

The changing scope of regional planning: From spatial to ‘growth-oriented’ planning in Denmark

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Abstract

Regional planning in Denmark originally emerged as a spatial framework to address socio-economic disparities and to provide physical arrangements in light of an equal development paradigm. As such, its socio-spatial foundations created a comprehensive structure for spatial development reflected in the advancement of several generations of legally binding regional plans. However, influenced by the outcome of a recent structural reform and due to a thorough amendment of the Danish Planning Act, the domain has been subjected to radical changes in the past years. Crucial amongst them is the fact that the spatial logic adhered to regional planning has been replaced by a space-less rationale geared mainly towards facilitating economic growth. Based on an in-depth analysis concerned with the history and evolution of Danish regional planning, this article qualifies a number of factors embedded in the transformation of the domain. The article concludes that several theoretical and practical implications emerge from the changed conception and institutional capacities associated with regional planning.

Key words: regional planning; spatial planning; spatial development; planning conception; planning logic; planning policy; Denmark.

Introduction

The planning domain in several European countries has been traditionally associated with the guidance of spatial development through the use of policy instruments embedded in hierarchical top-down structures (see European Communities, 1997). Planning at the national level in these contexts originally became key in allocating investments and social welfare resources throughout national territories. Within such regulatory and managerial framework, regional planning was primarily introduced as a coordinative tool and a cross-sectoral policy field and practice, which distinguished itself from other forms of planning due to its spatial nature and distributional character. In contributing to attain equal development, regional planning thereby fulfilled a series of functions aimed at the regulation of land uses, the balance of economic growth, the planning of infrastructure and the spatial coordination of many different sectoral policies.

However, spatial planning systems and policies have been subjected to radical changes during the past couple of decades (see Healey et al., 1997; Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000; Salet and Faludi, 2000). Amongst others, the structural shifts associated with this domain mainly concern its modified policy contents, its changing conceptual logics and its evolving institutional arrangements. Throughout Europe, it has been shown that these aspects of spatial planning tend to evolve in function of political and economic driving forces (e.g. Healey et al., 1999; Albrechts et al., 2003). In terms of Danish national planning policy, for instance, evidence shows that the traditional steering role of spatial planning that was originally established in pursuit of equal development has been supplemented or even substituted by balancing or strategic roles that rather align with environmental and globalisation agendas (Galland, 2011). At the regional level, the Danish statutory spatial plans formerly implemented via hierarchical mechanisms have been replaced by new development planning and growth-oriented policies generated by unprecedented institutional arrangements (see section 4 below).

In line with the above, Danish regional planning as a whole has been evidently subjected to profound changes particularly during the past decade. While its original scope intrinsically emphasised the management and control of spatial development based on an equal development orientation, recent shifts have caused the domain to align with growth agendas in pursuit of more ‘appropriate development’ in accordance to the Danish Planning Act. These shifts have generated important implications not only in regards to the contents and logic of regional planning but also in connection with its policies, institutional arrangements and roles. Based on this general context, the aim of this paper is to explore what actual shifts constitute the transformed conception of regional planning, how they take place and what potential implications emerge from them.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section theoretically describes the scope and functions that have historically characterised the field of regional planning. This is followed by an illustrative synthesis of recent shifts associated with the domain. The second section explores the underpinnings of regional planning in Denmark from a historical perspective. It describes initial attempts to carry out regional planning followed by an analysis of a highly influential structural reform, which ended up shaping the Danish planning system and thereby the institutionalisation of regional planning back in the 1970s. The third section delves into the evolution of Danish regional planning and discusses the contents and features pursued by the several generations of regional plans put forward since the 1980s until 2005. The fourth sec-

tion analyses the contents of a new structural reform and the implications that it brought along to the planning domain, including the creation of new policy mechanisms and institutional arrangements at the regional level. Finally, the last section assesses the different shifts comprising the transformation of Danish regional planning and the implications and challenges that emerge from these shifts.

This article builds on document analyses and retrospective interviews that have been conducted from 2008 until 2011. The description and analysis of the case draw from policy documents and reviews concerned with Danish spatial planning, regional plans, regional development plans and business development strategies. The analysis is further based on structured and semi-structured interviews conducted with national and regional planners involved in plan and strategy-making processes. In addition, interviews have been conducted with Regional Growth Fora board members representing regional councils, municipal councils, educational and knowledge institutions as well as local businesses.

1. The changing conception of regional planning

The genesis of regional planning as a field attracting policy interest can be traced back to the 1960s. Regional planning in countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom or the Netherlands generally emerged in response to two major problems, namely the socio-economic disparities between regions and the spatial and environmental issues provoked by particular growing urban areas. In tackling the former, regional planning surfaced as a ‘spatial framework for unequal development’ with the aim to lessen major income inequalities among regions (Friedmann and Weaver, 1979). In confronting the latter, it arose to provide new functional arrangements to specific urban regions facing rapid population growth and increasing urban sprawl product of rising standards of living and personal mobility (Glasson, 1974, page 10).

The underpinnings of regional planning at the time were clearly embraced in the following definition by Friedmann (1963):

‘Regional planning is the process of formulating and clarifying social objectives in the ordering of supra-urban space. The basic question, therefore, is: How are activities to be distributed in space so as to meet social objectives? Alternatively, what are the proper social objectives in accordance with which activities are to be allocated in space?’ (Friedmann, 1963, page 171)

In recognising the relationship between social welfare purposes and spatial arrangements, this definition evidently holds functional significance as to what regards the need to attain the spatial ordering and distribution of human activities. In a Scandinavian context and in Denmark in particular, this awareness was guided by the principle of ‘equal development’, which legally constituted the underlying orientation of regional planning. In connection with Friedmann’s definition but also widening its scope, the Danish Town Planning Laboratory defined regional planning as follows:

‘The purpose of regional planning is to provide a plan for the use of the land and the natural resources of the region on the basis of a general social view in which regard is being paid to the protection of the environment and the interplay with economic planning’ (Danish Town Planning Laboratory, 1974, page 31).

The inherent socio-spatial logic of regional planning embedded in the above definitions implied the coordination of multiple and long-standing sectoral policies and objectives to achieve a more even distribution of economic development between regions. As an overarching policy field, regional planning thus attempted to coordinate aspects of land-use allocation and their geographical distribution together with population balance. Spatial planning policies that demanded regional coordination evidently varied from country to country, but generally included housing and employment policies, transport infrastructure projects, urban and regional economic development measures, agriculture, the siting of waste facilities and the management of environmental resources, amongst others (Vigar et al, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones, 2001; Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000).

In Denmark, this coordination challenge was geographically implemented through the design of a hierarchical spatial arrangement of urban centres based on service provision and how such centres positioned themselves in relation to one another within their own regions. The spatial logic and cross-sectoral emphases associated with this rational form of planning aligned with the 'equal development' orientation of the domain and thereby also with the achievement of public interest objectives. Concerning its mode of implementation, regional planning was commonly exercised through regulatory mechanisms consisting of hierarchical institutional arrangements and provisions that lower levels were legally bound to comply with (see European Communities, 1997; Enemark, 1999). Indeed, the practice of regional planning was embedded in a system designed *ad hoc* to control and steer growth and development at different territorial scales.

However, planning systems and policies have been subjected to radical shifts during the past two decades (e.g. Healey et al, 1997; Albrechts et al, 2003), which have caused the spatial planning domain to adopt different roles (Galland 2011). In this sense, the overall conception of regional planning has also changed not only in terms of its logic but also in relation to its contents. For instance, the inclusion of more sectoral policies and (sustainable development) objectives (Haughton and Counsell, 2004) during the early 1990s certainly challenged the field to embrace and adopt new coordinative measures. By the late 1990s, the adoption of specific European directives made the field even more complex. At the same time, the continued move towards innovation and competitiveness in Europe caused the objectives of regional planning to skew more towards the pursuit of economic growth agendas (e.g. Amin and Thrift, 1994; Newman and Thornley 1996; Scott, 2000) in the 2000s. More recently in specific geographical contexts, several if not most planning responsibilities formerly adhered to regional level for the guidance of spatial development have been re-scaled (e.g. Gualini, 2006). In Denmark and Norway, for instance, planning system shifts derived from local and regional structural reforms implied the re-scaling of provisions, tasks and responsibilities once in charge of regional planning (see Østergård, 2005; Bukve et al, 2008).

The mode of implementation and the institutional landscape of planning have also been exposed to important adjustments (e.g. Albrechts et al, 2001). In Denmark as elsewhere in Europe, the traditional hierarchical structures and regulatory mechanisms of planning have been considerably replaced by new arenas shaped by a range of actors (e.g. Healey 2007; Nischwitz, 2007). Contemporary planning systems thereby tend to place the regional level in a position where authorities no longer seem to regulate or control lower levels through regional spatial plans but rather collaborate with other actors in establishing new initiatives for the management of regions (e.g. Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Healey, 2006). This whole situation concerned with shifts

in logic, contents and institutional arrangements inevitably raises a need to question the extent to which the tasks and achievements once delivered by regional planning still occur in practice. In what follows, the paper delves into the genesis and evolution of regional planning in Denmark to create an understanding of the domain based on its logic, contents, functions and roles.

2. Initial attempts towards regional planning and the genesis of the Danish planning system

2.1. The planning efforts of the post-war era

The underpinnings that support the Danish planning system lie on the awareness of creating functional cities through a comprehensive and enforced administration of land uses. These physical planning premises have traditionally entailed the enactment of town planning regulations and the zoning of urban districts since the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, the Planning Act of 1938, a planning by-law imposed on municipalities containing urban areas, provided the basis to regulate how towns ought to develop. The Act introduced the procedures for providing disposition plans (municipal plans) and town plans (by-law local plans) with binding effect for landowners (Gaardmand, 1993). These two types of plans were provided by the municipalities and adopted by a special department under the Ministry of Interior.

However, disposition plans were only provided for the major cities and the Act did not stipulate a legal basis to safeguard a clear demarcation between urban and rural areas or for controlling urban growth. The resulting urban sprawl of the following years eventually led to the enactment of a Town and Countryside Zoning Act in 1949 (Enemark, 1999, page 18). Aiming to preserve the open countryside, the Act introduced zoning as a tool to prevent further speculation in rural lands. Inter-municipal urban development committees were appointed with the aim to provide urban development plans, which were based on land use regulatory principles (zoning provisions) that deliberately projected specific areas for urban expansion in connection with the implementation of infrastructure development. Plans thereby identified three development zones, namely inner, medium, and outer zones (Gaardmand, 1993, page 40). Whereas inner zones referred to areas where development was allowed in adjacency to built areas, medium zones were considered as potential areas for expansion and outer zones banned development. At first, these plans were elaborated for the four largest cities (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg) but several other smaller urban areas followed suit throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Michelsen et al, 2005, page 8).

As it occurred in most of Western Europe, growth thinking based on industrial development significantly influenced the Danish cities of the post-war years. In Denmark, however, this paradigm was not unique. The realisation of the welfare state was being pursued in a parallel fashion, which sought for equal development in connection to delivering social goods (housing, education, careers, employment) for the whole population. But through disposition plans and urban development plans, however, these objectives only seemed sensible and appropriate for larger urban areas. Such plans could therefore be perceived as a rational attempt to create progressive and expanding cities based on the coordination of new developments with employment sites and service provision. While Denmark's largest cities were expected to benefit from

these considerations, it was only Copenhagen that seemingly accomplished these objectives notwithstanding the generation of a number of negative side effects.

Furthermore, while the planning regulations of first couple of post-war decades did not stipulate any considerations above the urban level, economic growth began to concentrate predominantly in Greater Copenhagen. In line with substantial industrial development and job creation, this urban area experienced significant net positive migration from 1950 to 1970 whereas most other regions in the country continued to lag behind (Studsholt and Hvidtfeldt, 1990). This situation led to a major political debate concerned with unequal development, which came to be known as ‘the unbalanced Denmark’ (Christoffersen and Topsøe-Jensen, 1979). Consequently, the need for more comprehensive planning in light of the accomplishment of welfare objectives was rendered essential. In what follows, some of the first attempts to carry out regional planning in Denmark are described as well as the contents of a highly influential structural reform of local government, which after its implementation during the 1970s ended up shaping the scope and functions of the first generation of regional plans.

2.2. The first planning exercises above the urban level

The renowned 1947 Finger Plan for Copenhagen was the first planning initiative above the urban level in Denmark. It came to represent the first comprehensive planning attempt to coherently address matters such as mass transport, industry development, housing and nature preservation in a supra-urban scale. Since the industrialisation of Denmark in the late nineteenth century, Copenhagen had begun to suffer from urban sprawl in several directions well beyond its urban core. Hence, the Finger Plan projected an ordered expansion of Copenhagen outwardly along five corridors (the fingers) into rural areas towards the west and north of the inner city and in direction of nearby towns. Each corridor allowed for urban development based on moderate population increases and housing stock positioned in function of suburban railway lines. The space between the corridors was preserved for agricultural and recreational purposes. Although the plan was not politically adopted, it was highly valued in the guidance of local development in the decades following its publication (Jensen, 1992).

(Insert Figures 1a & 1b about here)

Aarhus, Denmark’s second largest city, was inspired by the Finger Plan to develop its own ‘Regional Plan for Greater Aarhus’ in 1954, which consisted on an expansion along two urban corridors in northwest and southwest directions from the urban core (Michelsen et al, 2005, page 10). Updates of both regional plans for Greater Copenhagen and Greater Aarhus were voluntarily prepared by these cities in cooperation with their neighbouring municipalities in the early 1960s. While these plans can be essentially considered as preliminary attempts to implement coherent planning at a supra-urban scale, a more formal basis for systematic and coherent regional planning was still needed in addressing the socio-economic and spatial issues stemming from the ‘unbalanced Denmark’ debate.

In addition to these plans, a first Regional Development Act was passed in 1958. The Act authorised the Ministry of Trade to provide financial aid to site industrial firms in regions undergoing severe economic problems and where employment op-

portunities were much needed. Most of the Jutland peninsula was targeted as an area for regional development, particularly North Jutland, where direct grants to assist capital investments were made possible (Danish Town Planning Laboratory, 1974). In 1966, a comprehensive regional analysis carried out for this region generated a physical plan specifying a regional centre, growth areas and developing cities as well as principles for the development of traffic infrastructure (Bredsdorff et al, 1966). The plan projected the development of the whole region towards the year 2000 and it became distinctive from the former city-region planning exercises in that it was the first real attempt to generate a sound regional plan comprising urban, rural, coastal and potential growth areas in connection with infrastructure development and environmental preservation. Other Danish regions such as Funen and South Denmark followed suit some years after.

(Insert [Figure 2](#) about here)

Also in 1966, the national Land Planning Secretariat published an influential report entitled 'Regional Planning and Regional Divisions'. This report designated cities and towns as national, regional, municipal and local centres, respectively, in accordance to the type of service functions that they were to deliver (Landsplanudvalget Sekretariat, 1966). Such urban pattern rationale (known in Danish as *bymønster*) followed a hierarchical spatial arrangement of urban centres based on service provision and how they positioned themselves in relation to one another over the territory.¹ Without attaining legal status in the immediate years following its publication, the logic of spatial intervention was rendered reliable preparatory evidence for the implementation of the 1970 reform of local government structure as well as the preparation of regional plans a decade afterwards (see next subsection). As a whole, this hierarchy of service centres aimed at providing a sensible solution towards achieving a more even spatial distribution of socio-economic growth throughout Denmark.

(Insert [Figure 3](#) about here – Hierarchical pattern 1966 and 1981)

2.3. The 1970 structural reform and the consolidation of the Danish planning system

Denmark underwent a radical local government reform in 1970 that played a significant role in ultimately defining the scope and functions of regional planning in the future. The implementation of this reform was materialised through decentralising public sector tasks while reconfiguring the administrative division of counties and municipalities. Altogether, the transformation to the post-war welfare society in Denmark required a coordinated effort whereby municipal and regional planning would turn out to be fundamental. Local authorities took the initiative to materialise the structural reform where popularly elected members dominated a Local Government Commission founded in 1959. During the eleven years it took for the reform to concretise, the Commission's work focused on addressing inequality aspects stemming from rapidly growing towns such as the demographic unbalances and economic

¹ For example, to be a regional centre, a city should have comprised services and functions such as colleges, hospitals, retail areas, libraries, technical schools, and so forth. In addition to these functions, a national centre should also have a university, larger retail centres, hospitals with at least 12 specialties, and several other requirements.

side effects that jeopardised the future of rural communities at the time (Jørgensen and Vagnby, 2005).

The context for the execution of this structural reform was based on the recognition of planning as a societal need. The key structural expectations and challenges, amongst others, were constituted by the significant general population increase, a reduction of rural population due to mechanisation of the agricultural sector, the need for land due to rapid urban development (housing, transport, industry, service), a fall in average household size (from more than 3,5 to less than 2), a general increase in real incomes leading to a raise in consumption patterns, a significant rise in car ownership, and a significant growth in education, research and development activities (Vagnby, 2005).

Before 1970, Denmark was divided into 86 municipalities and 1366 rural districts contained within 25 county council districts. This demarcation showed a sharp distinction between the urban and the rural. Indeed, rural districts were too small (in terms of territory, civil servants and population) to handle local tasks effectively while the urban extension of many of the former municipalities had already spread outside their formerly defined boundaries. As a result, the 1970 reform amalgamated rural districts into 277 municipalities and reduced the number of counties to 14.

(Insert [Figure 4](#) about here)

A continuous transfer of tasks from national to regional and local levels with regards to planning, social services, health care and education followed in the years after. The counties were strengthened financially and were made responsible for regional planning as well as health care amongst other tasks and responsibilities. In addition, a restructuring of the financial system took place where reimbursement schemes were replaced by block grants and financial equalisation schemes between the more and the less developed municipalities (Elbo, 1981). The structural reform also enabled the possibility of economies of scale and further savings. Once the reform was implemented, counties and municipalities were deemed sizeable enough to ensure that welfare provision was effectively dealt with. Moreover, counties and municipalities were also authorised to collect their own taxes (Jørgensen, 2004).

The reform was followed by the legal consolidation of the Danish planning system, whereby planning law reforms were implemented from 1970 until 1977. These reforms included the Urban and Rural Zones Act in 1970, the National and Regional Planning Act in 1973 and the Municipal Planning Act in 1977 (Enemark, 1999). The 1973 National and Regional Planning Act became the first statutory policy at the national scale, which made it compulsory for counties to submit regional plans to national authorities. On these premises, the principle of equal development was legally adopted and the Danish planning system was rooted on the basis of the principle of framework control, by which plans at lower levels must not contradict planning decisions made at higher levels (*ibid.*, page 17).

(Insert [Figure 5](#) about here)

The 1970 structural reform together with the creation of the Danish planning system significantly contributed to promote not only an overall decentralisation of industrial development but also of administrative infrastructure to safeguard a more equal socio-economic development across the country. Such decentralisation contributed to meet the developmental needs of more peripheral regions while enabling a better access to

public and private services that would have otherwise remained in larger urban centres. All in all, the rise and consolidation of the planning domain at the time can be portrayed as 'the spatial expression of the welfare state' (Jensen and Jørgensen, 2000).

3. The evolution of regional planning in Denmark (1980 – 2005)

The institutionalisation of regional planning in Denmark was the result of an attempt to implement coherent planning for areas above the urban level, whose first signs had already been witnessed in the cases of North Jutland and the city-region plans for Copenhagen and Aarhus that were delivered during the first two post-war decades. The passing of the National and Regional Planning Act in 1973 marked the initiation of regional planning in Denmark, which adopted a more tangible form after provisions for the establishment of regional plans were put forward in 1977.

The first generation of Danish regional plans was advanced in 1980. Since then, the domain adopted a cross-sectoral focus in attempting to coordinate the multiple objectives of spatial planning in coherence with welfare values and in pursuit of equal development. This was materialised through a physical-functional orientation embedded in the distribution of socioeconomic development objectives and the management of environmental assets. The spatial reasoning behind regional planning thereby sought to provide a coherent framework for municipal planning based on legally binding land-use provisions. As such, these provisions required the counties to advance regional plans that included the designation of zones for urban development, recreational purposes, nature protection, environmental resource management, infrastructure development and the siting of regional facilities (such as waste or energy facilities), amongst other relevant themes.

As a whole, the practice of regional planning in light of the above rationale was comprised by 7 generations of plans prepared by each of the 14 Danish counties from 1980 to 2005. Regional plans were advanced based on a time frame of 12 years, and were revised and updated at least every 4 years (typically after the election of county councils). The first generation of regional plans published in 1980 was followed by updated versions delivered in 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001 and 2005, respectively. The process for preparing the plans typically included two periods for public debate. The first hearing comprised a call for ideas and solutions open for civil society organisations, while the second concentrated on the draft plan to be discussed by county and municipal actors. The elaboration of the first generation of regional plans was rather lengthy and included several revisions before final drafts were adopted. For instance, the county of North Jutland put forward yearly detailed proposals since 1977 until the first regional plan was finally adopted.

There were three generations of regional plans advanced during the 1980s, which defined the hierarchical pattern of urban centres for each individual county.² The key

² Based on the 1966 report 'Regional Planning and Regional Divisions' described in the previous section, the Ministry of Environment published an updated version entitled 'Report of the Future Urban Pattern' in 1979. This report hierarchically defined the urban pattern of every Danish urban centre based on service provision. It then became legally adopted in the 1981 National Planning Report wherein national, regional and local area centres were defined. For a detailed overview regarding the evolution of Danish national planning policy, see D. Galland, 'Understanding the Reorientations and Roles of Spatial Planning: The Case of National Planning Policy in Denmark', *European Planning Studies* (Forthcoming October 2011).

roles of towns and cities with respect to service provision and infrastructure development were thus defined for every single county. Through the urban pattern logic, plans sought to ensure equal development by strengthening weak areas partly at the expense of stronger ones. Moreover, this set of plans put forward guidelines concerned with natural resources management while also highlighted aspects that addressed the open country and the designation of special natural and agricultural areas. Guidelines related to energy facility siting (i.e. windmills) were also supplemented in the latest generation of plans in that decade (1989).

Two more generations of regional plans were advanced in the 1990s, which were considerably influenced by shifts in national planning. A new Planning Act, which entered into force in 1992, integrated and simplified planning and zoning provisions that were previously addressed by the several planning acts originally advanced in the 1970s. This shift allowed for national, regional, municipal and local planning as well as zoning and the administration of rural areas to be merged into a single law. Beyond these functional adjustments, a highly remarkable shift was the Act's opening chapter stating that the purpose of planning was to aim towards 'appropriate development in the whole country and in the individual counties and municipalities...' (Ministry of Environment, 1992). This orientation shift came in direct contradiction with the 'equal development' paradigm that characterised Danish planning ever since it was conceived.

Regional planning provisions during the 1990s were made more complex due to the implementation of two legally binding national planning directives that were included as amendments to the Planning Act in 1994 and 1997, respectively. The first directive addressed the safeguarding of coastal zones, which made regional plans responsible of ensuring their protection. The second directive dealt with retail trade regulations, whereby regional plans were meant to pose restrictions regarding the location of these facilities, amongst other constraints. In addition, groundwater quality considerations were also given special emphasis, particularly in the generation of regional plans of 1997. Beyond these inclusions, the two generations of plans advanced in the 1990s continued to designate aspects related with the urban pattern, infrastructure development and the use of rural areas based upon socioeconomic considerations (i.e. demographic and labour market trends).

The final two generations of plans were published in 2001 and 2005. These plans differed from the former given the inclusion of environmental themes following the enactment of European Union directives. Environmental impact assessment became an additional responsibility of regional planning after the passing of a EU directive that had entered into force in 1999. Regional plans thereby acquired the duty of specifying guidelines on the location and design of projects that were likely to have significant effects on the environment. Moreover, special responsibilities concerned with water resources protection and water quality were similarly assumed by regional planning in response to another EU directive adopted in 2000. For instance, groundwater protection became a stronger consideration with the designation of nitrate-vulnerable areas while the protection of cultural history in the landscape was also embraced through the identification of valuable cultural environments in regional plans. The last generation of regional plans of 2005 was the last of its kind, which maintained legal status through a national planning directive that entered into force in 2007 (Østergård, 2005). The directive stated that the 2005 regional plans should be integrated into the municipal plans generated by the new municipalities.

Altogether, the regional planning domain became increasingly more comprehensive in the course of every decade. From three general themes (urban and infrastruc-

ture development, recreation areas and natural resources management) covered throughout the first three generations of plans during the 1980s, regional planning continued to add and orchestrate several other themes related to different sectors during the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the shift in the thematic character of regional plans also implied that the domain gradually placed more emphasis on environmental considerations rather than societal ones. This turned out to be particularly evident after the Environmental Law reform of 1991, the shift from equal to appropriate development stated in 1992, and the enactment of EU directives in 1999 and 2000. Whereas the first three generations of regional plans constituted a base for socio-spatial development, the latest generations showed that the spatial logic embedded in the hierarchical urban pattern of regional plans decreased in importance.

Regional plans became imperative not only as a binding instrument for municipal plans with sectoral interests and objectives, but also as a conciliatory tool to balance sectoral considerations. For instance, regional planning became useful in ensuring that a particular sectoral decision was not undertaken at the expense of another (e.g. a transport decision impacting heavily on environmental assets). Another capacity provided by regional plans was the coordination of municipalities in joint matters transcending their own boundaries. In this respect, the regional planning process proved beneficial in balancing conflicting interests and in coordinating objectives related with traffic services (such as harbours, railways and roads) as well as the siting of 'undesirable' facilities (e.g. solid-waste treatment plants, sewage disposal sites, petrochemical plants and even windmill parks) (Studsholt and Hvidtfeldt 1990). Furthermore, the process also enabled the possibility of stakeholder participation including negotiations between municipalities and counties as well as two periods of public debate regarding aspects of draft plans (Studsholt, 2000)

4. The new Danish planning system and the rise of 'growth planning' at the regional level

In 2007, the implementation of a new reform redesigned functional and territorial structures of local and regional governments based on the creation of larger municipalities and regions with different decentralised tasks and responsibilities. This section addresses the implications that this reform generated on the planning domain in general, and on regional planning in particular. The character and background of the reform are firstly examined followed by a discussion concerned with new policies, strategies and institutional arrangements that have emerged at the regional level since then. The main argument put forward is that the spatial character of regional planning has been replaced by a new space-less rationale largely dominated by economic growth objectives.

4.1. The 2007 structural reform³

A new structural reform of local and regional government created in 2002, enacted in 2005 and put into effect in 2007 resulted in the restructuring of the political and ad-

³ This section partly draws from two reports published by the Ministry of Interior and Health in Denmark (2004 and 2006), respectively. The reports are entitled 'Agreement on a Structural Reform' and 'The Local Government Reform – In Brief'.

ministrative map of Denmark. The reform consisted of an updated territorial demarcation of municipalities and regions. While the former 275 municipalities were merged into 98 new ones, the 14 former counties were abolished and replaced by 5 new regions. Overall, the reform entailed a major redistribution of tasks as well as the creation of a new financing and equalisation system.

In determining the need for a new reform, a Commission of Administrative Structure was appointed by late 2002. With the support of ministries as well as regional and municipal entities, the Commission described alternative models for public sector organisation and concluded, by early 2004, that a whole reform in terms of territorial boundaries and transfer of tasks was needed. The Commission's final assessment deemed the reform necessary by evidencing several weaknesses associated with the former local government structure. More specifically, the Commission highlighted the inappropriateness of the territorial size of administrative units for task performance under the premise that overlapping responsibilities and functions between them created vast inefficiencies. In addition, the Commission was demanded to address matters concerned with economic sustainability, citizen participation, quality in service delivery and possible choices between service providers as well as coherence between technical competence and economic responsibilities (Ministry of Interior and Health, 2004, 2006).

An 'Agreement on a Structural Reform' was then made later that year between the government (The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party) and the Danish People's Party, which rendered the preparation of 50 bills on the division and distribution of tasks by level of government and sector. All bills were adopted by mid-2005, covering municipal, regional and state responsibilities in the fields of employment, business development, transportation and roads, culture, nature, environment and planning, taxes, social services, health care and education.

In accordance with the Agreement, the aim of this new reform was to '...maintain and develop a democratically governed public sector with a sound basis for continued development of the Danish welfare state' (Ministry of the Interior and Health, 2004). From an economic standpoint, benefits from synergy effects were to be obtained through merging local and regional administrative units via wage administration, customer service or the possibility of economies of scale, amongst other savings. Consequently, the new municipalities after the reform turned out to be significantly larger both in terms of squared kilometres and population, i.e. the merging of municipalities caused a raise in average population from 20,000 to 55,000 inhabitants.

In light of the above, the 2007 structural reform signified the outcome of a process mostly geared towards efficiency considerations and managerial effectiveness. While its mandate called for an assessment of several geographical criteria that could form basis for future decisions, no key recommendations concerned with spatial structure were delivered as such. In this sense, territorial considerations pointing towards classical peripheral problems of some counties, the functional relationships (e.g. mobility and commuting patterns) between them or the appraisal of other geographical criteria were entirely disregarded in the decision-making process (Jørgensen, 2004, page 11).

(Insert [Figure 6](#) about here)

4.2. Shifts in the Planning Act, the emergence of regional development planning and the birth of Regional Growth Fora

Beyond the reorganisation of the political and administrative map of Denmark, the 2007 structural reform also resulted in a crucial amendment of the Planning Act. This modification brought along important shifts to the Danish planning system and its configuration, which prompted the making of new planning policy at different levels. An important outcome was the strengthening of national and municipal levels of planning at the expense of the regional level. In this sense, while the purpose of the Planning Act and its aims nonetheless remained unaltered, spatial planning tasks and responsibilities formerly adhered to regional planning were transferred to the municipal level. Some of these aspects included the designation of urban zones, the location of transport facilities, the administration of agricultural interests, the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, the use of water resources, and several other environmental management tasks. In obtaining the right for land-use planning in both urban areas and the countryside, the Act provided municipalities the necessary autonomy to generate proposals and make decisions.

Furthermore, national planning was similarly ‘strengthened’, mainly in relation to its capacities and institutional arrangements to overview municipal planning and local land-use planning. The Ministry of Environment adopted a monitoring role that allowed national authorities to intervene in municipal planning in connection to themes and projects of international, national or regional relevance. In doing so, the Ministry established a number of environmental centres across the country to secure the implementation of national policy objectives concerned with nature protection, water resources management, national infrastructure projects, coastal zone management, retail trade and environmental impact assessment (Østergård, 2005).

The Act’s former chapters specifying regional planning provisions were thus repealed and replaced instead by regional development plans (RDPs).⁴ These plans are aimed at describing the ‘desired spatial development’ of each region, which includes several themes formerly undertaken by regional plans, i.e. the development of cities and towns, rural districts and small-town peripheral regions, nature and the environment, business, tourism, employment, education and culture (Ministry of the Environment, 2007). The intent of the RDPs is meant to utterly break away from the legally binding mandate, aim and scope of the former regional plans. In principle, the RDP can thus be conceived as a ‘soft’ policy instrument for the new regions whose aim is provide an ‘umbrella’ for development initiatives to inspire and partially support the making of municipal plans. In this sense, the RDPs reject the idea that regional planning is still expected to manage spatial planning at the municipal level. This statement is illustrated by the following quote:

‘The regional development plan will not be able to manage in detail and will not have the role of deciding where various functions will be located. If regional councils, the councillors and employees do not abandon the old way of thinking, the regional development plans will fail and remain sparse documents’ (Nielsen, 2005)

As strategic tools, the RDPs are the outcome of bottom-up, process-oriented, multi-stakeholder settings undertaken by regional authorities in close collaboration with municipalities, interest organisations, educational institutions and other actors in each

⁴ Prior to the implementation of the reform and to determining the existence of regional development, the Danish Government had already appointed a Regional Planning Committee (*Regionplanudvalg*) in 2002 with the task to give recommendations to upgrade and simplify regional planning in Denmark. In doing so, the Ministry of Environment commissioned different international organisations to carry out studies of regional planning systems in other Nordic countries as well as in England and Germany.

region. So far, the only generation of RDPs was advanced in 2007, a time where municipalities were deeply struggling with implementing the structural reform and preparing a new generation of comprehensive municipal plans. This situation essentially limited the inclusiveness and ownership of several bottom-up processes and in many cases caused the municipalities to adopt an indifferent attitude when it came to implementing the RDPs.

In spite of these initial challenges and limitations, the rationale behind advancing RDPs portrays the regions as members of a partnership strategy aimed at supporting the central government's focus on strengthening Denmark's role in the global economy. The 2006 national planning report clearly positioned itself in accordance with globalisation by stressing the need to renew spatial planning as a prerequisite to pursue the growth and competitiveness demands. Based on this premise, the RDPs could be regarded as an attempt of the central government to improve Denmark's position in the global competition. In this sense, both regional and municipal levels are increasingly expected to become strategically co-responsible for a broader economic development, adjustment and adaptation (Ministry of the Environment, 2006).

In line with such positioning on economic growth and competitiveness and along with the creation of RDPs, the 2005 Business Development Act handed the new regions statutory responsibility to set up partnership-like entities known as Regional Growth Fora (RGF). Comprised by representatives from regional and municipal councils, local businesses, trade unions and knowledge and educational institutions, RGF have been in charge of fostering and advancing initiatives to improve local conditions for economic growth. In doing so, these agencies hold the task of preparing business development strategies based on the strengths of businesses in the regions, which focus on the government's four drivers of economic growth (adopted through the EU from the OECD): human resources, entrepreneurship, accumulation and sharing of knowledge, and access to new technology. The main role of RGF is to ultimately make recommendations to regional councils and the state as to what regards funding for specific regional development projects and the allocation of EU Structural Funds, respectively.

There is a high degree of interaction and co-dependence between the RDPs and the RGFs' business development strategies given the fact that both need to ensure full cohesion with one another. In accordance to the 2005 Business Development Act, business development strategies should constitute part of the foundation of the RDPs themselves. In view of the RGF's legal positioning and their inherently strong decision-making nature coupled with the seemingly fragile clout so far embedded in RDPs, the implementation of the latter is most likely to be conditioned by their strict alignment with the interests pursued by the former. This scenario has somehow struck the first generation of RDPs advanced in 2007, which in subsequent years saw a rather limited implementation of its proposed strategies. However, a new generation of RDPs is expected for 2012, which is likely to undergo quite a different process and thereby render distinctive outcomes. This is mainly due to the shifting preconditions to embark upon more inclusive bottom-up processes based on already existing municipal plans (2009) and business development strategies (2010). RDP processes are also likely to undertake an alternative cause given the fact that municipalities have already overcome the turmoil of implementing the structural reform and have thereby been presented a new opportunity to prioritise the making of RDPs.

(Insert Figure 7 about here)

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

The evolution of regional planning in Denmark leads to the general discussion that the overall conception of the domain has been significantly mobilised, which has thereby entailed a profound transformation of the domain particularly during the past five years. In this sense, the preceding analysis leads to three main conclusions. The first conclusion is that the contents and logics of regional planning have importantly shifted as a result of specific development orientations as well as other political driving forces. Regional planning was originally regarded as a societal necessity (to address uneven development) and as an orchestrated effort to alleviate the pressing urban and rural development issues of the post-war decades. This became evident in the advancement of (supra-urban) planning exercises seeking for the ordered expansion of city regions with respect to sectoral matters (i.e. mass transport, industrial development, housing and nature preservation). Moreover, in pursuit of providing a comprehensive framework for developing a whole region, the regional plan of North Jutland advanced in 1966 covered urban, rural and coastal development matters in correlation with infrastructure development and environmental preservation. These examples could be regarded as the first genuine attempts in pursuit of regional planning based on equal development and spatial coherence.

The cross-sectoral quality of these initial plans persisted throughout the consolidation of the domain in the 1970s and later with the advancement of regional plans. Of utmost relevance was the establishment of an urban pattern logic, which yielded hierarchical spatial arrangements within individual counties. This enabled a more even spatial distribution of demography, labour market and economic growth, which together with the 1970 structural reform contributed to secure a more equal socio-economic development across the country. In safeguarding the achievements made after the consolidation of regional planning, the same socio-spatial approach was pursued by the three generations of regional plans put forward in the 1980s. However, due to supra national and national interventions as well as the Planning Act's shift from equal to appropriate development, the contents of regional plans gradually placed more emphasis on environmental themes during the 1990s and early 2000s. Along with these thematic shifts, the spatial logic embedded in regional plans steadily decreased in importance.

The most radical shift, however, stemmed from the 2007 structural reform that abolished the counties and thereby most provisions associated with regional planning. This situation prompted the birth of five new regions with the task to pursue regional development planning instead. While contents wise the new regional development plans inherited most thematic aspects from the former regional plans, the spatial logic formerly embedded in the latter was replaced by a spaceless rationale geared towards the promotion of growth. This has entailed that the cross-sectoral nature of the plans be now exclusively regarded in light of drivers of economic growth while the balance of conflicting sectoral objectives appears to be largely overlooked. In other words, the conception of regional space once based on the equilibrium of socioeconomic aspects, environmental quality, land use and infrastructure development from inter-regional and intra-regional scopes has turned out to be fully dissolved. The absence of spatial thinking has thereby created an important policy gap, which could be likely to generate sectoral issues especially in connection with aspects transcending municipal boundaries (see third conclusion below).

The second conclusion can be explained through the outcomes of more recent shifts related with the policy mechanisms and institutional arrangements associated with regional planning. After its genesis and first decades of practice, regional planning in Denmark became consistently shaped by policy mechanisms designed *ad hoc* to yield legally binding physical land use plans. As of 2007, the statutory character of such mechanisms shifted into a new strategic scheme aimed at generating regional development plans. In contrast to the former, these new plans could be regarded as soft policy instruments geared towards generating visions for desired regional development. There is thus a general shift from coercion to guidance, implying that the allocative function once delivered by regional planning has ceased to exist.

In terms of institutional arrangements, the hierarchical structures previously in charge of plan making and implementation have also been considerably altered. The new Danish planning system currently relies on a much flexible version of the principle of framework control, implying that the regional level no longer directly imposes its provisions on municipalities. Although in principle the regional development plan does still hold a steering role over municipal plans (i.e. according to the latest version of the Planning Act the latter cannot contradict the former), it is precisely municipal actors who have significant influence in the process of defining the contents of regional development plans themselves. Besides, such plans are similarly meant to ensure cohesion with the growth fora's business development strategies, wherein municipal councils and private sector actors hold substantial decision-making powers. Therefore, the implementation potential of regional development plans mainly depends on the ownership that regional councils in liaison with municipalities and other groups of actors develop in supporting a common vision for the development of their regions. As only one generation of plans has so far been advanced, the extent to which these strategies are able to succeed remains to be seen.

The third conclusion concerns the shifting role of regional planning from being a 'Panopticon' to a facilitator of growth. The traditional structure of the Danish planning system based on the principle of framework control enabled the regional planning domain to ensure spatial coherence through the coordination of municipal and other sectoral plans. Through this mechanism, regional planning thereby originally adopted a 'Panopticon' role that directly intervened and safeguarded inter-municipal coordination in spatial development matters. Given the fact that the legally binding nature of regional plans has now been replaced by economic growth-oriented policies that neither oversee regional space nor hold a factual enforcing character, it can be concluded that the 'Panopticon' role of regional is no longer being assumed whatsoever.

The absence of the 'Panopticon' role may imply that municipalities face serious challenges due to their potential lack of collective expertise. This may actually hold true in cases where municipalities embark upon projects transcending their own boundaries or wherein an array of sectoral issues requires coordination for the sake of balancing regional space. An example is the implementation and maintenance of EU-sponsored development projects formerly endorsed and upheld through regional planning intervention. Another clear example where municipalities might encounter challenges concerns the management of environmental issues such as groundwater and surface water quality affected by the leaching of old industrial areas. Yet another case is that regarding the grants of special agriculture permits based on the compliance of *ad hoc* regulations, whose assessment is dependent on particular know-how and capacities that individual municipalities have not probably yet assumed. A further im-

plication is that regional population balance or labour market considerations are no longer overseen in unison with other sectoral plans.

The above implications suggest that the harmony provided by regional plans in bringing together different sectoral policies is currently at stake. Yet, the absence of this 'Panopticon' role could also entail a range of new opportunities for municipalities to generate innovative arrangements aimed at the implementation of inter-municipal networks. Through inclusiveness and ownership, for instance, municipalities still hold the possibility to advance a common framework of goals and strategies in relation with regional development plans and their implementation. In this sense, the extent to which regional development plans succeed to perform as real partnership strategies will potentially determine whether the domain recoups its former coordinative capabilities. But to do so, regional development planning as such will have to overcome the challenges of strengthening bottom-up processes while also being capable of generating a strong ownership amongst actors.

In sum, the whole conception of regional planning has experienced a substantial transformation in recent years. This concluding section has emphasised that such conversion is comprised by significant shifts concerned with: (i) the contents and logics of regional planning; (ii) the policy mechanisms and institutional arrangements associated with regional planning; and (iii) the role of regional planning in contributing to cater for development in the country. Several potential challenges and implications derived from each of these shifts have also been put forward. It is also concluded that the capacities and outcomes of regional planning as formerly conceived have ceased to exist. In this sense, regional planning as a comprehensive mechanism to deal with uneven spatial development has been transformed into a domain that mainly aligns with growth agendas. In addition, regional planning as a tool to ensure the ordered expansion of urban areas has been suppressed.

The endurance of regional planning values in the new regional development planning domain is likely to depend on the regions' ability to facilitate a sound symbiosis between the former values of regional planning and the growth values of business development strategies. This will therefore be contingent upon the regions' capacity to incorporate them in the on-going bottom-up development processes for the 2012 generation of plans. However, a successful symbiosis could be hampered by an increasing agenda on governmental austerity, which is currently causing that Danish municipalities centre even more on economic growth objectives to fill in budget potholes. In addition, with the strengthening of national and municipal planning and the significant clout that business development strategies possess at the regional level, the future of whatever is left of regional planning seems highly dependant on decisions that will be made beyond regional councils themselves.

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Figures

Figures 1a & 1b. 1947 Finger Plan for Greater Copenhagen (above) and 1954 Regional Plan for Greater Aarhus (below)

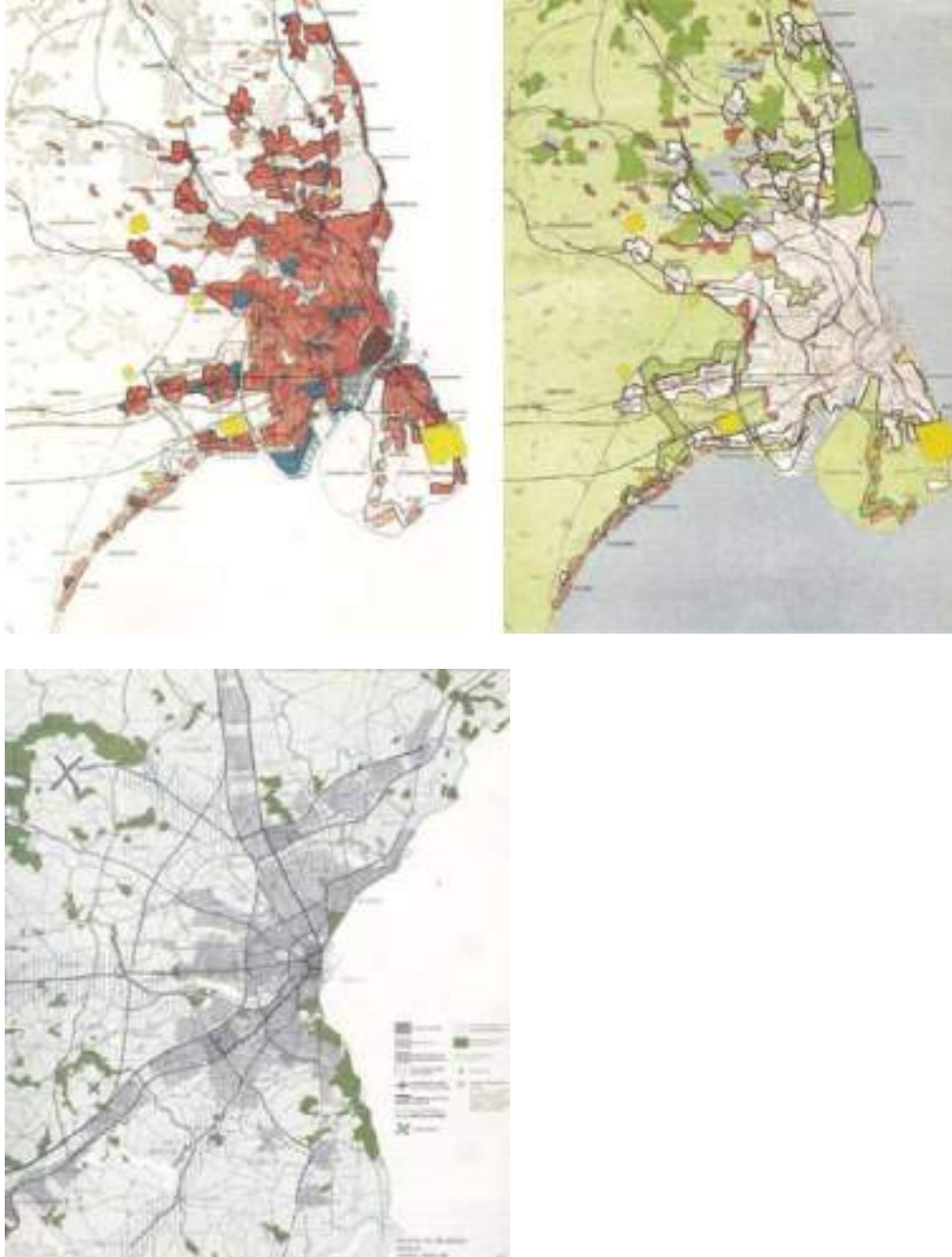


Figure 2. The 1966 regional plan of North Jutland



Figure 3. Hierarchical urban pattern: National centres (left) and regional centres (right) ca. 1965 based on 16 and 9 different service functions, respectively (Landsplanudvalget Secretariat, 1966, pp. 64, 67).

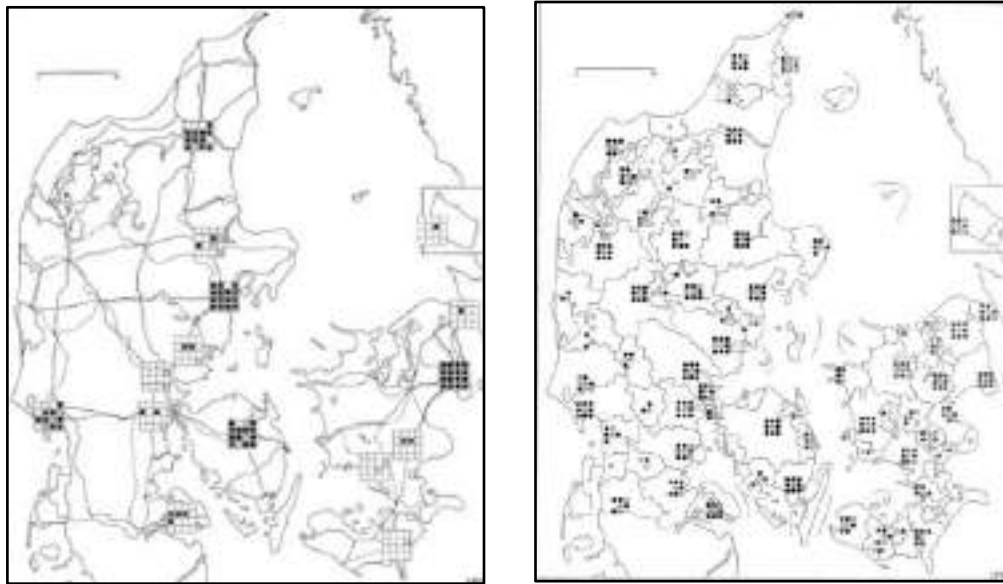


Figure 4. Danish counties and municipalities before and after the 1970 structural reform of local government (adapted from Jørgensen and Vagnby, 2005)

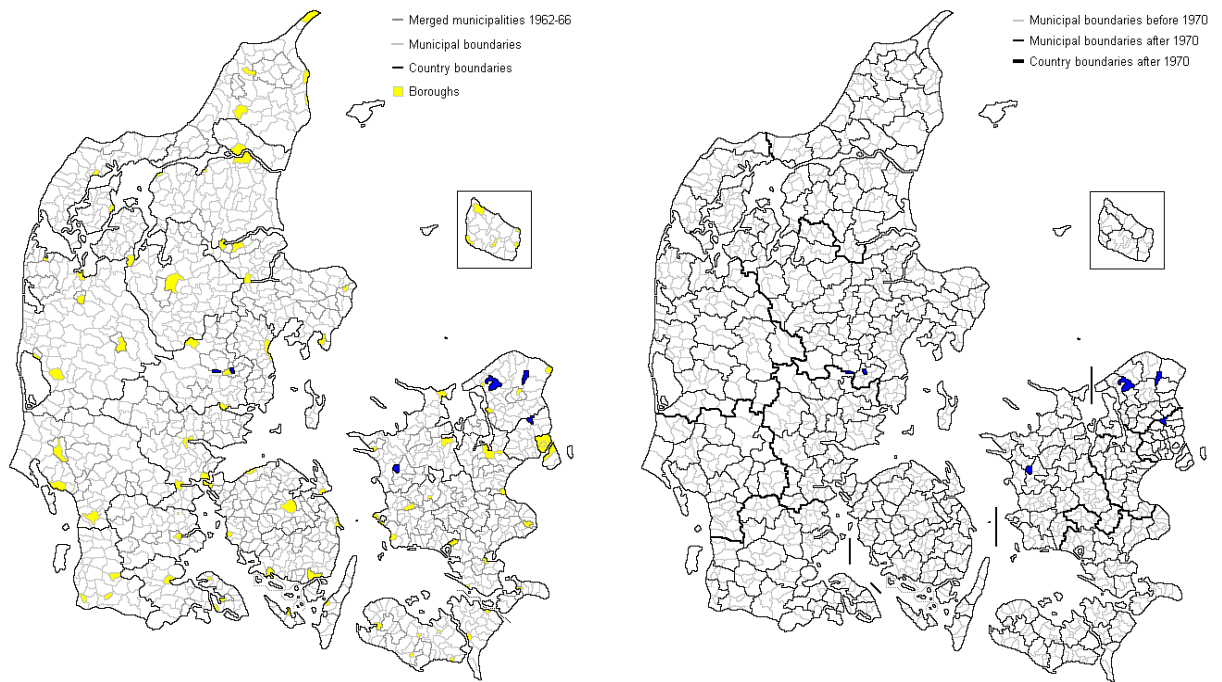


Figure 5. Overview of the Danish planning system and principle of framework control after the 1970 structural reform (adapted from Enemark, 2006)

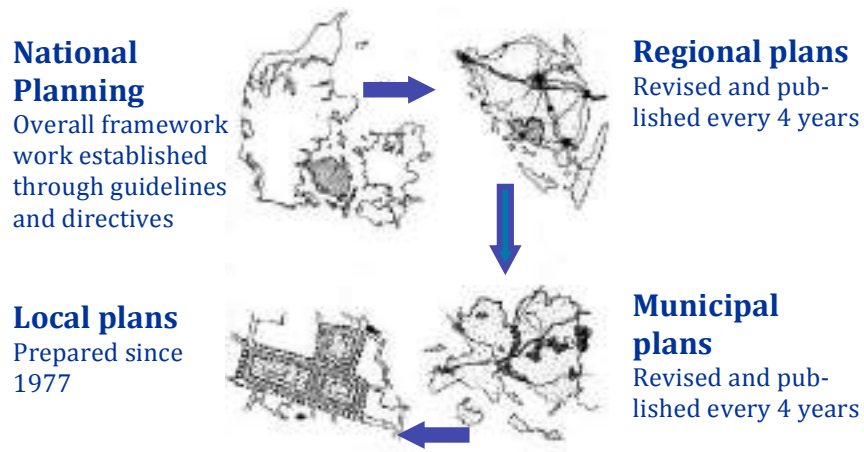


Figure 6. Danish regions and municipalities after the 2007 structural reform of local government (Nordregio, 2007)

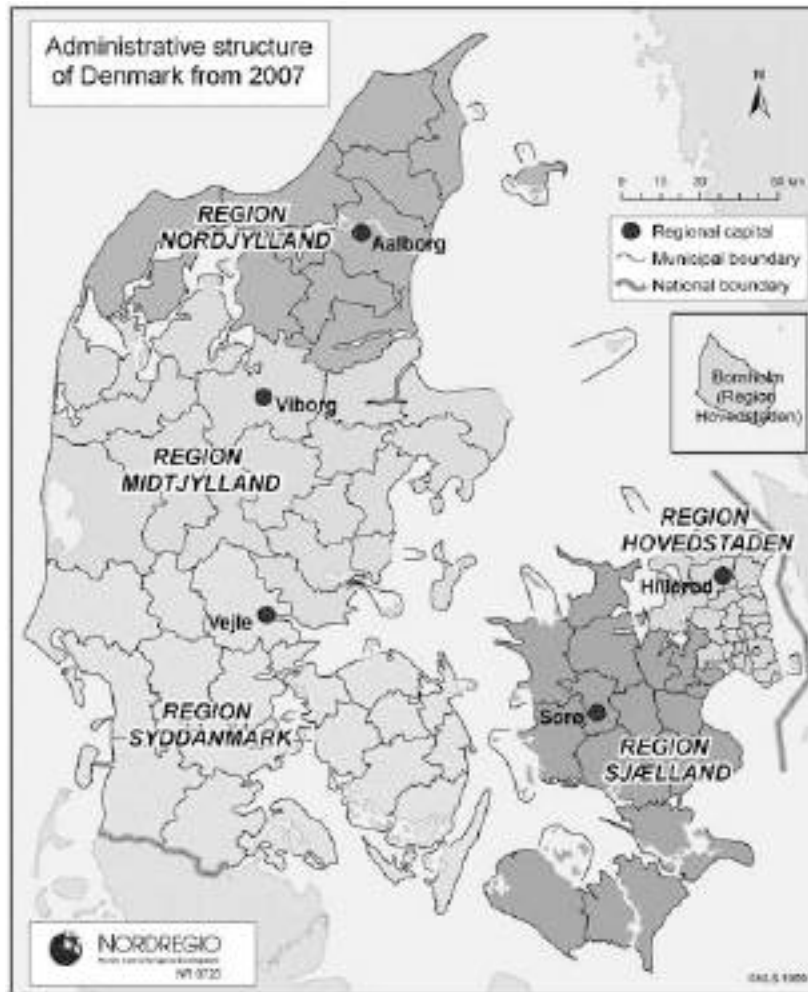


Figure 7. Overview of the Danish planning system after the 2007 structural reform (adapted from Østergård, 2005)

