

Interdependencies of Spatial Planning «in» and «for» Europe Effects of European spatial planning perspectives on the spatial planning systems of the Nordic countries especially at the regional planning level.

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A new catchword, as bright and promising as a rainbow, echoes in our circles: «European Spatial Planning». The term covers at least two different concepts. Ever since the first official draft of the «European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)» was presented and adopted in Noordwijk (1997), European Spatial Planning has been mainly connected to the idea of *planning for Europe*. In addition, however, there is another conception, a bottom-up approach, on which the ESDP is based: European spatial planning also describes the variety and diversity of spatial planning concepts and systems within Europe.

In this contribution I will try to briefly examine the interrelationship between *planning for Europe* and *planning in Europe*, focusing on the Nordic countries and especially their regional planning level. The principal aim is to investigate, how different European spatial planning systems influence the spatial planning approach for Europe and vice versa. To facilitate discussion, I use a grouping of European national spatial planning systems into certain families, one of which covers the Nordic countries. In the first part of the paper I look at the question of families/groupings of spatial planning systems in Europe.

Proceeding from this to the main topic of this paper, the second part touches the question of the influence of the ESDP on the Nordic countries as manifest at the regional planning level. Since spatial planning is not included in the competence of the European Commission, the ESDP is designed as a bottom-up and not a top-down process. In fact, it is an inter-governmental approach

adopted by the EU member states, although it has often be claimed that the ESDP is a product of French, German and Dutch planning thinking and planning traditions (Rusca 1998). Viewed from the perspective of planning families, this would mean that the ESDP rests on a mixture of Napoleonic and Germanic styles. If this is the case, what would this mean for planning in Europe, i.e. the bottom-up dynamics? Even more problematic s the reverse side of the coin: Would the top-down pressure strengthen harmonisation tendencies affecting other planning traditions in Europe?

Planning in Europe

Discussing spatial planning in Europe often involves debate as to whether European countries are converging, towards a harmonised planning system (and there are many indications of such trends operating throughout the countries of Europe, as they are faced with similar broad economic imperatives and share common membership of the EU). As Davies (1994) points out, however, the future is unlikely to produce a harmonised system throughout Europe; instead greater mutual learning could perhaps result in a *convergence* of planning policies within different legal and institutional settings.

Furthermore, Newman and Thornley (1996) have shown that there are major differences, within legal and administrative approaches/styles, which are not likely to disappear over night. Following the lead of Zweigert and Kötz (1984), Newman and Thornley divide Europe into five planning families, taking into account both legal and administrative styles: a Scandinavian, British, Napoleonic and Germanic family, as well as a family formed by the countries of the former Eastern bloc.

Apart from the legal and administrative aspects, there are other possible criteria that determine the form of national spatial planning systems and practices. The EU report *Europe 2000+* (EC 1994) identified five such determinants: (1) history, geography and cultural traditions; (2) the state of economic and urban development; (3) political orientation and prevailing ideology; (4) conception of land ownership and development; and (5) constitutional structure. In conclusion, the report points out three interrelated questions which can be posed to bring out the essential features of each: (1) Is the planning system centralised or decentralised? (2) Is it reactive or

proactive? (3) Is it mainly regulatory or discretionary? These criteria can be added to those of the administrative and legal style to distinguish groups/families of countries.

In attempting to define such families the problem naturally arises that the finer the focus chosen, the more differences appear. From a European point of view, the Nordic countries have a enormous number of similarities, which group them as a Nordic family. The Nordics themselves never tire of pointing out how different they are. However, according to the five principles of the *Europe 2000+* document it is obvious that the Nordic countries share relatively common approaches.

Regarding the development of Nordic legislation, Letto-Anamo (1998) points out that the countries' growth from the grassroots beginnings, lack of an entrenched feudal system with its concomitant administrative system, as well as the lack of major trade towns/commercial centres and their bourgeoisie have all left their traces. Cultural/historical developments should also be taken into consideration regarding the recent division of power. They are one reason for the rise of *unitary governments* (as in: EU 1997) with strong local authorities. Or, as the EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies puts it: «The role of local authorities is strongest in Member States with a unitary government structure with a policy of decentralisation. Denmark, Finland and Sweden come into this category.» (EC 1997: 40) The Scandinavian family has probably gone the furthest in decentralisation, with spatial planning at the national level reduced to a minimum and regional planning only weakly represented. The emphasis lies very much on the municipalities, even if the precise shaping of this competence differs from country to country.

There is, nevertheless a strong relationship between the central government and the regions. Central government usually has its own agency operating at regional level to implement national policy and staffed by personnel appointed by the centre. At the same time, although local authorities have been reorganised into larger units for efficiency, local self-government has a long history stemming from the strength of peasant politics and in some cases the far-flung expanses

of the countries. Local self-government is seen as one of the cornerstones of Scandinavian constitutions. (Newman/Thornley 1996)

Planning for Europe - Consequences on spatial planning in Europe

What consequences does a ESDP have for the various spatial planning systems in the Community? A large number of voices might answer this question, «No effects at all!», as the ESDP and its related processes are often seen as toothless paper tigers. Or, as Kunzmann (1998) expresses it, the spatial planning industry in Europe has got a new gimmick to occupy itself with.

However, there is a lot of fuss about ESDP, and watching the activities in the Nordic countries, I am quite sure that the ESDP is already having an effect. Not primarily as a masterplan would have, which gives guidelines and regulations for the location of major infrastructure etc. and has to be adapted by plans at lower tiers. No, my impression is that the effects are far more subtle. ESDP transports and transposes planning ideology: the idea of comprehensive, interdisciplinary, i.e. not only physical, planning at superior tiers. This is, one message being forwarded by planning for Europe far more effectively than, for instance, the question of certain localisation activities.

A preliminary overview of consequences for the Nordic countries can be given by focusing on the differences within this planning family. Denmark is one of the countries involved more actively in the ESDP processes, and, as it is in many regards closer to the continent than other European countries, it has less trouble in adopting ESDP. It was among the first European countries to take up ESDP perspectives in its own national vision. Furthermore, Denmark has an administrative structure and a spatial planning system that is far better suited than any other in Northern Europe to adapt trans-national planning ambitions, thanks to a relatively strong regional tier and a kind of national spatial plan.

All of this appears to be more difficult in Finland, where the national state is very weak regarding spatial planning and even the regional level is not as strong as in Denmark. However, in recent years there have been several changes in the administrative regional level aimed at strengthening

the regional tier. We might ask to what extent this has been influenced by discussions about European spatial planning and the idea of a Europe of Regions?

Most remarkable is the situation in Sweden. Of all three Nordic EU countries, Sweden has the most powerful municipalities, which hold a municipal planning monopoly that does not tolerate planning at any superior tier. Here, the ESDP has already caused a lot of confusion regarding the question of responsibility for inter-governmental activities. There is not only the problem of how Sweden should be represented in the EU co-operation – when the state level has no planning power/responsibility – but also how to «implement» ESDP without intermediary tiers between European and municipal planning. All of this influences national and regional discussions about changing regional administrative divisions and responsibility. It might be the most obvious example of the direct influence of spatial planning *for* Europe on spatial planning *in* Europe. At the same time, voices can be heard claiming that the ESDP is over-estimated in Sweden.

Since Norway is not member of the EU and thus not covered by the ESDP it takes more or less the position of an observer, continuing its very own discussion about the regional tier.

These simple points illustrate that a spatial planning conception which is based on unitary governments combined with strong municipalities is likely to encounter problems dealing with a spatial planning approach for Europe that emphasises comprehensive planning at superior levels. At the same time, it is obvious that the ESDP cannot accommodate all European styles. What does this mean for the varying styles and national planning systems? Should we expect, contrary to Davies' assumption, a strict harmonisation, or can a spatial planning approach adapted to strong municipalities survive in a Europe of Regions, and to what extent might adjustments be needed?

To take this discussion one step farther, we might ask whether, and if so how, planning for Europe will basically change the role of strong local authorities and local democracy in Member States?

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