

SPATIAL PLANNING: GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND EUROPEAN APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

Spatial planning is a strategic management process that aims to reconcile the effects of competing sectoral policies at local level. The richness or scarcity of natural and human resources is overcome by a proper coordination of managerial measures, including land use arrangements, in order to improve the overall premises of development and wellbeing. In the European framework the spatial dimension of sectoral policies is an important feature that among others should be addressed in a coordinated manner. The meaningful changes occurring in the last decades created important challenges for spatial planning which will be reviewed in the first part of the paper. The characteristics of the European spatial planning, its goals and variety of support models will give further insights on how this process is carried out and which are its benefits against the triple bottom line of sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: *ESDP, integration, spatial planning, sustainable development.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *R10, R50*

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is a complex construct that has a more and more important role to play in the political, economic, social, and environmental transformations that feature the contemporary society. This construct enabled governance to overcome historical animosities occurring among the most powerful nations of the world by streamlining power and resources toward the materialization of a development concept based on universal human values that is expected to deliver wellbeing in harmony with the constraints of natural systems.

The overarching process of integration that allows common goals to be achieved within a synergy featured framework necessitates a variety of aspects of the social and economic life to be approached at European level (Ioan, 2011). Along time in the European Commission new directorates general (DG) were established in order to manage specific issues. For instance in 1973 was created the DG Environment, followed by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in 2001, DG Competition in 2005, DG Energy in 2008, and 2010 DG Climate Action in 2010 to pick only few examples. Spatial planning is of European interest since the early stages of the integration, since the DG of Regional and Urban Policy was established in 1968.

The European significance of spatial planning emerged gradually and increased in importance and expectations. Which are these expectations and how they are captured in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) are the questions to be enlightened in the first part of the paper. Further, we will focus on the spatial planning models that were identified across Member States, discussing how they could be harmonized within the European approach.

2. CONTEMPORARY SPATIAL PLANNING CHALLENGES

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Spatial planning is a high decision level activity which manages the tensions created by the implementation of sectoral policies. Its role is to provide a rational arrangement of activities and to reconcile policy goals which use similar resources. The importance of spatial planning reveals itself by the creation of enabling conditions for investment and development, harnessing development benefits at local level, and protection of natural capital elements (Candea et al., 2006). The benefits of spatial planning could be grouped against the triple bottom line of sustainable development and are represented by:

- Economic benefits:
 - o Increased stability for investment;
 - o Optimal positioning in relation with the transport network and labor;
 - o Improved natural environment that create favorable conditions for investment;
 - o Better correlation of development directions with the goals of the local community;
 - o Increasing the use of renewable energy sources and fostering sustainable material flows;
 - o Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of decision making.
- Social benefits:
 - o Using community needs as basis for policy development;
 - o Good accessibility of existing and new infrastructure;
 - o Supporting the provision of local facilities where they are lacking;
 - o Ecological restoration of brownfields toward expanding the land availability for recreation or residential areas.
- Environmental benefits:
 - o Regeneration of ecosystems, appropriate use of land, buildings and infrastructure;
 - o Preservation of natural and cultural heritage;
 - o Improved risk management in case of natural hazards;
 - o Accessible location of alternative transportation means and infrastructure (public transportation, cycling and walking tracks etc.);
 - o Energy efficiency principle embodied in various developments (construction, infrastructure, institutional management etc.).

The economic and social turmoil that featured the first decade of the third millennium created a very dynamic environment for all types of human activities. Spatial planning also witnessed a challenging environment especially because the financial crisis unleashed in 2008 concerned real estate goods. Beside this specific aspect, the spatial planning process should consider four key challenges: i. globalization; ii. sustainable development; iii. European integration; and iv. demographic change.

2.1. Globalization

Globalization has an important impact on economic development even on a very low scale of spatial units. This impact is coming in various aspects such as:

- Acceptance of democratic institutions and widespread use of market based approaches even in public administration issues;
- Free circulation of freight, labor, and financial capital;
- Powerful influence of the corporate sector on public administration;
- Rapid up taking of technological innovations in more and more production and service delivery.

As consequences it could be noticed changes in the distribution of responsibilities between public and private sector, roles of local administration within regions, strong competition by the entrance of international business partners with highly efficient production means created within a multinational context etc.

2.2. Sustainable development

Sustainable development is a very powerful discourse that gained a global hegemony. Although there are several critics of the concept and its means the sustainability discourse was adopted by all governmental and governance institutions. The main challenge of sustainable development is to assess any process, product, service etc. against the triple bottom line – economic, social, and environmental. By this condition sustainable development influences spatial planning because it strengthens the need for:

- Building technologies and ecologically sound designs;
- Low energy consumption and promotion of renewable energy;
- Selective and efficient use of resources, recycling;
- Ecological principles to guide settlements development and land use;
- Public participation in the decision making process.

Although accepted as discourse, sustainable development does not produce major changes in spatial planning (Nastase et al., 2009), especially in urban areas because economic and social priorities undermine environmental issues.

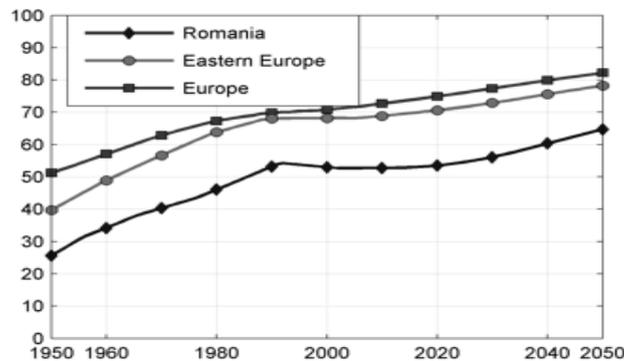


Figure 1. Proportion of urban population
 Source: UNDESA

2.3. European integration

The European Union is basically a territorial approach to address the economic challenges of a more and more competitive world. The spatial dimension of its policies emerged in the early stages of the European construct, although its coordinated pattern is still not well outlined. Nevertheless, spatial planning already produced significant effects by focusing on the reduction of disparities as an important means to improve the overall competitiveness of the union. Further, the relations among national communities had undergone important changes because administrative barriers were reduced, transportation infrastructure developed and employment centers changed at some extent.

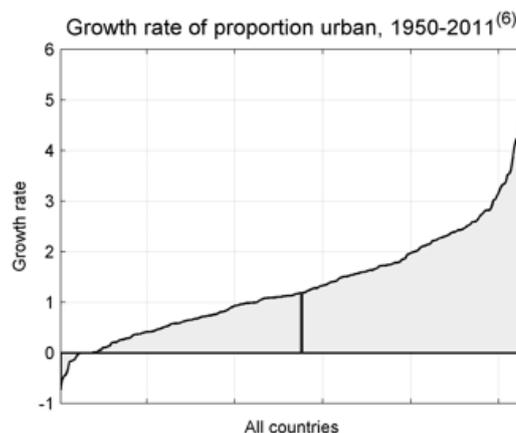


Figure 2. Growth rate of urban population's proportion
 Source: UNDESA

2.4. Demographic change

There are a number of demographic changes to be considered by spatial planning in the next decades such as: increasing rate of urbanization (figure 1), population decline in developed countries, increasing demand for housing. The urbanization is an attribute of civilization and it is expected to continue to absorb a wide proportion of the population (figure 2). At global level more than half of the population is living in urban environment since 2006. This percent is even higher in Europe and is expected to increase above 70% by 2030. For spatial planning it is important to consider the trend of sub-urban expansion that creates pressure on infrastructure such as transport, utilities, and waste disposal (Ioan and Radulescu, 2010). The decline of population has a stronger impact on rural areas, where lower population produces delay of infrastructure development.

3. EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING GOALS

The mission of the DG for Regional and Urban Policy (DGRUP) is to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion by reducing disparities between the levels of development of regions and countries of the EU. This mission is the result of a long process which is regarded as one of the many processes of the European integration.

The DGRUP is among the early established DGs (1968). The need for European spatial planning is rooted in the 1970 Council Declaration where it was stated that "European integration could aggravate geographical differences if this were not accompanied by a common approach to regional planning".

After several decades of approaching spatial planning at European level the degree of coordination did not reached too far. In fact, the first reports on spatial coordination were prepared only in the 1980s, the most important being the so called Gendebien Report (1983), which focused on the spatial nature of the EU policy. Other milestones of the European spatial planning framework's emergence are the initiatives and documents of the European Council such as the European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter or the Torremolinos Charter (CoE 1984) continued with the pan-European approach issued at Hanover (CoE 2000) and the proposals of the European Commission which began in 1999 with the approval of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) after a six year long process of development.

ESDP recognizes three policy guidelines for spatial planning:

- Development of a balanced and polycentric urban system and a new urban-rural relationship;
- Securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge;
- Sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage.

The ESDP is not legally binding for the Member States and it is not the only policy document in this area. In fact there are a number of Community Initiatives with specific spatial planning aims, such as Interreg, URBAN, LEADER, and EQUAL. The ESDP is expected to have impact by persuasion (Faludi, 2008). The policy discourse of European spatial planning was endorsed by text and image messages, creation of specific practice (such as the ESDP process which is described as a new planning method which aims to reconcile development, balance and protection), and construction of an ideology around a specific hegemonic principle. This ideology is defined by three ideas:

- "Objectives of development, balance, and protection must be reconciled";
- "Spatial approach"; and
- "Polycentric and balanced urban system".

The effectiveness of the spatial planning discourse is proved by the concept of polycentric development arriving from nowhere to become debated in academic circles and referred to in numerous policy documents (Bohme, 2002). Nevertheless, rational and supportive discourse could

prove to be not enough for the achievement of European spatial planning goals, the evidence of accomplishment being a necessary input for stepping from persuasion to a more formal framework.

4. SPATIAL PLANNING APPROACHES IN EUROPE

At the level of Europe spatial planning benefit from the holistic view on the various interdependencies among regions and states which could reveal potential synergies and tradeoffs (Ioan and Radulescu, 2008). This holistic view on planning is built by using a conceptual framework underpinned by the state of the art in science, but also the models of spatial planning already enforced in the Member States. It could be inferred that there are differences in the approach of spatial planning from one Member State to another, although a certain pattern could be identified in the sense that these national models could be grouped in four categories according to the tradition of spatial planning:

- The regional economic planning approach;
- The comprehensive integrated approach;
- The tradition of land-use management; and
- The urbanism tradition.

4.1. The regional economic planning approach

In this model the concept of spatial planning is used with a very wide significance, considering its final outcome the social and economic development. Therefore, in the implementation of this approach the role of the central government is very important. It will rely strongly in public investment project which will streamline economic and social processes. Such tradition influences the spatial planning in France and Portugal.

4.2. The comprehensive integrated approach

System thinking is the paradigm of the comprehensive integrated approach that uses hierarchy of plans from national to local level and a coordination of public sector activities across different sectors. The outcome of this approach is the organization of spatial planning coordination, which could be as a federal system or with a strong local authority that share the responsibility with the central government. This model is used in the following states: Austria, Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia etc.

4.3. The tradition of land-use management

This model is focused on the changes occurring or that should be made in the use of land. The administration is performed at strategic and local levels. In this tradition the main instrument to secure the sustainability of development of growth is regulation. This model is used by Belgium, Ireland, Luxemburg, United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Czech Republic etc.

4.4. The urbanism tradition

The urbanism based spatial planning is a model that concentrates on urban design, areas dominated by urban landscapes having a strong influence on the built environment. The urbanism tradition features the Mediterranean basin, respectively Greece, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, and Malta.

The regional economic planning approach and the comprehensive integrated approach of spatial planning traditions are the most relevant for the European level. Nevertheless these approaches should be reconciled since they are differentiated by how they identify the problems. Thus the regional economic planning approach is based on a top-down framework, while the comprehensive integrated approach is using a bottom-up framework.

Traditions in planning are modeled by the action of a number of factors that build different contexts from one country to another. This context produces norms and value that determine the society's view on planning. The factors could be divided in the following categories:

- Constitutional law;
- Government structure and how responsibilities for spatial planning are apportioned;
- The legal framework.

The forms of national spatial planning systems are also determined by more general factors that could be grouped in five categories:

- History, geography, and cultural traditions;
- The state of economic and urban development;
- Political orientation and prevailing ideology;
- The conception of land ownership and development; and
- Constitutional structure.

Planning systems could be also divided by establishing if they are centralized or decentralized, reactive or proactive, mainly regulatory or discretionary?

5. CONCLUSIONS

Spatial planning is an important managerial task that expresses the strategic dimension of this process. This position reduces the operation with concrete elements conceptual constructs being more appropriate in order to provide a good correspondence between decision support information and real world processes. The European spatial planning models were examined considering the overall challenges they have to face, goals established to be achieved and the variety of approaches used in the Member States out of which the European approach emerged not long ago.

The European spatial planning's institutional representation went well before the actual application of its means. Today the ESDP is producing its effect by the increased focus on territorial cohesion which is reflected by community policies and initiatives. The ESDP is a process developed from a wide variety of national models that are influenced by legal framework and other more general factors and which could be grouped in four categories. Out of these the regional economic planning and comprehensive integrated approach have higher relevance for spatial planning to be performed at European level.

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