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# The Hidden Face of European Spatial Planning: Innovations in Governance

UMBERTO JANIN RIVOLIN\* & ANDREAS FALUDI\*\*

\*Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio, Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy, \*\*OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies, Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands

**ABSTRACT** *Presently, the 'informal' European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is being duly applied. At the same time, European planners are still searching for a shared understanding of what European spatial planning actually means. Against the backdrop of current developments in European governance, it seems appropriate to explore various regional perspectives on this emergent phenomenon. In so doing, one needs to go beyond the most commonly known perspectives, though. One needs to also reveal the less obvious 'southern perspectives'. Under close scrutiny, they show themselves well capable of introducing some valuable new elements, and they are as equally useful as others in enriching the debate on European spatial planning and in deepening our understanding about current changes in planning practices in Europe.*

## Introduction

Spatial planning seeks to connect disparate initiatives invoking different perspectives but impacting, nevertheless, upon one and the same area and its people. It necessarily cross-cuts the public–private divide and/or various jurisdictions. For a long time, innovation and networking have been recognized as essential ingredients of successful planning and lack of institutional capacity as a bottleneck. Various policies of the European Community aim amongst others to improve precisely this capacity, identified since Putnam (1993) as a condition of success in what is increasingly called governance rather than government, and this is also true for European spatial planning. The message of this special issue is that about southern member states of the European Union (EU) there is an, albeit hidden, success story to be told. The story is about innovation in governance in the wake of European spatial planning programmes. This introduction recounts the evolving debate on European spatial planning. It shows the perspectives from the various corners of Europe at work in this debate, only to home in on the added value of the southern experience that has so far received little attention. The introduction ends by reflecting on spatial planning as an experimental field for European governance.

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*Correspondence Address:* Umberto Janin Rivolin, Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio, Politecnico di Torino, Viale Mattioli 39, I-10125 Torino, Italy; Email: [umberto.janin@polito.it](mailto:umberto.janin@polito.it)

## The Evolving Debate on European Spatial Planning

The absence of formal competencies in the European Treaties notwithstanding, European spatial planning has become by now a reality and the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) its ‘proudest achievement so far’ (Faludi, 2001a, p. 245). Even if with different intentions and expectations as to probable outcomes, ministers representing the governments of all then 15 EU member states have committed themselves to the ‘application’ of the ESDP (Faludi, 2002a).

It is rather surprising and not a little disconcerting to see how academics still appear to consider European spatial planning as a separate field of analysis and discussion within planning studies, as if it was of interest only to a restricted circle of eccentric amateurs. Surely, the reason is that the peculiar institutionalization of this rather new field of action, closely related as it is to European integration, is still ongoing. This makes it difficult to forge appropriate links with the various planning traditions in Europe (CEC, 1997), each valuable in its own right.

There is nothing unusual about a field of policy being explored informally and thus outside the treaties dealing with the institutions of the EU and their responsibilities. After all, “both regional policy and environmental policy started outside the Treaty in the early 1970s” (Bastrup-Birk & Doucet, 1997, p. 313). It is only now that we can see very clearly how they count in the everyday life of many European citizens. In other words—just to underscore Sir Peter Hall’s warning not to be mistaken about the ‘esoteric’ appearance of the ESDP—, today more than ever planners need to understand that “[i]gnorance can sometimes have serious consequences” (Hall, 2002, p. VII).

On this premise, the aim of this special issue is to complement the range of various ‘regional perspectives’ on European spatial planning as they come from various corners of the EU, a picture that has emerged successively over the past years (see amongst others: Faludi & Zonneveld, 1997; Faludi & Böhme, 2000; Faludi, 2001d; Tewdwr-Jones & Williams, 2001; Böhme, 2002). This will be done by focusing on the perspectives that have so far remained hidden: those of the southern member states. A complete picture is essential to position European spatial planning, and, who knows, this might even reveal more about its deepest meaning for the development of the planning traditions in all EU member states.

Up to the middle of the 1990s, that there would be a form of European spatial planning was anything but a forgone conclusion. With remarkable foresight, whilst the ESDP was still in its early stages of exploring what later became to be known as the ‘Leipzig principles’ (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 72–79; Schön, 1997; §2.1), in his review of deepening European Community involvement in planning, Davies concluded that “[t]he future for planning in Europe [...] lays in the growth of mutual learning and cooperation at the regional and local levels of government out of which will come a gradual convergence of planning policies and practices. Evidence for this is already beginning to be apparent” (Davies, 1994, p. 69; see also: Fit & Kragt, 1994).

Two years later, the seminal textbook *European Union Spatial Policy and Planning* was published (Williams, 1996). It illustrated the richness and complexity of the emerging institutional practice from its controversial bases in the European treaties to the numerous fields of concrete intervention, as well as the challenges which these developments pose to planners and policy-makers. In his conclusions, the author alerted us to the fact that “European integration requires not only new governmental structures and physical

infrastructure links but also new mental maps and removal of Cartesian inhibitions” (Williams, 1994, pp. 264–265). Based on her convincing analysis of the close relationship between the European integration process and the emergence of European spatial planning, Giannakourou (who is among the authors of this special issue) in turn found that the traditional conceptual and institutional standards of national planning policies are bound to undergo fundamental transformations, since “the current configuration of a spatial planning policy at a European level manifests a recourse to new policy processes, instruments and techniques” (Giannakourou, 1996, p. 608; see also: Newman & Thornley, 1996).

Both Williams’ and Giannakourou’s contributions referred also to the progress achieved in the meantime by the elaboration of the ESDP. Since 1997, the year of approval of its ‘first official draft’ at the Noordwijk ministerial meeting (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 109–117), there was a noticeable increase in the attention paid to European spatial planning. The new inter-governmental document on the books was quickly and rightly acknowledged as the (no longer missing) link in European spatial planning. Numerous analyses and commentaries began to focus on the contents of the ESDP (Faludi & Zonneveld, 1997; Kunzmann, 1998; Böhme & Bengs, 1999), as well as on the policy-making process (Faludi, 1997; Nadin & Shaw, 1997; Bengs & Böhme, 1998). Also, progress in European spatial planning was accompanied by growing interest in “the state of the art concerning urban policies conducted by national authorities in each of the 15 member states” (Berg *et al.*, 1998, p. XII) and by planning journals feeling compelled to give scope to discussions of topics such as the structural funds (Begg, 1998). This was also when the summary volume of “The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies” (CEC, 1997) appeared.

As the reader may be aware, the final approval of the ESDP at the Potsdam ministerial meeting in May 1999 (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 144–152) was immediately followed by a joint decision on an ‘Action Programme’ taken at the Tampere meeting in the autumn of the same year (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 159–165). Those events were followed by a further intensification of the debate on European spatial planning along three major lines of advance, all centred on the Potsdam document and its potential implications for the future:

- (a) often rather critical discussions of the contents of the ESDP in general (Buunk *et al.*, 1999; Davoudi, 1999; Zonneveld, 2000; Jensen & Richardson, 2001), more in particular its key proposal of a polycentric form of development (Richardson & Jensen, 2000; INGEROP, 2000; Krätke, 2001; Baudelle & Castagnède, 2002) and also on urban policy (Atkinson, 2002);
- (b) reflections on the policy-making process and the important institutional and political implications concerning the ESDP (Faludi, 2000a, 2000b; Williams, 1999, 2000; Eser & Konstadakopulos, 2000; Faludi & Waterhout, 2002), its application through the Tampere Action Programme (Nadin, 2000; Faludi, 2001c; Bengs, 2002; Faludi, 2003) and, more generally speaking, on the current ‘positioning’ of European spatial planning (Faludi, 2002a, 2004a; Faludi, 2002b; Janin Rivolin, 2003b, 2004, 2005);
- (c) more focused surveys of specific regional perspectives from the various corners of the EU on the ESDP (Faludi, 2001d) and on the mutual impacts between European spatial planning and national planning traditions (Balchin *et al.*, 1999; Bishop *et al.*, 2000; Faludi & Böhme, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones & Williams, 2001; Böhme, 2002; Janin Rivolin, 2002, 2003a).

The present special issue adds to the latter tradition of taking a regional perspective on the ESDP process but, as the reader will hopefully appreciate at the end, it also raises arguments relevant to the other discussions and, to some extent, will try to forge some useful links between all of them.

## **Regional Perspectives at Work**

### *North-west European Countries Leading*

The foundations of the ESDP were laid at Nantes, where in 1989 the first meeting of the European Ministers responsible for spatial planning was held (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 34–38). Subsequently, as mentioned earlier, the first official draft was approved at Noordwijk and its final version launched at Potsdam. This is no coincidence. France, the Netherlands and Germany are the member states that, more than any others, and even if often in competition with each other, have sustained, promoted and shaped the whole ESDP process to the point where the ESDP is usually said to represent a distinctly north-west European perspective on spatial planning (Figure 1) (Faludi, 2004a).

Indeed, French *aménagement du territoire*—a non-statutory approach to ‘regional economic planning’ rooted in intervention of the central state in territorial development (CEC, 1997, p. 36)—is considered to be the main inspiration for the model of planning embraced by the ESDP (Faludi & Peyrony, 2001). Inspired by their federal constitution and regulatory planning system described in the EU Compendium by way of contrast as the ‘comprehensive integrated approach’ (CEC, 1997, pp. 36–37), the Germans succeeded in imposing an inter-governmental rather than a Community method on the whole ESDP process (Faludi, 2000a, 2001b). Last but not least, interested above all as they were in the development of a European dimension of planning, the Dutch acted mainly as pro-active mediators between the two bigger member states’ perspectives (Martin, 2001).

Moreover, one should remember that under the Dutch Presidency, at The Hague in 1991, the Committee on Spatial Development (CSD) was set up to manage the technical process of the elaboration of the ESDP (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 49–50). Subsequently, in 1994 the Germans thought under their Presidency that they were already embarking on the end game. In this they were wrong, but they at least obtained approval for the Leipzig ‘Principles for a European Spatial Development Policy’ (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 72–79). In their turn, the French were the first introducing diagrammatic ‘scenarios’ into the ESDP process at Strasbourg in 1995, an effort that was, however, only sustained until the Noordwijk first official draft (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 81–83, 104–109). More recently, during their last 6-month Presidency in 2000, the French successfully drew the CDS’s attention to the topic of ‘polycentrism’ constituting, especially in the French view, a key to interpreting and managing what is called ‘territorial cohesion’, a concept to be discussed further at various occasions in this special issue (see, in particular, the contributions by Cichowlaz and Governa and Salone; see also Faludi, 2004b).

However, around this French-German-Dutch axis, which may well recall the often evoked French-German axis in European integration (reinforced in this case by the valuable Dutch role in promoting European planning), other north-west European countries, too, played significant roles in the ESDP process. Notwithstanding its peculiar institutional system and the resulting absence of national planning (so much so that, in



**Figure 1.** The ESDP. *Source:* CEC, 1999

European planning matters, the regions represent the state; Lecq, 2001), Belgium for instance was a force to be reckoned with to the point where the very decision to produce the ESDP was taken at a ministerial meeting held at Liège in 1993 (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 63–68). As soon as it had changed its attitude to the EU under the incoming ‘New Labour’ government in 1997 (Williams, 1997; Zetter, 2001), the UK suddenly moved to centre stage, organizing the Glasgow meeting where the ‘complete

draft' of the ESDP was presented in 1998 (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 121–128; about the specific role of the UK see later). Even the small Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has recently taken the initiative to manage the administrative tasks concerning the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), which at the present moment is the most significant follow-up of the ESDP (ESPON, 2002; Bengs, 2002).

### *The Enlightened 'Exceptionalism' of the UK*

As far as the UK perspective on European spatial planning is concerned, however, this requires some deeper consideration.

Despite the late active involvement of the UK in the ESDP process, in fact, British planners had already started their careful reflection on the impact of the European Community on land-use planning in their country early on during the process (Davies *et al.*, 1994). Going beyond the 'Eurosceptic' attitude of their government up to 1997, British planners have noticed, even more so than, and even some time before, their colleagues elsewhere in Europe that, the absence of a Community planning competency notwithstanding, "a large number of EU spatial planning initiatives have had a significant indirect impact on the operation of the British planning process" at local level (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2000, p. 652; see also: Bishop *et al.*, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones & Williams, 2001; Cullingworth & Nadin, 2002, pp. 76–85; Dühr 2002). In so doing, the authors referred not only to the Interreg, Urban or other Community Initiatives, but also to the implementation of the environmental directives, the 'mainstream' Structural Funds, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Trans-European Networks (TENs).

An interesting observation was that for a long time the local impact of EU planning intervention had not been reflected in statutory planning policy at national and regional levels. The reason was the separation—in the views of government officials—between 'land-use planning' (statutory planning practice) and 'spatial planning' (non-statutory planning strategies) (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2000, p. 658). The importance of that conceptual distinction, which to some extent seems but a reflection of a major point of disagreement between the 'two models' (the German and the French one) in the construction of the ESDP (Faludi, 2000b, pp. 251–252), can be appreciated that much better if one considers the valuable tradition of British town and country planning, defined as a separate 'land-use management' approach in the EU Compendium of planning systems (CEC, 1997, p. 37).

However, as the post-1997 UK government seems to have been quick to acknowledge (Shaw & Sykes, 2003), that conceptual distinction needs to be seriously reconsidered in the light of a 'multi-level governance'-oriented European spatial planning system, in which "[t]he importance of the national level of planning policy-making is fundamental to the trajectory of the whole planning process, even if planning in the UK is a predominantly local activity" (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2000, p. 653). There is one important consequence, of course, of this notion of an emergent European planning system extending over many spatial planning scales, from a supranational level to a local one (Williams, 1999, p. 64; Tewdwr-Jones & Williams, 2001, pp. 164–167) (Figure 2). It is that different national planning approaches could and should coexist. Whether in the fullness of time these various approaches will coalesce into one overall approach is for the future to decide.



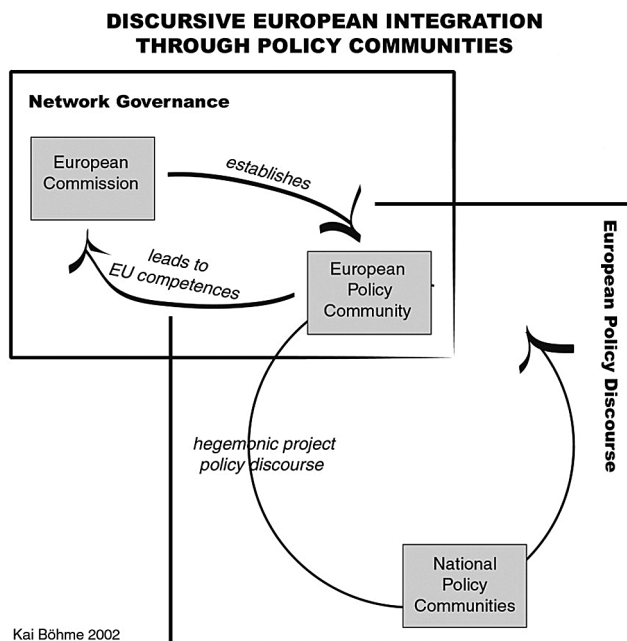
**Figure 2.** Typology of scales of EU spatial planning. *Source:* Tewdwr-Jones & Williams, 2001

### *Listening to 'Nordic Echoes'*

Whilst the ESDP was under preparation, none of the Nordic countries hosted a meeting of planning ministers. The Danish Presidency lost its one and only opportunity in 1993; Finland and Sweden joined the EU only in 1995. So the first Finnish Presidency came in the second half of 1999, just after the final approval of the ESDP. However, the Fins keenly organized the Tampere meeting, commonly regarded as a milestone in the application of the ESDP after Potsdam (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 159–165). In addition, it is worth remembering that Denmark has been the first country to apply the principles of the ESDP to their own policy as early as 1997 (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, p. 61; see also: Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 1997).

The Swedish Presidency came too late to have an impact and the Swedes are reluctant members, anyhow. In addition, their planning system is fragmented, so at that time they could perhaps not be expected to give European planning a boost. This is a characteristic which the Swedes to some extent share with the other Nordic countries. All of them have planning systems rooted at municipal level and generally lacking, with the exception of Denmark, comprehensive national planning. So the Nordic countries have adapted to European spatial planning with a certain degree of difficulty. Moreover, a common (and proud) feeling of 'eccentricity' in relation to the core of the Union is also evident in a home-made form of transnational cooperation launched, parallel to the ESDP process, through the VASAB initiative (Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea) (Faludi & Böhme, 2000; Böhme, 2001, 2002). This vision has been a source of inspiration to the makers of the ESDP.

Between them, these aspects seem to have contributed to shaping specific Nordic perspectives on European spatial planning, in which mutual learning and exchange play a prominent role. On the one hand, Nordic countries are commonly seen as having been the first to introduce and to strengthen environmental concerns in the ESDP (Rusca, 1998; Bengs, 2000), as well as representing, more than is the case with any other group of member states, explicit concerns for welfare and democracy. On the other hand, the ESDP has been said to have been 'an eye-opener for Nordic planners' in helping them to overcome a strict division between physical planning and regional economic policy and in broadening the spatial context of planning policies (Böhme, 2001, pp. 302–303).



**Figure 3.** Discursive European integration. *Source:* Böhme, 2002

A thorough analysis from such perspectives has led at long last to the discovery of European spatial planning as an enlightening “example of European integration by networking and policy discourses” and to the conclusion that “discursive European integration can be successful when there are strong policy communities active at European and national levels and direct links between them” (Böhme, 2002, p. III; see also: Böhme, 2003) (Figure 3). There is no doubt that from such perspectives, too, there is much to be said about the potential role of planning for the full implementation of European governance (CEC, 2001).

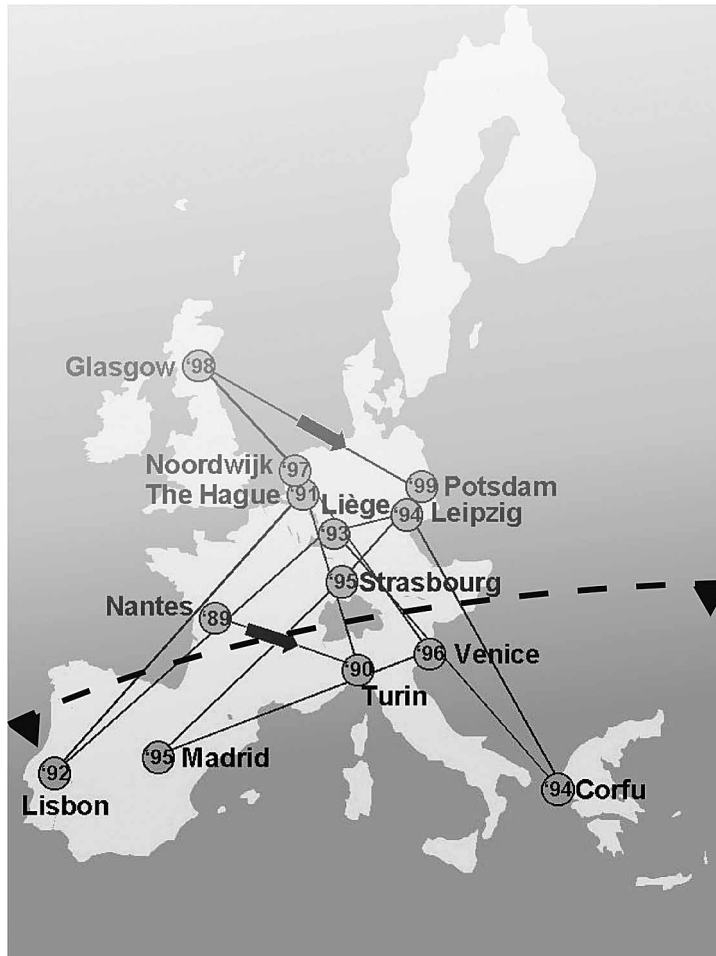
## **The Added Value of the Southern Experience**

### *The ESDP on its Passage Through Southern Europe*

As compared to the north-west European, British and Nordic perspectives as outlined earlier, so far the attitudes of south European member states towards European spatial planning have never been fully clarified.

It goes without saying that the southern member states did take part in the ESDP process. Indeed, going by the number of ministerial meetings organized under their respective EU Presidencies during the entire period—Turin (1990), Lisbon (1992), Corfu (1994), Madrid (1995) and Venice (1996)—the commitment of southern European member states seems to have been no less than that of their north-west European partners (Figure 4).

The point is that, unlike all other ESDP meetings recalled in the previous section, these never raised topics that became important during the subsequent process, nor did these



**Figure 4.** The ESDP making process: focusing on southern Europe. *Source:* Faludi, 2001d, adaptation of the authors

meetings achieve significant steps in advancing the making of the document. Rather, the meetings were generally characterized by their focus on emergent spatial planning discussions on specific topics dear to the respective host country, sometimes even coming perilously close to counteracting the idea of an ESDP as such. True, one needs to admit that each host country—in the north as much as in the south of Europe—has always tried to bring grist to its own mill during the process. However, what seems to be missing is an important contribution from a southern member state advancing the common cause.

For instance, the Turin meeting of 1990 (the second after Nantes in 1989, when the process began) is remembered above all for the simplistic and ‘one-dimensional view of Europe’ (core against periphery) put forward by the Italians, contrasting with the more diversified and promising vision proposed the year before by nobody less than Commission President Jacques Delors (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, p. 39). It is as good

as certain that the Italian intention was to put the north-west European member states into their place. After all, the latter “would profit much more from the opportunities offered by the European unification than the southern member states” (Zonneveld, 2000, p. 271; see also: Zonneveld, 1999).

Later, at Lisbon in 1992, the Portuguese Presidency decided to focus attention on the TENs and invoked once again a centre-periphery model of Europe in order to show how this should be counteracted in the interest of the more peripheral regions (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 58–60). The Corfu meeting in 1994, organized by a Greek Presidency unenthusiastic about the ESDP, achieved at least some important methodological agreements among the parties concerned (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 69–72).

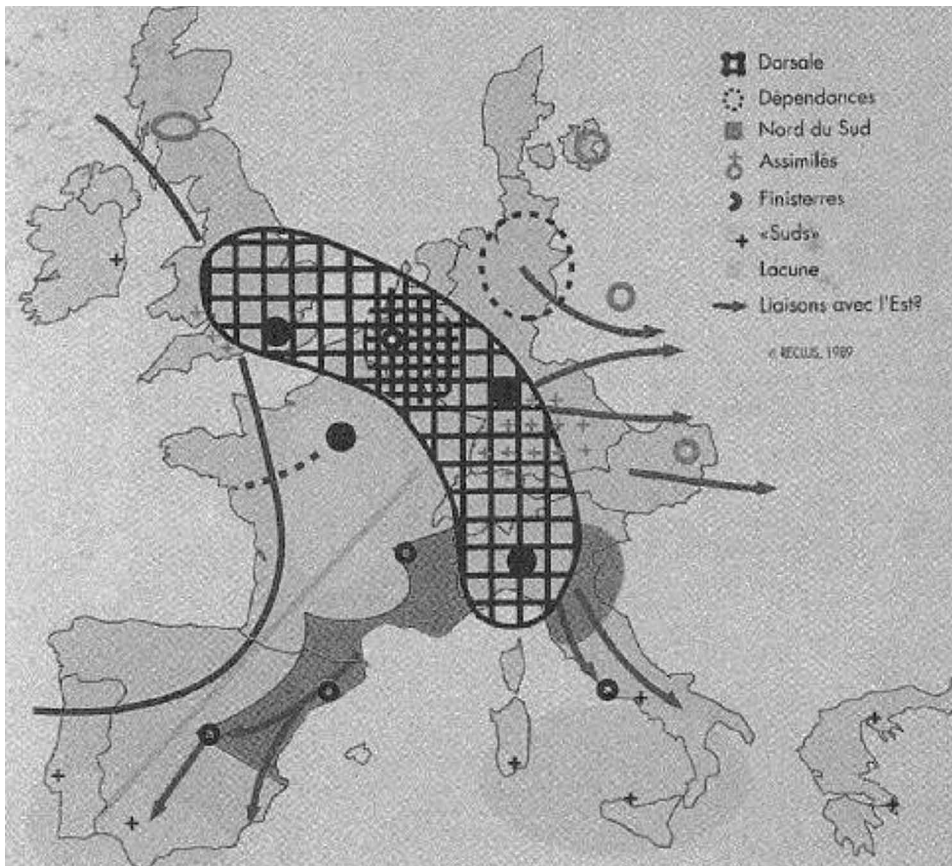
Then it was the turn of Madrid, in 1995, providing the Spanish with the opportunity to demonstrate their deep suspicion of the ESDP as “a northern European plot to reduce its share of the Structural Funds” (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, p. 85; see also: Rusca, 1998, p. 40; Farinós Dasí, Gonzáles and Sánchez de Madariaga in this special issue). However, the controversy quickly subsided, and the last meeting of ministers held in southern Europe at Venice in 1996 proved to be more constructive. Nevertheless, at Venice the Italians chose to focus attention on specific topics of national interest: urban development and, especially, cultural heritage. Furthermore, they continued to show reluctance, together with the Spanish, to see an immediate finalization of the ESDP (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002, pp. 93–95).

At the same time the groundwork needs to be acknowledged which, aided by the French (see the paper by Cichowlaz in this special issue), the Spanish and Italian Presidencies laid for the work of ESPON concerning urban or territorial indicators (CEC, 1999, p. 38). Indeed, future revisionist historians of European spatial planning may point to these Presidencies as having laid the foundations of the application of what is called the ‘open method of coordination’ in EU territorial cohesion policy.

### *Mediterranean Moods*

What has been said above about the southern countries’ participation in the ESDP process in no way means to suggest that they tried to cause it to fail. Obviously, if that had been their intention, it would have been easier for them simply to abandon ship. Furthermore, as already mentioned, disputes were heated among the representatives of other member states as well; and, anyway, arguably opposition to the common interest as defined all along by the European Commission came from member states more deeply involved in the discussion, rather than from southern countries. As major beneficiaries of EU cohesion policy, if anything, the latter are perhaps more receptive for European initiatives than other member states are.

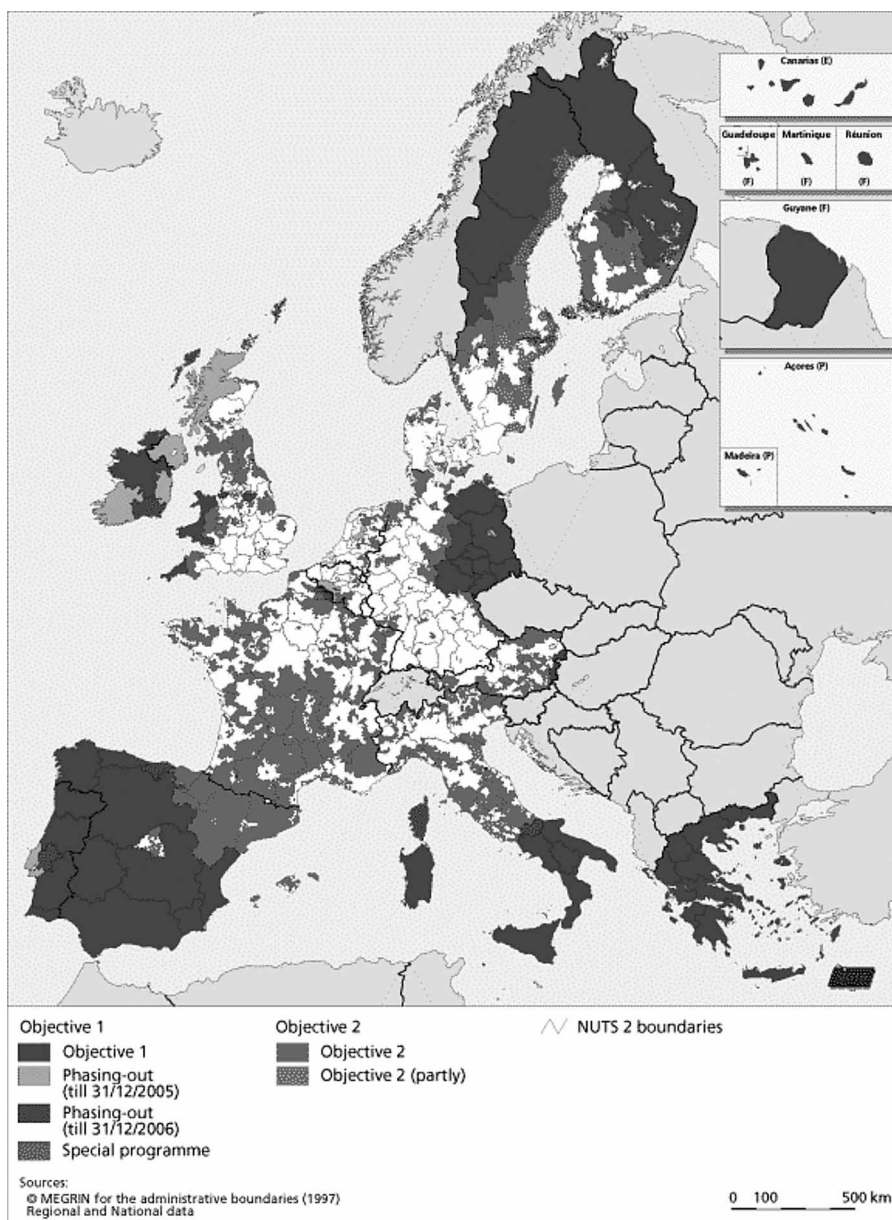
Even so, going by an eye-witness, herself an ESDP protagonist, the ‘Mediterranean group’ included countries that were “sponsors of the dialogue, but enemies of the crude rationality of a Scheme and very cautious about the risk of changing the methods for the allocation of Structural Funds of which they were major beneficiaries” (Rusca, 1998, p. 37). Such an explanation does not add much to what has already been said, but it is useful to recall that, independently of the limited power of intervention attributed in the end to the ESDP, European spatial planning is rooted in the deepest reasons and mechanisms of European integration (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The 'Blue Banana'. *Source:* Reclus, 1989

In a Single Market, geo-economic positions count. The rough delineation of areas due to receive funds notwithstanding, the structural funds clearly show a broad picture of divergences (the extent of 'Objective 1' areas in the south is of course proof of a weaker position). At the same time, the Structural Funds currently represent the prime EU means of counteracting that divergence in the name of geo-economic 'territorial cohesion'; Husson, 2002; Faludi, 2004a). Thus, the whole competitive/cooperative process of making the ESDP (Faludi, 2001d), with all its underlying fears and emerging controversies, but also with its agreements and compromises, seems a poignant demonstration of the European need for (and difficulty in using) a more sophisticated and effective tool for managing territorial cohesion (Figure 6).

In this light, European spatial planning may well be viewed as an arena for 'regulative competition' between planning systems, in which "[h]igh-regulation countries are at an advantage" (Faludi, 2001a, p. 250). Consequently, a geo-economically-based explanation of the south European attitude towards the ESDP is strengthened by one based on divergent styles of policy-making. Because of their relatively low-regulation systems, in the ESDP process, "Southern Europeans have [...] sat on the fence" (Faludi, 2001a).



**Figure 6.** Areas eligible for Objectives 1 and 2 of the structural funds 2000–2006. *Source:* CEC, DG Regio website

Such an explanation, of course, leads one once again to refer to the existence of national planning traditions. Perhaps it is not by chance that the EU Compendium lists the Mediterranean states under the ‘urbanism’ approach, the fourth and last approach mentioned in addition to the ones described earlier. This “has a strong architectural

flavour and concern with urban design, townscape and building control” and is also reflected in regulation “undertaken through rigid zoning and codes” (CEC, 1997, p. 37).

Giannakourou will deal with this aspect in her contribution to this special issue. Here the point is simply to wonder aloud whether it would be profitable to add an explanation based on what is happening in planning practice. In other words, the assumption here is that, by widening the focus to include not only the ESDP, but other planning processes as well, we could improve our understanding of what is really going on in European spatial planning. These developments in planning practice is what this introduction explores next.

### *Evidence of EU-led Innovation in Planning Practices*

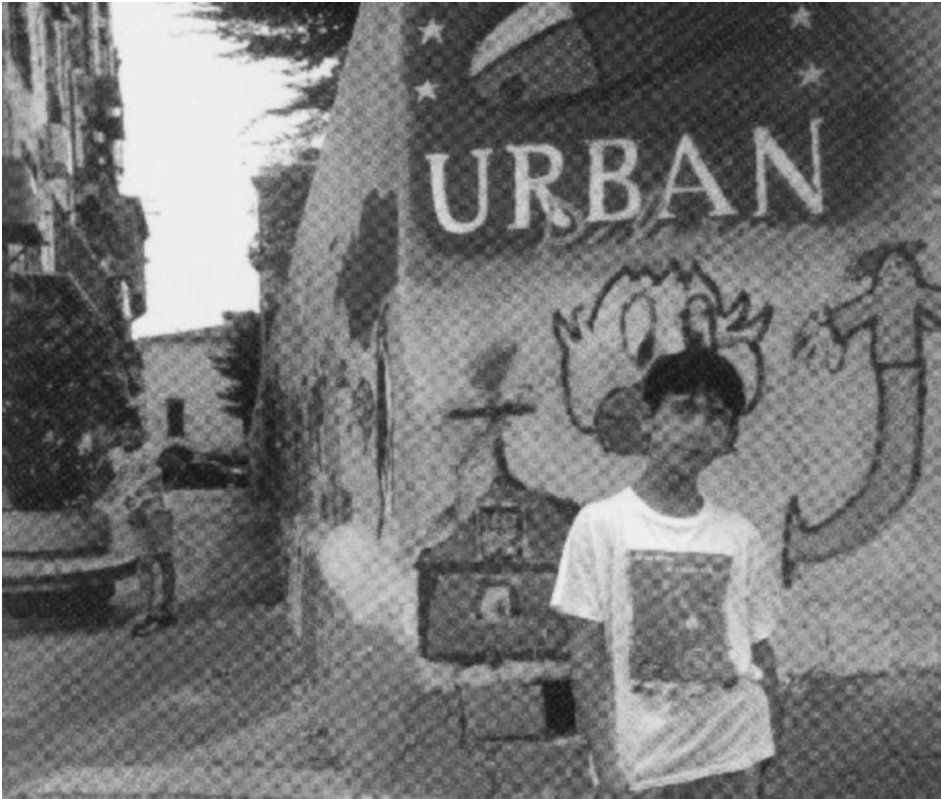
In a survey of Italian experience in dealing with European spatial planning, one of the editors of the present special issue has recently described the ‘creeping material innovation’ in planning practice since “the arrival on the scene of the EU as a new institutional player” (Janin Rivolin, 2003a, p. 55; see also: Janin Rivolin, 2002). Interestingly, such innovation has occurred in spite of the weakness of Italy’s commitment to making and applying the ESDP and, more in particular, the persistent separation of the formulation of the Italian input from national planning responsibilities notwithstanding (Janin Rivolin, 2003a, pp. 52–55).

Going by Italy’s experience, the evidence that “European spatial planning has a life beyond the ESDP” (Janin Rivolin, 2003a, p. 72) is clear at national level, where in the last decade an increasing European commitment has led to a veritable ‘new deal’ for planning (Gualini, 2001). Thanks to a sort of contamination by Community policies (through participation in Integrated Mediterranean Programmes, Territorial Employment Pacts, Urban Pilot Projects, Leader and Urban Community Initiatives), a dozen or so new tools for ‘negotiated programming’ and ‘complex programmes’ for urban regeneration have been created, within the short period of time of only a few years giving rise to a plethora of local territorial actions.

At regional level, the EU influence has come in particular by way of the Interreg Community Initiative, leaving its mark in the form of a further improvement of institutional capacity, the term having been introduced by Putnam (1993). It results above all in a progressive increase in attention being paid by policy-makers to spatial visions and in an effective learning process about inter-institutional negotiations and how to achieve mutual agreements.

The most interesting aspects of planning innovation are emerging at the urban level, though. There local actions promoted by Community as well as national initiatives are triggering the emergence of new paradigms for territorial governance. To be more precise, the Italian ‘urbanism tradition’ appears to be challenged in a beneficial way by “the rise of planning practices as formulating local development strategies” (Janin Rivolin, 2003a, p. 66). The sudden, spontaneous adoption of non-statutory strategic plans by many local authorities is perhaps the clearest sign of a widespread attempt to capitalize, both technically as well as institutionally speaking, on such EU-led cultural innovations (Figure 7).

This special issue seeks to answer the question raised by this development of whether such changes only apply to Italy. Whatever the answer, there are grounds for arguing, also and in particular for sustaining European spatial planning efforts in future, that we should capture this emerging ‘life beyond the ESDP’.



**Figure 7.** Urban community initiative in Palermo, Italy. *Source:* CEC, DG Regio website

### **Revealing Southern Perspectives**

As indicated, taking the Italian experience as its point of departure, the aim of this special issue has been to extend the scope of enquiry to the whole of southern Europe. Beyond Italy, it is of course Spain, Portugal, Greece and France, a country that forms an interesting bridge between north-west and southern Europe, that come into the picture. Moreover, two final contributions focus on southern Europe as a whole, thus representing a ‘transnational’ perspective. It is not our purpose as the editors of this volume to go deeply into the topics covered by each of the contributions. Suffice it to simply stress the essential arguments by which they confirm the existence of this additional composite perspective on European spatial planning, showing that, if one seeks to form a complete and fruitful understanding of this nascent phenomenon, progressive changes in local planning practices and institutions must not be overlooked.

Written from an insider perspective, the article about the Spanish case by Farinós Dasí, Romero Gonzáles and Sánchez de Madariaga first and foremost casts light on the sceptical role of this country in the making of the ESDP. As in Italy (and Greece), the official reasons for national opposition reveal themselves to be strongly influenced by an uncertain attribution of ministerial competencies in managing the process, itself but a reflection of a

weak national planning tradition. In Spain, this has been made worse by the institutional fragmentation resulting from the process of regional decentralization. After all, now the 17 Autonomous Regions have exclusive responsibility for planning. At the same time, participation in EU territorial programmes and initiatives is contributing, nevertheless, to the shaping of regional planning laws. This happens, for instance, through the creation of new instruments, embracing the concept of spatial planning as going beyond the prevailing tradition of physical intervention and a regulative approach. This also contributes to changing cultural attitude towards territorial policies, through growing attention to concepts like the structural funds, environmental policy, cohesion and sustainable development.

In Portugal, as confirmed by da Rosa Pires, like in any other south European country, so far the ESDP has received only limited attention. However, as against most of the others, here it has clearly instigated thinking about a national planning framework, the 'National Programme for Spatial Planning Policy' (PNPOT). This arguably depends on the stronger tradition of national level planning, to the point that Portugal may be considered the southern country most closely emulating the French planning approach. Be that as it may, the current debate in Portugal witnesses the emergence of a degree of acceptance of the French proposal to give the ESDP, or its possible successor document, a central position in a new-style EU regional policy (Faludi, 2004a). Such an evolution of national planning attitude parallels the process of decentralization of planning powers to local authorities and of an, albeit uneasy, revision of the traditional 'blueprint approach' in planning practice.

As far as Greece is concerned, Coccossis, Economou and Petrakos argue for the limited capacity of the ESDP to capture the structural specifics of the country, thus indirectly confirming also national difficulties of self-representation. However, they acknowledge its positive impact in putting wider European policy aims on the national agenda, as well as in strengthening the role of spatial planning in the national planning system, with some appreciable concrete changes to the institutional context in its wake. Beyond the ESDP, certainly the participation in EU programmes and initiatives (since the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes, launched in the mid-1980s exclusively in Greece, France and Italy) has contributed to a 'dramatic transformation' of the national territory. However, the cultural capitalization of the change still appears to be hampered by a prevailing 'non-planning culture', which is a prominent cause of the generally perceived implementation gap in planning.

A general account about Italy, of course, has been summed up already in the present introduction. Going beyond this, the article by Governa and Salone focuses on 'polycentrism', one of the crucial, yet problematic concepts presented in the ESDP. The authors explore the functioning of the above-mentioned innovative local practices of regional development and urban regeneration in Italy in depth, seeking to establish whether, and to what extent, these innovations constitute an exemplary (albeit unconscious) application of that ideal concept. In so doing, the authors demonstrate how the apparently 'technocratic and centralist perspective' proposed in Europe in the vein of the French spatial planning style can meet concretely with more spontaneous bottom-up processes of networking.

So, one conclusion of the present special issue is that it is very appropriate to think of European spatial planning as progressively shaped by a multi-lateral convergence of regional adaptations to Community messages shaped by a variety of planning practices.

This appears to be definitively confirmed by the position of France, truly a bridge between the north-western and southern attitudes to planning, a position that is capably represented by Cichowlaz. Indeed, on the one hand, his contribution explains how the *aménagement du territoire* tradition is historically rooted in a deeply felt political need for territorial balancing (a need that, nowadays, one may easily identify with the commonly accepted European goal of 'cohesion'). On the other hand, it shows how, the strength of central planning notwithstanding, the participation in Community programmes (especially the ESDP process and Interreg) has strongly influenced the recent generation of '*contrats de plan Etat-Régions*' and the empowerment of Atlantic and Mediterranean regions in taking autonomous initiatives of transnational planning.

The last point relates to one of the 'transnational' contributions to this special issue, the survey of the Interreg IIC (1996–1999) and IIIB (2000–2006) programmes relevant to southern Europe. This article by Pedrazzini focuses on the Mediterranean countries' reaction to "one of the main instruments to promote the application of the ESDP". Interestingly, the implementation of joint planning programmes results in the formation of a concrete arena in which, irrespective of any theoretical concerns, states and regions recognize and accept a Community competence in spatial policies. In this process, the regions prove to be 'the real innovative actors' and cooperation appears to be the key-concept helping them to overcome their traditional habit of restricting themselves to regulative planning; even if, as the author alert us, "we are still at the first stage of sharing Euro-spatial concepts".

Finally, the other transnational contribution, by Giannakourou, concludes the special issue. It offers to the reader a comprehensive account of the common features of EU-led planning innovations which occurred in southern Europe. The 'urbanism' tradition as well as the 'Mediterranean Syndrome' of legalistic government ('command-and-control' type regulation) are the analytical starting point which the author adopts in explaining the difficulties of south European countries in attuning themselves to the ESDP approach but often also in implementing their own established land-use policies. The impact of Community territorial interventions (since the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes, as the forerunners of structural funds policies) is confirmed to have been of great importance in the whole area under consideration, even if responses vary from country to country. However, arguably, the main common effects are the strengthening of the role of the respective central governments in the planning process (sometimes going in parallel with the appearance of the ESDP in recent legislation) and the diffusion of new procedures of policy-making at the regional and local level (with a perceptible shift from regulatory to strategic urban planning, both from an institutional and cultural view).

In conclusion, the overall impression from the contributions to this issue is that the southern perspective really has something to add to what hitherto has been said about European spatial planning. One is immediately reminded of what President Delors has recommended in his speech at Nantes in 1989, when he spoke about "local knowledge and the forces of auto-development" being 'as important as investments' for European integration, envisaging the need for 'repositioning *aménagement du territoire*' in this light (Faludi & Peyrony, 2001, p. 258). With some justification, the south could argue that, as European spatial planning evolved, this exhortation has been forgotten, a short-coming that this special issue seeks to rectify.

## **Conclusion: Spatial Planning as an Experimental Field for European Governance**

The 2001 Commission White Paper on *European Governance* mentions the ESDP in a section dedicated to 'Overall policy coherence'. This follows upon the recognition that "[t]he territorial impact of EU policies in areas such as transport, energy or environment should be addressed. These policies should form part of a coherent whole as stated in the EU's second cohesion report; there is a need to avoid a logic which is too sector-specific. In the same way, decisions taken at regional and local levels should be coherent with a broader set of principles that would underpin more sustainable and balanced territorial development within the Union" (CEC, 2001, p. 13).

One might argue that, the lack of formal EU planning powers notwithstanding, the move towards territorial cohesion in Europe has already begun. Sure enough, there is still a long way to go, and European spatial planning needs a clearer, shared technical definition of what it is about in order to make its usefulness and capacity as a proper tool of European integration more transparent (Janin Rivolin, 2003b, 2004, 2005). However, since we are here in the domain of 'governance', the current weaknesses of European spatial planning, its 'contested' nature (Faludi, 2001a), may in fact turn out to be its major strength. After all, what else but the ESDP process presents an exemplary way of 'making institution' outside of established government channels?

In this light, approaching European spatial planning from different regional perspectives proves both practicable and profitable. Perhaps southern perspectives were really the missing piece in the overall puzzle of European spatial planning (Figure 8). Based on this special issue, the picture should become clearer:

- north-west European perspectives have spearheaded the collaborative process up and including the approval of the basic political document of European spatial planning: the ESDP. Mainly within those perspectives, the institutional future of European spatial planning, in particular the need for a formal planning competency at EU level, has recently been debated, leading to the inclusion of territorial cohesion as a shared competence in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Faludi, 2005).
- British perspectives have cast light on the crucial but complex link between spatial planning and land-use planning. Consequently, they have paved the way for a conception of European spatial planning as embedded in a multi-level governance system that could reach from the supranational to the local level.
- Nordic perspectives have shown the discursive nature of European spatial planning. This may explain how such a multi-level governance system acts in practice and, in so doing, why it should deserve much more attention for the nitty-gritty of the work done day in/day out in the pursuit of European integration.
- southern perspectives (described into far more detail in the following contributions of this special issue) suggest that, ultimately, European spatial planning takes shape by passing through the prism of progressive and complex changes in planning practices. Even if Community-led, this is an eminently local and diversified process and therefore less visible at the continental scale.

In conclusion, it may very well be true that southern perspectives represent the hidden face of European spatial planning. Stepping into the limelight, southern European practices give European spatial planning the visibility it deserves as a strategic tool of



**Figure 8.** European spatial planning: learning by regional perspectives

integration and as a basic driver of planning innovation. For these reasons it seems that, alongside others, any account of European spatial planning must consider the southern dimension, too.

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