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# *Challenges and issues of spatial planning in the European Union: European vision and supraregional co-operation*

Valérie Biot and Alain Colard

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## **A European Vision: the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)**

- 1 The European Union is promoting a policy of balanced and sustainable spatial development planning. Ministers in charge of spatial planning have recently adopted a spatial development perspective for the European Union territory, which is proposing a spatial vision for the entire Union territory.

### **Background**

- 2 On May 11, 1999, the EU Council of Ministers in charge of spatial planning adopted the final text of the European Spatial Development Plan (ESDP). They considered that even if spatial planning does not lie within European Union jurisdiction, it was essential to have general and common plans in order to develop national policies on spatial planning and community-based sector policies (ESDP, p. 7 of French text).

### ***National Policies on Spatial Planning***

- 3 The first paragraphs of the ESDP describe the many diverse components of the European Union territory but while this diversity must be preserved a certain level of integration must be advocated. Moreover, the various development projects put forward by Member States should be based on common goals at European level in terms of spatial planning so as to complement one another and to avoid unnecessary competition.
- 4 Faced with considerable disparities in spatial planning in the European Union, the ESDP wants to achieve a more balanced spatial planning in the medium term (*ibid.*, p. 9), in conformity with the Union stated objective of a balanced and sustainable development.

### ***Community-based sector policies***

- 5 The European Union has the jurisdiction to legislate in several fields which impact considerably on both spatial and development planning of Member States. The ESDP identifies in particular:
  - Structural funds
  - Transeuropean networks (transportation, telecommunications and energy supply infrastructures)
  - Environmental policy
  - Competition policy
  - Common agricultural policy
  - Fisheries policy
  - Research, technology and development
  - Loans from the European Investment Bank
- 6 It does however place the emphasis on the three first points because they have a direct influence on spatial development in the various european areas (*ibid.*, p. 13).

## **Content**

- 7 The three objectives of spatial development are:
  - Economic and social cohesion
  - Natural and cultural heritage preservation
  - Increased competitiveness of the European territory
  - The three fields of action chosen by the Ministers in charge of spatial planning are:
  - Development of a multiple nuclei model for urban areas and a new city-country relation
  - Equivalent accessibility to infrastructures and knowledge
  - Sustainable development, conservative management and natural and cultural heritage preservation
- 8 In this perspective, the ESDP puts forward some sixty political options:

## **Positioning**

- 9 The ESDP is a non-binding document, a political framework aiming at improving both the co-operation between community-based sector policies which have a significant impact

on spatial hierarchies and the co-operation between Member States, their regions and their cities (*ibid.*, p. 11).

- 10 The ESDP is the result of a long discussion process led by Member States and the European Commission, with the participation of and in consultation with the various institutions and persons in charge of spatial development both at European and national level. EU membership candidates also participated in the dialogue.
- 11 It is meant to be a general reference frame for public and private decision-makers and provides for implementation procedures to be followed on a voluntary basis and based on the subsidiarity principle.
- 12 Consequently, what are the possible links with the other planning levels, and in particular the supranational level highly promoted by Interreg programmes, to what extent is this supra-regional co-operation suitable and real? In an attempt to answer these questions, we decided to examine one of them, namely the Euroregion and its aim to develop a common 'strategic objectives scheme' for its various components.

## Creation of the Euroregion

### Presentation

- 13 As part of the diversification of approach levels in terms of spatial planning (European, supranational, supranational, transregional or local), the impact of the Channel Tunnel and the high-speed rail system in the eighties led to a transborder collaboration between Nord-Pas de Calais and Kent (1987, agreement setting up the Trans-Channel Region).
- 14 It appeared very rapidly that this area should include the three Belgian regions (Brussels-Capital, Flanders and Wallonia) as they were also affected by the high-speed train system (HST stations operating in Brussels or the ones planned in Antwerp, Flanders, as well as in Liège, Wallonia). Moreover, it appeared that one should also include in the process the issue of economic growth within the context of the European Economic Space and of the strengthening of transborder social and cultural links. The Euroregion was created in 1991, as an official Economic Interest Group, with a Members Council, composed of one elected senior representative per region (chaired by the Minister of External Affairs for the Brussels-Capital Region, Mrs. Annemie Neyts in 2000), an Executive Board and a General Secretariat in Brussels.
- 15 Under these bodies, five working groups, composed of professionals and technical experts, are working in the following fields of common interest:
  1. Development of economic activity, technology and tourism
  2. Spatial Planning and infrastructures
  3. Environment
  4. Training and exchanges
  5. Public relations and promotional activity
- 16 Given that the Euroregion is in existence for several years and that the high-speed rail system is completed, one of its current projects is to develop a 'strategic objectives scheme', namely a common reference frame for spatial policies in the five regions. This project falls within the scope of the community approach in favour of supranational co-

operation and supported by Interreg programmes in particular. As a result, it allows a confrontation between wishes and real possibilities.

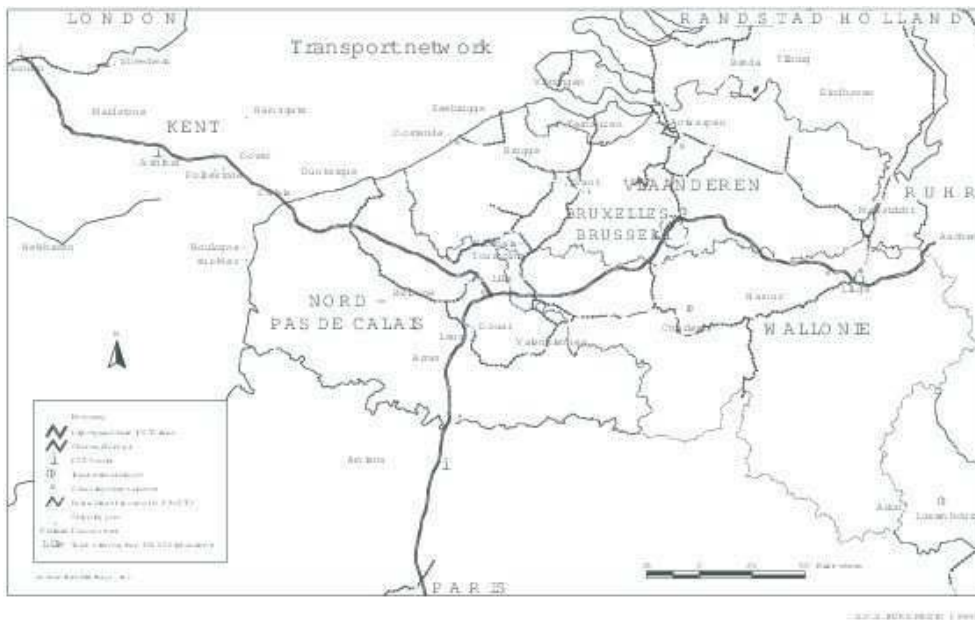
- 17 In order to ascertain the degree of convergence of spatial development strategies for the regions that make up the Euroregion and the possibilities of developing such a common scheme, the following points were analysed:
- The components of the Euroregion: the Belgian and French regions and the British county—their authority and jurisdiction in terms of spatial planning,
  - The spatial planning practices, the positioning of their strategic document in the national planning structure,
  - The spatial development plan or scheme achieved at their level.

## The components of the Euro-region and their jurisdiction in terms of spatial planning

### The three Belgian Regions

- 18 As a result of a long process beginning in the 1970s, and following various constitutional (1970, 1980, 1988, 1993) and legislative reforms, Belgium is now a federal State, whose federated entities are three Regions (Brussels Capital, Wallonia and Flanders) which have essentially economic responsibilities, and three Communities (French, Flemish and German speaking communities), with essentially cultural and educational competence. Each of the federated entity has his own government, parliament, administration and budget, their financing deriving mainly, for the Regions, from a partial transfer of the revenue of the federal personal income tax, redistributed on the basis of the taxpayers' residence (the Flemish Community has merged its institutions with the Flanders Region). These entities have the power to legislate on an equal footing with the Federal State.
- 19 Spatial planning has been fully transferred to the Regions, and in the nineties, each of the three Regions developed his own regional official scheme, which was agreed by his own regional Parliament and adopted by his own regional government. Despite the fact that they are at different stages of implementation, these schemes are all being used in strategies and decisions dealing with public policies. Schemes are also being developed at lower level (provincial and municipal in Flanders, only municipal in Wallonia and Brussels).
- 20 Regional schemes are not mandatory, apart from some binding provisions attached to the Flemish scheme, but they are political documents, with options presented to citizens. So it is very difficult to undertake actions contrary to their objectives. Consequently, one can expect that they will be renewed at each term of office as planned in the legislation (except for Wallonia).

Figure 1. The Euroregion.



- 21 The Euroregion is located at the centre of the European Union and has several major 'gateways' (international ports and airports) and excellent road, railway and river infrastructures. With a population of 15 million inhabitants, it is nonetheless seen as an interstitial area between the four major conurbations of 5 to 10 million inhabitants, i.e. London, Paris, Randstad Holland and the Ruhr area.

### The French Region

- 22 France is a unitary state but the Constitution establishes territorial entities (municipalities, departments et overseas territories) and makes provision for the possibility of creating other by law. This applied to the regions in 1982. The 1982 Act on the rights and freedom of the municipalities, department and regions, in addition to setting up regions as genuine territorial entities also reformed the way in which the territorial entities were organised, by introducing decentralisation.
- 23 French Regions are run freely by regional elected councils (deliberative body) and by a regional executive, the Council Chairman, elected by the Council and its collaborators. The Regions have their own administration, but no initial prescriptive power. However, their regulatory decisions are directly binding by right and are subsequently submitted to a legality control.
- 24 Powers are expressly delegated by the legislature (National Assembly), and the role of the regions was enhanced in planning, spatial structuring, economic action and development, but it is still the Central State who owns the general competence. Their financial resources are coming mostly from State transfers (overall allocations to be used as the regions see fit).
- 25 End of 1999, jurisdiction in terms of spatial planning was reorganised and distributed among a national framework (eight collective services scheme, sectorial), and a regional planning and development scheme, which should prepare a planning Contract developed and budgeted with the State. For Nord-Pas de Calais, a planning contract came to his end,

and a new one is negotiated, but no regional plan has been developed yet, and the most representative document is the Regional Trends and Orientations paper which the planning Contract will have to take into account. Several plans also exist at a more local level, essentially at intermunicipal level, given the small size of French municipalities.

## The British County

- 26 The United Kingdom is a unitary State<sup>1</sup> with a long tradition of local government. After a long period of continuity, there has been a major upheaval since the 1970s, under the different Conservative governments. Here we will consider local government in England, the Counties and Districts (smaller).
- 27 As England does not have a written constitution, the constitutional protection for the organisation of local government is not very pronounced and ordinary laws (Acts of Parliament) were sufficient to transfer responsibilities and powers from local governments either to the national level, be it public (since the thirties already) and private, or to local or national agencies, mixing both levels.
- 28 Their level of financing has been reduced and henceforth they cannot exceed prescribed ceilings without facing some penalty.
- 29 Nevertheless, local communities still have numerous responsibilities, an elected Assembly, an Executive, a significant local administration and are run by 'Councils'.
- 30 In England, more general structure plans and several sectorial plans are developed at county level and on some sectors at district level too. They all have to fit in the framework given by 'Planning guidance' and 'Regional guidance' issued by the National State. Planning supervision is the task of the 'Planning Inspectorate', which is a national State administration.

Table 1. Comparison of the planning system of the five regions Euroregion

Comparison of the planning system of the five regions Euroregion						
Level:	France		England	Belgium		
CENTRAL/ FEDERAL STATE	Laws of 2/3/82 and 7/1/83 (decentralisation) Law of 29/7/82 (planning reform) Framework law of 4/2/95 Framework law of 25/8/99 (incl. strategic choices) Urbanism Act General Local and Regional Authorities Act		Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Planning and Compensation Act 1991 Local Government Act 1985 White Paper: 'This Common Inheritance 1990' Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGN 1 and 12) Regional Policy Guidance Notes (RPGN 9 and 9a) Housing Plan	None		
Legal framework						
Planning	STRATEGIC CHOICES 8 Collective services plans (SSC) with OBJECTIVES + Coast Law 31/1/96 (+ Mountain Law 9/1/85)		None	None		
REGION	BUDGETARY CHOICES = <b>Contrat de Plan</b>			Walonia	Flanders	Brussels
	Regional spatial and development plan		Opinion on regional strategy	<b>Schéma de développement de l'espace régional (SDER)</b> Decree of 27 nov. 97; the Walloon Code of Town and Country planning and Heritage Sectorial plan (PS)	<b>Ruimtelijk structuurplan Vlaanderen (RSV)</b> Spatial planning Decree of 18/5/89 Regional plans (Gewestplannen)	<b>Plan régional de développement (PRD)</b> Town planning Order of 28/8/91 Regional land use plan (PRAS)
			COUNTY <b>Structure plan</b> Transport plan Economic Development Business Plan	PROVINCE Provincial structure plan (Provinciaal structuurplan)		
LOCAL (or supralocal)	Country charters Conurbation projects Intercommunal development and spatial plans	Outline Sectional outline Land use plan	DISTRICT Local plan	Municipal structure plan (SSC) Municipal spatial plan (FCA)	Municipal structure plan (Gemeentelijk structuurplan) General land use plan (APA) Special land use plan (BPAS)	Municipal development plan (PDC) Special land use plan (PPAS)

## Spatial planning practices and positioning of the various documents

- 31 This brief overview stresses the imbalances between the various stakeholders, in terms of authority, jurisdiction, financial autonomy and their ability to legislate. It is also worth noting that strategic schemes are at various levels in their respective planning hierarchy and follow different practices, in particular when dealing with implementation means and players.
- 32 The Official Schemes of the three Belgian Regions refer to development philosophies and integrate spatial planning in a global territorial development project. Because of the status of regions in Belgium (federate entities in a federal government) plans developed are likely to address many areas over which they have jurisdiction and include them in a 'society project'. In the planning hierarchy, even if these plans have no statutory scope, they are nevertheless 'first in line' as all other planning instruments must comply with them; additionally, and at various degrees, these plans have a binding force for public authorities.
- 33 The French and English documents are not at the top of the planning hierarchy. They stem from other requirements, primarily established by the national government. They are developed by territorial communities, in this case French regions and English counties, that share jurisdiction with both central State and the other levels of territorial communities (municipalities, districts, supra regional bodies). These territorial communities all have relative authority as well as financial means that heavily depend on central government. The 'philosophical principles' must therefore be sought at a higher planning level.
- 34 The current French document is an 'orientation paper'. At this stage, it consists of statements of political intention as part of the evolving status of regions. In order to find out what the specific short-term applications are, we will need to analyse the planning contract, which determines budget preferences and associate national and regional levels.
- 35 The Kent county plan, on the other hand, is more sector-based, more technical, high detailed and backed up by figures. It is the only one that emerges as a technical paper, and not a political one, yet it also has a coercive force with public authorities.
- 36 An added difficulty to these various contexts is the negotiators involved, particularly in the implementation process. Apart from the fact that public authorities involved have different levels of authority and jurisdiction, one must also take into account negotiators belonging to the private sector, especially in England, even though this is generally a matter that comes within the scope of public policies.
- 37 Finally, some practical difficulties result from differences between statistical and distribution instruments.



## Analysis of the contents of the five spatial planning schemes: objectives and main ideas

BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION - THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PRD)	
Objectives	Main ideas
I Making the region more attractive and enhancing social equilibrium	Stabilising or even increasing the resident population and preventing a two-tier social structure caused by traders moving out of the city centre. strict management of the housing supply through means of the anti-speculation provisions. Thrust efforts towards demographic revitalisation and combined with measures to improve living conditions (improved housing and public areas), making the city safer and improving access to collective facilities.
II Stimulating employment to improve social progress and stimulate multifunctionality	Countering the excessive growth of the tertiary sector of the Brussels economy, halting de-industrialisation and the flight of workers to outlying areas while preserving the diversified nature of the work force within the urban area. Three approaches have been highlighted - limiting the new urban industrial zones to give new impetus to industrial and port employment in the canal area and sites with good access to motorways, checking the growth of tertiary activity and the uncontrolled growth of offices in urban areas, bringing out areas meeting residence and work needed for companies needing an inter-city location. This employment policy will be supported by a policy of teaching and vocational training ensuring the access to employment and by measures, bonuses, the usage of the region as a centre of employment.
III Managing mobility at regional level	Encouraging activities in the city centre depending on the needs specific to every type of activity, road hierarchisation, remodel public space for the benefit of users, make the public transport system more efficient with the addition of a local high speed rail link, discourage heavy vehicles from entering the city centre and encourage heavy duty transport to use existing arterials.
IV Assessing Brussels' aspirations as a European and international city	Highlighting the specific assets of the Brussels region and strengthening its competitive position within an economic, decision-making and managerial communication network, encourage activities linked to the European role.
V Strengthening the city's identity by highlighting the urban heritage	Improving the region's image by organising events in public areas and by using the architectural, industrial and social heritage.
VI Ensuring rational management of resources, pursuing a policy of reducing pollution and protecting nature	More rational use of energy and water, reducing noise and water, ground level air pollution mainly by introducing stricter legislation and recycling waste as well as reducing industrial and vehicle emissions, improving public spaces and creating green areas.
VII Setting up dynamic cultural projects and drawing attention to the region's tourist attractiveness	Providing the region with a dynamic cultural project, preserving existing cultural treasures and developing a policy of encouraging the setting up of new infrastructures.
VIII Drawing up a safety and security programme for the city	Setting out a policy of prevention which is translated into spatial development of public areas which are safer and more welcoming, improving security for pedestrians and access to decent housing. Specific security policies which would consist of improving the image of the police, developing local branches, improving the coordination at various levels, parking and giving preferential treatment to the needs of security in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods.
IX Improving trade and facilities in the region	Encouraging an entrepreneurial security and improving the image and accessibility of commercial areas and the quality of public spaces. Guaranteeing the supply and adequate level of quality of facilities and highlighting university and research facilities.

FLEMISH REGION : THE SPATIAL STRUCTURE PLAN FLANDERS (RSV)	
Objectives	Main ideas
I Meeting the need for 400000 additional dwellings by 2007	Pursuing urban renovation, developing new types of dwellings, with minimum density housing in urban areas.
II Meeting the need for well-equipped industrial zones	Co-ordinating economic development policy and spatial policy, progressively developing industrial zones with control of requirements through an inventory, differentiating industrial zones and adapting their infrastructure.
III Meeting the need for sufficient farming space and quality	Moving towards well-structured units for agriculture, forestry and nature.
IV Safeguarding and extending unbuilt areas	Concentrating housing and economic activity in rural centres, guaranteeing the development potentials of the functions and activities structuring rural space, halting fragmentation of housing, co-ordinating spatial and environmental policies, isolating the nature function within the rural zone from bordering areas, maintaining the urban/rural 60/40 ratio of additional housing, safeguarding (or developing) urban and peripheral nature areas, demarcating housing and employment zones inside rural areas, focusing growth in built-up peripheral areas, halting ribbon development and scattered building, ensuring the conservation and future development of quality landscapes, limiting new tourism and leisure infrastructure.
V Meeting the need for increased mobility	Concentrating economic activity, evolving other forms of urban mobility and improved localisation policies, reducing the dispersion of functions, focusing economic activity within economic nodes, ensuring access to and accessibility within Flanders, optimising existing infrastructure, creating intermodal transport facilities, integrating traffic control in mobility policy (parking, company transport plans, use of telematics), promoting use of rail.

WALLOON REGION : THE REGIONAL AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (SDER)	
<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Main ideas</i>
I Organising the Walloon area	Organising or re-organising the area not only at regional level, but also at sub-regional and local level using every Planning Act.
II Integrating the supra-regional aspect in Wallonia's area development	Establishing Wallonia as an active partner in the various trans-regional processes and emphasising Wallonia's priorities.
III Setting up cross-co-operation	Encouraging and organising co-operation between the various public and semi-public authorities according to common objectives; in addition, seeking co-operation from the private sector.
IV Fulfilling basic needs	Fulfilling needs in terms of quality of living environment, housing, access to shops and services, preventing natural and technological hazards.
V Contributing to creating jobs and prosperity	Enhancing Wallonia's assets internationally, improving the terms for setting up companies, developing research and innovation, setting up business activity channels (particularly for agriculture, forestry and tourism).
VI Improving access to the Walloon territory and managing mobility	Finalising the transportation system and taking care of modal transfers and logistic operations; in addition, controlling the growth of mobility.
VII Enhancing the value of heritage and protecting resources	Taking or finalising the necessary measures to protect and develop public buildings, natural heritage and landscapes as well as natural resources (water, sub-soil, energy).
VIII Building awareness and increasing responsibility of all players	Involve all players in achieving these objectives : this means informing them and increasing their responsibility.

NORD-PAS DE CALAIS REGION : THE REGIONAL ORIENTATION PAPER (DOR)	
<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Main ideas</i>
I Relationships with the Government	Securing financial support, for example as part of the next planning contract.
II Sustainable development	Requiring new stakes within a sustainable development perspective; re-focusing the region towards a territorial (smart territory) and social viewpoint of the environment (and of sustainable development); diversifying and innovating in terms of energy; managing waste, natural resources and tourism-related resources.
III Social aspects	Linking economic and social development to the sustainable views of the plan, to culture, education and training, based on consultations between the region/ State and communities (including associations).
IV Education	Increasing the region's attractiveness (cutting down the drain of young graduates); developing new networks and new technologies as well as synergies between economic players and training structures; encouraging a global picture of education (within a sustainable development perspective).
V Culture	Developing cultural identity; integrating culture to the whole approach of economic and social development; re-building social cohesion; seeking cultural balance and innovation.

KENT COUNTY : THE KENT STRUCTURE PLAN	
<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Main ideas</i>
I Foothold in Europe	Using inter-European relationships as a catalyst for economic development; developing a European view of mobility and of sustainable development.
II Protecting the living environment	Protecting the environment, managing energy and natural resources; planning the living environment and the overall economic environment (unemployment, job security).
III Sustainable development strategy	Reducing detrimental needs (travelling, energy,...); managing natural resources; developing consistent town planning through a global view of the various topics addressed.
IV Economic development	Encouraging quality of life and sustainable development; reducing unemployment and increasing job security; establishing environmental standards for economic and industrial development.
V Town planning	Increasing accessibility and the quality of life; combining environment and sustainable housing; resolving current traffic and parking issues; encouraging business and leisure activities.

1995	REGION	Added Value in Banking-Insurances (Mio\$ PPS)	Total Added Value (Mio\$ PPS)	Turnover of the Europe-based companies in the world's Top 500	Population (x 1000 inh.)
EURO-REGION	BRUSSELS CAP.	4,354	28,933	1.7 %	949
	FLANDERS	4,307	121,668	0.0 %	5,873
	WALLONIA	1,494	52,940	0.0 %	3,313
	NORD-PAS DE CALAIS	2,315	66,164	1.0 %	3,998
	KENT	1,179	23,983	Unknown	1,551
EUROPEAN CONURBATIONS	ILE-DE-FRANCE REG. (within dept of Paris)	24,972	306,163	19.5 %	11,004
	GREATER LONDON	15,542	110,796	-	2,129
	RANDSTAD HOLLAND	16,445	151,926	16.9 %*	7,007
	NORDRHEIN-W.	9,902	142,983	7.1 %	6,862
		17,165	350,791	9.9 %	17,854

\* (South-East)

## Diverse interests and complex ion, lack of co-ordination, but no fundamental divergence

- 38 The five documents analysed here reflect five different initiatives. National cultures, regional characteristics and economic, social and environmental context are some of the many factors which colour these various visions for development, each of them being confronted to some specific problems.
- 39 In the Brussels-Capital Region, the development plan adopted by authorities reflects a willingness for an harmonious urban lifestyle and a desire to provide this city-region with its own and marked identity, one of the principal objectives being to establish its inhabitants. Indeed, for 30 years now, many people, particularly the wealthier, left the region to live in the Flemish or Walloon suburbs. This leads to a smaller tax base for Brussels and daily commuting with a negative impact on their quality of life. In the Flanders Region, territory is at the centre of the paradox which wants to both designate

the area for economic development, but also protect open, unbuilt spaces and the environment. In Flanders, both the high population density and an inherited and permissive policy in terms of areas eligible for development led to a quasi-continuous urbanisation of its territory. The Wallonia Region is committed to a global and open vision for its territory. It is a marked evolution, Wallonia passing from a relatively self-sufficient development for its territory to a development philosophy turned towards the exterior. Having no major cities, large areas of its territory belong to the employment areas of major cities outside the region (Brussels, Lille, Luxemburg, Aachen). Consequently, the Walloon plan wants to promote an opening to its European neighbours. The Nord – Pas de Calais region, through its orientation document, has builded some bridges for its future and towards the state to which it presents its economic, social, environmental, claims in view of the next planning contract. The document proposed by the Nord – Pas de Calais Region is neither a plan nor a project. An Orientation document, it is presented essentially as a reflection platform in view of the future regional development plan. Eventually, the vision of the Kent County Council is essentially sectorial. Each area has its chapter, even its plan. Transportation is the most comprehensive area. This is understandable given the strategic position of this County (ports and the Chunnel to the East and the impact of its proximity to London to the West). The Plan insists particularly on the modernisation of the economic structure. The plan addresses the private sector as much as local government.

- 40 These differences in contexts and priorities do not necessarily lead to fundamental divergences in strategies put forward. Some concerns are common, e.g. options relating to transportation policies all aim at better controlling the volume and impact of traffic movement and at a mobility shared in a better fashion. All these documents are also based on a ‘sustainable development’ philosophy, even if they are given a specific emphasis by each Region. Four of the five documents – the Flemish RSV excepted – go beyond the strict scope of spatial planning to take into consideration other subsidiary aspects (social issues, education, etc.) of spatial development.
- 41 Another common point is the way they are prepared. All these documents were submitted to intergovernmental and parliamentary consultation, a dialogue process with administrations and semi-public associations, and public consultation.
- 42 They do not deal with the same issues, which is partially due to their ‘age’, e.g. regarding new technologies. They do not necessarily have the same interests, but that does not mean that it results in contradictions or incompatibilities. On the other hand, similar interests can lead to conflicts, related amongst others to economic growth, e.g. company and industry setting up.
- 43 Briefly, it is clear that while they are not contradictory, these documents, which reflect strategies developed by public authorities, do not lay the foundations of co-operation between these Regions. This co-operation with adjoining regions is deemed necessary by all, but one must stress the fact that regional schemes are generally developed independently – the Walloon Scheme excepted – without references to issues of neighbouring regions, but to transportation, to some degree. Project authors rarely look beyond their borders because of heterogeneous supraregional statistics and various legislation as well as working languages.

## Towards a common 'strategic objectives scheme'?

- 44 Yet, an increased supraregional co-operation is clearly wished for by all people concerned since the Euroregion wants to develop a common 'strategic objectives scheme'. Despite the stated differences and imbalances, this area seems to be suited to such a co-operation, even more so that one noted they did not necessarily result in incompatibilities.
- 45 The Euroregion seems to be a sound frame of reference, constituting the interstitial area between four major European conurbations (London, Paris, Ruhr and Randstad Holland). In this area, the awareness that many economic indicators are lower than in neighbouring regions has strongly focused attention on the action required to harness the substantial flows interlinking these conurbations into a strong Euroregion.
- 46 There are many reasons why significant progress should be done on full knowledge of the facts and establishment of multisectorial common strategies: the existence of the Channel Tunnel, the desire for synergy between Lille and its great cross-border sphere of influence (Grootstad project), the problem of converting the franco-belgian mining areas and the old industries of Kent, and the need to establish supraregional sectorial links (textiles, metal industry, agro-industry) to better adapt to the globalisation of the economy. Such strategies can be achieved only through overall studies at Euroregion level or at a level approximating it which may lead to a strategic development plan, whose 'sustainable' nature, however, remains to be worked out and substantiated.<sup>2</sup>

Table 2. Economic indicators for the Euroregion economic weight (retrieved from ULB-IGEAT economic databanks).

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\* (South-East)



## Regional planning and possible links to the supraregional and European levels

### Renewed interest in a certain type of planning, a mere wish?

- 47 As a general trend, we can see a renewed and enhanced focus on spatial planning in the five regions we analysed, with political awareness concerning the need for strategic instruments for development. That new kind of planning is usually not mandatory or statutory, but wants to give a binding framework. New tools were needed because of the increasing pressures and requirements of the land and the legislative framework which is often outdated and poorly adapted to the actual situation. This desire for 'planning' is now underpinned by a process of consensus and participation, with reference to indicative recommendations, in which a wide range of actors take part in discussions on the society of the future.
- 48 There are some who regret that these plans are not sufficiently binding: they are indicative, with few quantified objectives and usually without a timetable. The plans are also often open to multiple interpretation.
- 49 Attempts to co-ordinate these plans at supraregional levels are generally come up against major divergences in terms of statistic instruments, culture, political will and conduct, strategies viewed from a regional standpoint, and eventually means of action.
- 50 They often fall into the trap of merely being a vague, indicative document, devoid of quantified objectives and adopting only the greatest common denominator; but is this really a trap or an inevitability, given the ideological context in which they are conceived – which in itself hardly shows any divergences?
- 51 Attempts to articulate them according to a European vision rapidly come up against the confusion resulting from the many general or sectorial plans developed without any co-operation.
- 52 For instance, the plans that are involved as cross-sectorial plans in the Euroregion context are the second Benelux scheme and the Saar-Lor-Lux+ plan and many projects under the NWMA<sup>3</sup>, starting with the Spatial Scheme currently in progress in this area.
- 53 The ESDP, which is hoped to become the frame of reference for the Union, is not binding either, and does not set out targets in precise figures or translated into maps, be it for information only.
- 54 Therefore one could be wondering if the 'new planning' would not be merely 'a kind of symbolic ritual of development ambitions' (as C. Comeliau suggests in respect of the countries of black Africa<sup>4</sup>, a mere wish and at the same time a way for our societies to feel well with its conscience.

### Supraregional co-operation and European vision

- 55 The objective of this article is not to ponder on the validity and the challenges of dividing the European Union in regions, nor on their increasing positioning as representatives of the EU and beneficiaries of European policies.

- 56 This being established, it is necessary to have a supranational vision and to increase co-operation efforts at the appropriate supraregional entities level with all the collaboration, negotiations and strategic vision that it entails. It is especially true within the context of an increased integration of Europe in some fields such as currency issues, lack of harmonisation in many others, major disparities on its territory and on the eve of the EU enlargement to the East.
- 57 A project based on consensus and shared strategies must provide a common framework. The fact that the planning system is less explicitly binding, while implying some disadvantages, has the advantage of making it possible for these strategies to be adopted, officialized, known and used.
- 58 Nevertheless, in order to prevent this 'new planning' from being a mere wish and to guarantee a successful co-operation at supra regional level, some solutions will be needed so as to overcome the existing differences and imbalances shown in our case study.

### **Obstacles to overcome**

- 59 By examining in a critical way the various components of the supraregional entity and by analysing their respective spatial development strategic plans, their positioning, their content and their priorities, we notice the following:

#### ***Concerning the general framework***

- Major imbalances between stakeholders in terms of their authority, jurisdiction, financial means, ability to legislate, which prove to be a serious disadvantage when negotiating and taking decisions,
- Different practices due to specific national contexts, which remind us of the significance of the national factor, including in regional co-operation,
- Imbalances as to the position of strategic schemes in the planning hierarchy of their respective countries,
- Co-ordination deficiencies with the neighbouring regions,
- A lack of supraregional vision.

#### ***Concerning the objectives***

- Different objectives and priorities, which could be advantageous since it enables strategies to be complementary and not conflictual,
  - Similar objectives that could be in competition (mainly objectives linked to economic growth),
  - Finally, objectives that while designated with the same term are not interpreted the same way and do not have the same purpose.
- 60 One notices very quickly that negotiations between partners come up against numerous obstacles that until now have prevented most occasional co-operation efforts at supraregional level from becoming true co-operation projects. A way to overcome these obstacles would be to adopt a wider reference frame such as the ESDP.

### **The ESDP, an asset?**

- 61 In fact, the ESDP is a lot more than a spatial strategic plan, since it is articulated according to the notion of economic development, respect for the environment and social

development. This scheme is not binding, but seems to be in the process of becoming a true reference document for decision-makers and lobby groups, leading to concrete decisions.

- 62 In light of its preparation process, it is supposed to be based on a large consensus and could therefore fulfil its role of reference framework. But by being too general and not binding, there is a danger that people interpret it according to their own specific interests.
- 63 However, since it must also serve as the basis for EU sector policies, it will greatly influence strategies and the co-operation process between regions. It is already obvious with Interreg programmes without which, admittedly, numerous transnational and supranational co-operation programmes would never have seen the light.
- 64 The ESDP meets a real need in terms of coherence and co-ordination, be it only for the implementation of agreements with the European Union. Let's take the example of transportation policies: the European Union promised to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels which of course leads to the appropriate strategies at all levels concerned with the development of transportation policies.
- 65 The ESDP, which virtually encompasses all the sectors that need to be studied under strategic development plans, should be the frame of reference of all plans at more local level. Accordingly, all plans should be interlinked in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.
- 66 Half way between the ESDP and the regional plans, the supra regional plans have an important role to play, as well as the Interreg programs of the European Union.

## Conclusion

- 67 Even though spatial planning does not fall under EU jurisdiction, one needs only to examine the projects in the supranational co-operation areas defined by Interreg to conclude that the EU is becoming a reference framework, even a support, for a wider vision and that a majority of these programmes refer to the ESDP. Even without explicit jurisdiction in terms of spatial planning, it is obvious that the European Union has the ability to act through its numerous programmes and in numerous fields affected by and related to spatial uses.
- 68 The same goes for other national or regional non-binding schemes which nonetheless have the appropriate means to be implemented.
- 69 Consequently, and despite problems related to framework differences, the most powerful driving force in terms of co-operation remains the will of public players and increasingly of some private players, according to their interests.
- 70 The European Union did put some weight in the balance to motivate regional players while spatial entities were generally converging: 'local or intermediary governments are getting more autonomous where they were mostly dependent and see their relations with the centre develop where they were mostly autonomous'<sup>5</sup>.
- 71 On the one hand, regional policies and significant funds allocated to them by the European Union (one-third of the EU budget in 1994, just behind the CAP and far ahead of policies linked to the environment for example) 'allow a progressive autonomy process of the community policy dealing with Member States spatial policies'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand,



these funds allow regions to receive funding from another source than the National State. However, National States still remain the only official representatives for the Union and most funds first go through State administrations before they reach the appropriate regions.

- 72 With this supraregional co-operation as a background, one witnesses in fact changes in the way land is organised. This organisation intrinsically relies on political decisions and in the European vision would aim at more local autonomy and less disparity. Nevertheless, all you have to do is to observe representatives at the EU Regional Committees to notice the existing and persisting imbalance.
- 73 We conclude by reflecting on the very meaning of these plans: beside their existence and their potential co-ordination and integration into a European body, none of them, while claiming to rely on sustainable development principles, does really question the free-market economy and commercial approach of our society even if most of them now include a few social and environmental aspects.
- 74 They often give major weight to the economy: it is not in keeping with the spirit of the times to unduly inhibit free enterprise, and added value always remains the yardstick against which to measure development.
- 75 The plans, even if they claimed themselves to be more than just spatial planning schemes, have no or only a very slight social cultural dimension than one could wish for (except in the regional guidelines for the Nord-Pas de Calais region, but the DOR is not yet a scheme, neither a plan), even though these two dimensions ought to be part and parcel of sustainable development (and ought to be included in development indices).
- 76 Obviously, we are only beginning to be concerned about land and space with paying more attention to the immediate living environment of its inhabitants, be it social or environmental, than the economy. Despite the great advances made in this direction by the ESDP, the economy still plays a major role in this scheme. In conclusion, we are still far away from a Europe which would advocate a life philosophy less focused on huge consumption: would it not be the time to mistake a little less well-being for 'well-having'....?

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## NOTES

1. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland had recently their own elected parliament and government, but it is still too early to analyse the concrete consequences in terms of State organisation (at the finalisation stage of this article).
2. Concerning for instance the already mentioned policies on transport, the overall reduction of road traffic does not appear as a priority, with the plans rather proposing a different distribution of traffic by calling for support for collective transport and goods transport other than by road. The fact is, however, increasing traffic, both by road and air, shows that Europe is still a long way off from reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 8% by the year 2010 compared with 1990, although it gave this commitment at Kyoto. Extrapolation from current trends lead to a 39% increase of traffic-generated CO<sub>2</sub> emission, only very mildly compensated by a reduction of industry-generated emissions. In view of these figures, the solution generally recommended by the plans of a reduction in motorised traffic, with a shift to other modes of transport, clearly appears to be inadequate.
3. North West metropolitan area.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
5. R. Balme, P. Garraud (1994), *Le territoire pour politiques : variations européennes*, p. 35.

6. Ibid., p. 254.

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## ABSTRACTS

The European Union is promoting a policy of balanced and sustainable spatial development planning. Spatial planning ministers have recently adopted a spatial development perspective for the European Union territory, which is proposing a spatial vision for the entire Union territory.

One of the issues to be raised is the possible link with the other planning levels, in particular with the regional level strongly advocated in Interreg programmes, the European Union providing financial support to many transborder and/or supra-regional co-operation concerning studies as well as projects.

Within this framework, this article is questioning the relevance and the reality of such co-operation activities by analysing one of them, the Euroregion. Which capacities have the five regions of the Euroregion (the three Belgian regions, Nord-Pas de Calais and Kent) to articulate their policy of spatial planning strategy, and to get to a transborder or supra-regional vision, which seems relevant to optimise the assets of these regions in accordance with the trend towards a concentration of activities and mainly of the leading hubs in the surrounding major cities?

A critical scrutiny of competency levels in spatial planning and analysis of the spatial planning strategic scheme in each of the five regions of the Euroregion highlight imbalances between the various stakeholders, differences in the objectives, lack of co-ordination, as well as lack of supra-regional vision.

However, this vision and how it fits into a European vision, is necessary, and often wished for, but if we want to go beyond a mere wish some prerequisites will have to be met.

Finally, this whole process seems to point to progressive changes in territorial organisation.

L'Union européenne souhaite mener une politique de développement spatial équilibré et durable, et les ministres de l'Aménagement du territoire ont dernièrement adopté un schéma de développement de l'espace communautaire, qui propose une certaine vision spatiale pour tout le territoire de l'Union.

Quelle est l'articulation possible avec les autres niveaux de planification, et en particulier le niveau régional fortement mis en avant par les programmes Interreg, l'Union européenne soutenant financièrement de nombreuses collaborations transfrontalières et/ou suprarégionales, concernant à la fois des études et des projets ?

Dans ce cadre, cet article s'interroge sur la pertinence et la réalité de ces collaborations suprarégionales, en étudiant l'une d'elles, l'Eurorégion. Quelles capacités ont les cinq Régions de l'Eurorégion (les trois Régions belges, la région du Nord-Pas de Calais et le Comté de Kent) à articuler leur politique spatiale stratégique et à avoir la vision transfrontalière et suprarégionale qui semble pertinente pour optimiser leurs atouts face à la tendance à la concentration des activités et surtout des pôles de commandement dans les métropoles encadrantes ?

L'observation critique des niveaux de compétence en aménagement du territoire et l'analyse des plans stratégiques de développement territorial de chacune de ces cinq régions nous amène à constater des déséquilibres dans les intervenants, des différences d'objectifs et des carences de coordination dans la réalité, ainsi qu'un manque de vision suprarégionale.

Cette vision, et son insertion dans une vision européenne, sont pourtant nécessaires, et souvent

souhaitées, mais si l'on veut éviter qu'elles ne deviennent une simple incantation, certains présupposés devront être rencontrés.

Enfin, tout ce processus semble présager d'une lente modification de l'organisation territoriale.

## INDEX

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