about *selection, omission, simplification, classification and symbolization*. They can lead to consensus or conflict. This implies the necessity of well-developed cartographic representation so as to transmit the ideas of the plans as intended, and avoid conflicts.

This study has focused on the strategic plan-making, which has become widespread in the face of the ever globalizing socio-economic relations. These plans, prepared as general, selective and comprehensive ones, adopt a different visual language than that of the traditional land-use plans.

Strategic spatial plans are in fact upper scale structure plans, aiming at demonstrating the general spatial strategy in a strong way. Many recent strategic planning examples reveal the increasing use of metaphors, logos and catchwords in order to raise awareness about complex spatial issues. Meanwhile, since they are not alternatives to physical land use plans, practical examples show a variety of iconographic language adopted in strategic plan making. Obviously the iconographic languages adopted change from one planning system to another due to cultural differences.

Upper level plans have been comprised in the Turkish planning system, too, with the name "subregional land-use plans" and "provincial land use plans". They are supposed to guide to the preparation of lower scale land use plans. Nevertheless, they seem to adopt a very similar language to that of urban development plans. Moreover, they do not seem to carry powerful and creative spatial messages that would highlight the distinctive qualities of settlements. This is not to say that the role of strategic planning is simply to improve the competitive capacity of territories va highlighting their distinctive features. Rather, an emphasis on the distinctive qualities and combining them in a strongly constructed spatial image give the territory *a direction for future*.

This study does not indicate the foreign examples as benchmarks to adopt in the Turkish context; nor proposes an immediate modification of the existing visual language in upper level plan making. The cultural specifities, as mentioned before, should show themselves in different planning systems. Moreover, the visual language problem of these plans should be handled together with a review of the language of urban development plans. Clearly, this would be a careful and collaborative work of many relevant institutions, also involving other topics of plan making.

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