

This is an Author Pre-print. 'The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in Planning Theory & Practice, published online January 26, 2015, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2014.991544

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2014.991544#.VNH2My6d9-4>

INTERFACE

Raising Sustainability

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There is a fantastic word in German: *Aufheben*. How this word captures the essence of dialectical social space was discovered by Schmid (2007), and his observation is worth repeating here:

At the core of the dialectic lies a concept whose deeper meaning emerges only in German: *das Aufheben des Widerspruchs* (sublation of the contradiction). *Aufheben* signifies, on the one hand, negation and overcoming: on the other hand, preservation and placing at a higher level. This ambiguity is completely lost in most translations: for example, in the French (*dépasser*) or English (“transcend” or “sublate”) (Schmid, 2007, p. 30)

Further contradictory translations include: to dissolve, to keep, to remove, to raise, to void, and to sustain. In this way, *Aufheben* captures the core contradictions of social space that define social reality (Schmid 2007). It is exactly this dialectic that surfaces time and again at the interface between sustainable development policy and planning practice, and this is the central theme of this issue of *Interface*. On the one hand, sustainable development signifies the normative ideal of generating a better world. On the other hand, in the process of addressing and resolving problems, it often results in the realization of other problems, if not also the preservation of current problems (e.g. capitalist relations). This contradiction is an unfortunate, if not depressing, observation given that over twenty-five years have passed since the World Commission on Environment and Development’s (WCED) (1987) declaration that sustainable development is a goal worthy of international attention. Recalling, further, Jordan’s (2008, p. 17) remark that, ‘things have gotten worse – not better – since the publication of Brundtland’s landmark report,’ one might wonder how progress will ever be achieved, given the numerous attempts that have been made so far at realising it.

Across the wide palette of such attempts, one can see that the urban has surfaced as *the* site of sustainability interventions. Rydin (2010) cited several reasons for this. First, the idea that the planet’s population is more than half-urbanised renders urban places increasingly important nodes of human affairs and therefore logical starting points to intervene and invoke wide-reaching change. By extension, second, the reshaping of cities and neighbourhoods (through, for example, new infrastructure) can potentially generate new and sustainable ways of living. Third, negotiations over land use, building codes, and/or zoning, often unfold at the municipal level. Forums of local decision-makers are, therefore, logical venues to thematise and, hopefully, materialise sustainable development ideals. This consensus that the urban is the site of mediation, has, in many places, been translated into a call to the planning profession to produce the 21st century sustainable city, and one can observe a vast array of designs, approaches, and indeed, entire planning paradigms such as integrative spatial planning, which have emerged as tools to address this normative orientation.

The contributions that follow in this issue of *Interface* address some operationalizations of sustainable development that have prevailed in planning policy in recent years. Moreover, they show

how these approaches have, in practice, produced not only new sets of problems to be dealt with, but have also achieved very little in terms of addressing the fundamental underlying problems that underlie the reason for the call to sustainability in the first place – that capitalist relations must be modified so that development that will not burden future generations. Much of this is a result of the fact that many of the strategies and orthodoxies that have taken on hegemonic form ultimately fail to grasp the complexities of the task at hand. The authors in this issue of *Interface* make this point very clear. Sometimes the sustainability goal is too fuzzy and blurred in its articulation. Sometimes the approaches are too top-down, and insensitive to specific local variations. Sometimes the planners and activists (alike) are so fixated on the orthodoxies – such as densification – that the point is missed altogether. Achieving sustainable development in times of post-fordist, post-crisis political economic patterns of urban restructuring, such approaches have also increasingly been driven by market forces – another problem. The contributions to this *Interface* show that that, to date, no recipe for sustainable development exists, in fact. Rather, current prevailing forms of intervention expose, at best, various dilemmas, and at worst, that only certain agents – such as landowners, developers and central state administrations – can expect to benefit from these exercises. The *Interface* thus points not only to issues of mere political interest and conflict, but also the hidden agendas that frame the unspoken normative vision of sustainable development. This issue of *Interface* illuminates the contradictions of existing policy formulations, and signals to policy-makers and practitioners that the existing repertoire of solutions are not as convincing as they might like them to be. There is still more work to be done.

Sustainable development has been a key area of concern for several years now at the University of Luxembourg (UL). This issue of *Interface* brings various members of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning from UL's Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education into conversation. Each underscores how sustainable development relates to their own work, and they have sought to understand this relationship not with the goal of finding the ultimate blueprint of sustainable development, but rather from analytical and constructivist perspectives. It is a great pleasure to introduce them here.

Currently a research associate at the UL, National Contact Point for the European programme Urbact, and former manager of CIPU, Becker explains some of the difficulties in translating European Union sustainability objectives in sub-national contexts. Drawing on his experience with the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC), Becker explains how European sustainable urban policy initiatives are difficult to implement because of complex, multiply scaled, and relational transfer processes that influence their permeability and dynamics in cities. The clean world of policy-making falters in the implementation process. The contradiction here is that the clear and clean world of normative policy documents and the normative concept of neatly levelled policy arenas contrasts with, and finds limited use-value in, the messy world of interscalar hierarchies and levers of decision-making. Becker argues, however, that this is not a *fait-accompli*. Rather, institutions such as the *Cellule nationale d'Information pour la Politique Urbaine* (CIPU) can mediate between the levels of government, bringing actors from different arenas and jurisdictions together to address local specificities. It can never be certain, however, that local agendas will reflect, in the end, the original European objectives.

Similar conclusions were reached by Evrard et al. In their role as Luxembourg National Contacts of the European Spatial Observatory Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON), and supported in part, by the University of Luxembourg, the authors were well positioned to view and discuss the state of European territorial cohesion policies. They argue that the territorial cohesion policies are fuzzy, and that policy responses have been equally so. More recently, too, there has been a shift in focus from sustainable development to sustainable growth. They thus refer here to the set of cohesion policies as a moving target. Also problematic are the set of indicators developed by ESPON that are vague in meaning, and are generated with too little input or ratification from lower levels of government. In terms of sustainable development, the normative orientation that underpins the cohesion policies, Evrard et al. show that a centralised unified concept of a space as broad and diverse

as the European Union is difficult to achieve, without generating new problems. The attempt to create fuzzy meanings may have advantages insofar that localities can fill it with meaning as they need. The variegated manifestations, however, may not resemble a sustainable, coherent or evenly distributed social space.

Turning to projects of urban transformation, McDonough addresses the spatial problems of the rapid peripheral development of Madrid airport, where certain actors endorse the integration of certain flows of mobility at the cost of delinking certain local spaces and networks. This work is significant because the concept of integration has, in some circles, been thought of as hand-in-hand with sustainability (Holden 2012), and McDonough shows that the sublime integration of everything into a perfect sustainable harmony is far from realistic. The result is only the sustainability of particular pathways and flows within them. In the case of Madrid's airport expansion, global flows of capital are prioritised over local communities, irrespective of their spatial proximity to the capital city. McDonough's case study is thus a vivid testament to recent spatial planning practices in Europe that claim sustainability through integration. Instead of achieving some sort of blue-printed harmony, integrated spatial planning accomplishes only new sets of divisions and new problems to be solved.

Hesse addresses the contradictions in density planning a paradigm of so called good neighbourhood and city planning that not only has deep roots in Europe, but is also continually taken up, without reflection, as key to sustainability everywhere. He argues that densification is not a universally positive or progressive goal of planning; rather, it masks dynamics of power and causes further social, political exclusions (with regards to decision-making, political participation, and capital power) and deepening environmental problems (such as longer carbon heavy flows of people). In particular, and similar to Krueger's observations, it consecrates a perfect money-making marriage between environmentalists, land owners and developers. Developers and land owners have often received a critical eye in matters of sustainability. Now environmentalists are also under the microscope as they, too, can be considered as being part of the problem.

Krueger, Guest Professor at the UL and Director of Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Environment and Sustainability Studies Program, reveals the primacy of economics over the other two domains of sustainable development of the social and ecological. He describes how approaches in the US and UK, such as smart growth and new urbanism, have achieved what, once upon a time, seemed impossible: The chasm that existed between environmentalism and land use development was bridged, and market-based sustainability was born. Yet, what arose was not a magic formula, but rather a rationalised and often technocratic system that reified current political economic arrangements, providing sustainability only for those who can afford it. At the same time, lower standards of living (lower building standards, longer commutes) were guaranteed for others. While drivers of these approaches claim that sustainable development has become a realizable goal, the fact remains that negative social externalities are the result, and even underpin their success. New dilemmas have arisen.

The culmination of the following papers reveal, in their entirety, the new fissures and caveats opened up by current operationalizations of sustainable development. As the reader will find, the contributions invoke and bring forward several current debates in human geography and urban and regional studies, including market urban development and sustainability (Gibbs and Krueger 2012; Gibbs, Krueger, and Macleod 2013), the policy mobility of sustainable development (Carr 2013; McLean and Borén 2014; Temenos and McCann 2012), Europeanization and the cohesion of its components (Chilla 2013; Faludi 2006; Marshall 2005), and integrative spatial planning for sustainable development (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009; Hesse and Carr 2013; Holden 2012; Stead and Meijers 2009). It is shown that new format of a sustainable and cohesive European Union, through the optimization of flows and spaces towards a cohesive union, is difficult. Policies generated at upper levels of government often overlook the messy pathways of local delivery. Policies fuzzy in their formulation are also reflected by fuzzy modes of articulation. It is also shown that the imperatives of free-market growth and development generates new social externalities. Orthodox approaches to city planning, and as well as new trends in integrated spatial planning, accomplish only new sets of divisions

and new problems, while supporting certain sets of spaces, flows and their human constituents. Together, they show that it is difficult at best, and impossible at worst, to 'sublate the contradiction' of sustainable development.

Perhaps sustainable development is too tall an order. The set of papers that follow certainly, at least, present a somehow daunting picture. Perhaps at this juncture, however, it is helpful to recall Campbell (2000, p. 296), who argued that planners cannot *achieve* sustainability but can *approximate* it, and only indirectly, 'through a sustained period of confronting and resolving [...] conflicts'. In this sense, the contributions in this issue of *Interface* can be understood as a call to understand sustainability not as an end in itself, but as a lens to expose the dialectics of social reality with respect to sustainability. Sustainability and sustainable development, in this light, can thus only be best appreciated in the incongruities and ambiguities that are exposed. The contributions in this issue underscore the limitations of current policy approaches, and imply that the search must go on.

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2014.991544#.VNH2My6d9-4>

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2014.991544#.VNH2My6d9-4>

Boosting and mobilizing sustainability: Why European sustainable urban development initiatives are slow to materialise

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In recent years, sustainable urban development has been high on the European Union's (EU) political agenda in spite of the principle of subsidiarity where decision-making powers in this policy field are left to local authorities (European Commission, 1997, 1998, 2007, 2008, 2009). So far, EU regulatory measures concerning sustainable urban development have been limited to directives or regulations in policy areas covered by the Treaty establishing the European Community, such as environmental and regional policies (cf. Strategic Environmental Assessment or Structural Funds regulations) (Becker, 2012; Rottmann, 2006). Eager to become active in this field and to develop, transfer and embed knowledge, skills, values and norms from the European down to the sub-national levels, the EU has nevertheless developed a large array of 'soft' (i.e. non-binding) initiatives by means of policy concepts, tools, and exchange programmes (such as URBACT) to promote sustainable urban development.

The reasons for EU's growing interest in the field of sustainable urban development are twofold: first, they can continuously and specifically influence changes in urban policies that occur as a result of social, economic, environmental, technological or governance-related pressures; second, the EU tries to position itself in the research, policy and practice nexus that, as a result of the general move towards evidence-based policy-making, has developed in the field of sustainability over the past decades. However, despite the provision of considerable funds and efforts to boost urban sustainability, such EU transfer initiatives have hitherto failed to produce major long-lasting effects in cities.

Drawing on the example of the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) – initiated by the European member states and strongly supported by the European Commission (EC) both in terms of expertise, values, benchmarks and financial resources – this article explores why EU induced policy transfer activities intended to boost urban sustainability are slow to materialise in cities. It also analyses the role that Luxembourg's national Unit for Urban Policy (*Cellule nationale d'Information pour la Politique Urbaine*, CIPU) – a policy-practice-research interface connecting the European, national and local scales – plays in this process. Evidence suggests that the attempt to materialise European sustainable urban policy initiatives with the RFSC was hampered by complex, multiply scaled, and relational transfer processes that influence their permeability and dynamics in cities. Meanwhile, institutionalised interfaces, such as CIPU, are helpful in linking the various scales and facilitating the mobility and mutation of sustainability policies. Such platforms are often overlooked in the literature.

The argument is structured as follows: Firstly, different theoretical concepts of EU induced policy transfer processes seeking to grasp the mobility and the effectiveness of EU policies are critically reflected upon with respect to key factors influencing their materialization at the local level. Secondly, the case of the RFSC, a tool for supporting and monitoring sustainable urban development, and of CIPU as an institutionalised policy-practice-research interface facilitating the transfer and use of the RFSC in Luxembourg will be presented. Lastly, some bottlenecks in the transfer networks will be highlighted.

Europeanization, policy transfer and policy mobilities

Conceptualising the transfer and mobilization of EU policies has been the subject of concern in scholarly research for some time. The growing literature can be divided into three strands – Europeanization, policy transfer, and policy mobilities – and I will touch on them here.

Europeanization literature provides a useful starting point for understanding the logics behind EU policies. In classical political science, Europeanization is often interpreted as a process by which the EU impacts national and sub-national levels. The impact results from the transfer of European ideas and practices to the core of local decision-making as well as from the local to the higher policy levels (Marshall, 2005). Accordingly, Europeanization has apparently both download and upload components (John, 2001; Marshall, 2005). Rational-formalist approaches of political science suggest that such transfer processes resemble a rigid, automated transfer of policies and practices by way of import/export of policies, practices or preferences. The various geographical scales involved in Europeanization processes are often depicted as a pre-given, fixed hierarchy of bound spaces (McCann & Ward, 2012).

In contrast, social-constructivists turn to conceptualisations of scale as socially constructed, and this contextualises policies transfer processes that take place at various levels and in various political institutions (Carr, 2013; McCann & Ward, 2012; Moore, 2008; Paasi, 2004). The policy mobilities approach reveals for instance that policies travel, and they pass and transform through fluid and negotiable sets of socio-spatial relationships in which the interests and opportunities of agents matter (Affolderbach & Carr, 2014; Jessop, 2009; McCann & Ward, 2012). Scales are therefore neither nested nor mutually exclusive as is suggested in the literature on policy transfer (Ward, 2006); they are continuously being reconnected and responsibilities are being renegotiated and rescaled. Accordingly, policy transfer is neither rigid nor transparent. R; rather, it is a complex, context- and value-laden multi-scalar process in which policies and ideas are translated, adapted, and transformed at and by the various levels involved; hence, the term policy mobility (McCann & Ward, 2012; Temenos & McCann, 2013). In this understanding of policy transfer, the mobilization and relational construction of knowledge between 'policy suppliers' and 'policy demanders' generally involves extrospective urban policy-making processes, which in return favour policy boosterism, i.e. 'the active promotion of locally developed and/or locally successful policies, programmes or practices across a wider geographical field' (McCann 2013, p. 9). In this context, one can recall Turnhout et al.'s (2013) reflections on the 'facilitating repertoire' in knowledge brokering between science and society. In contrast to 'bridging repertoires', which are characterised by linear models where science provides answers for the users' problems, the facilitating repertoire is more likely to produce co-productive processes that transcend the boundaries between knowledge production and use (Turnhout et al., 2013).

Europeanization and policy transfer literature are hard pressed to explain why EU policies are slow to materialise at the local level because it concentrates mainly on rigid processes in a system of fixed scales, and generally underestimating factors such as contexts, values, stakeholder interests, and opportunities of actors and institutions involved in the transfer processes. The concept of policy mobilities coupled with the approach of nonlinear co-production processes of facilitating repertoires that facilitate knowledge mutation and learning provides a more useful lens in understanding how policies move, are interpreted and are implemented.

Europeanization and CIPU

The RFSC and CIPU are exemplary cases for exploring the issue of Europeanization and the policy mobility EU sustainable development initiatives. The RFSC, conceived as a tool to transfer sustainability policies from the European level down to the municipal level, ran into caveats and ultimately failed to deliver the desired sustainability effect (at least in the eyes of the European Commission). However, institutions such as CIPU, because they are sensitive to the complex relational contexts and nonlinear processes that characterise actual policy mobility, can facilitate vertical communication between levels of government. Institutions such as CIPU are often overlooked in Europeanization literature.

Mobilizing sustainability through the RFSC tool

In 2007, the European ministers in charge of urban development agreed on common principles and strategies for urban development, which resulted in the signing of, and production of policies associated with, the Leipzig Charter on sustainable European Cities. A year later, the RFSC was developed in attempts to put the Leipzig Charter into practice. Promoting integrated and sustainable urban development, the RFSC aimed to provide urban stakeholders with an instrument for the self-evaluation of locally-defined urban development strategies and working methods against the background of the EU defined principles of sustainability and integrated development. To guide the process, a working group consisting of member states, European city networks, and the EU Commission – representatives from the various governing levels – was created.

Released in early 2013, the RFSC is a free web-based tool that socially networks cities up with one another. Intended especially for small and medium-sized cities, the RFSCs offers methodological support for practitioners and policy-makers. Available in most EU languages, it provides an overview of possible actions towards organising sustainable and integrated urban development. It contains five modules, in which city officials can enter their respective data and link-up with similar cities across Europe: (i) defining city characteristics, (ii) developing sustainable development strategies, (iii) auditing and assessing sustainability and the integrated approach with respect to ongoing projects or strategies, (iv) monitoring progress, and (v) building networks and finding partner cities. Although the RFSC has a potential centralizing capacity, it neither proposes a binding framework nor a specific sustainability model for all European cities. Instead, it supports users in assessing their municipality's development, defining objectives, creating appropriate instruments to achieve these goals, and providing a platform where city officials can exchange with one another. In this way, the RFSC could be viewed as a process-oriented attempt at applying EU sustainability policies.

All involved partners deemed interaction with and among cities and stakeholders important throughout the development and dissemination process: Many member states launched support groups, gathering representatives from the national level, from cities and city networks in order to identify the needs of their cities in terms of integrated and sustainable urban development, link them to existing national or local initiatives or policies, and evaluate the usefulness and the potential of the RFSC, taking into account the respective national institutional settings. Moreover, a European-wide testing phase, funded by the EC, was organised in 2011 with 66 test cities that were asked to report back on the RFSCs practical usability, its layout, and the way it was used in their respective governance processes. After its official launch in 2013, participating member states put National Contact Points in place to promote the RFSC, organise opportunities for exchange on the RFSC and urban sustainability issues, guide cities that wish to use the various modules, and report back on the ways cities are working with the web-based tool.

The EU Commission's financial support for the RFSC between 2013 and 2015 was suspended in late 2014 due to the low turnout of European cities interested in actively working with the tool. Today, only around 90 cities are working with the various modules, and many of these are the same cities that had previously participated in the 2011 testing phase and already had experience with sustainable urban development tools and projects elsewhere or had engaged in similar European projects or city networks. Small and medium-sized cities – originally the main target group of the RFSC – are still particularly hesitant to use it. They are reluctant to share their experiences and initiate interurban co-operations. The reasons for the RFSC's lack of effectiveness are manifold. First, in general, small and medium-sized cities are not accustomed to being active in European urban policy arenas and they lack a proper understanding of how European policies work. Second, European principles, values and norms of sustainable urban development – as presented in the RFSC – are not easily accessible and comprehensible despite the presence of institutionalised support at various levels (see below). Third, from a political point of view, the RFSC, deliberately conceived as a non-binding and open web-based tool, lacks legitimizing powers that, in return, has an impact on its capacity to persuade and motivate decision-makers to make full use of it.

Facilitating sustainability through CIPU

Except for the City of Luxembourg, cities in the Grand Duchy are all rather small by European standards (with 3,000-30,000 inhabitants). Many municipalities thus suffer a lack of human capacities, rendering the search for good practices and innovative ideas with regard to urban development, at best, difficult and time-consuming, and at worse, low priority. To counteract this problem, in 2008, CIPU was launched as a platform for exchange of experiences and know-how on urban policy issues. CIPU supports municipalities with thematic conferences, workshops, and tools; thus, helping to better structure the exchanges of good practices, policies, and scientific knowledge both from within Luxembourg and abroad. The value in CIPU is both its ability to make European concepts, strategies and policies more comprehensible to actors and agencies otherwise remote from EU workings, and to enhance capacity-building generate new collaborations. CIPU helps urban stakeholders in coordinating European, national, and local developments in the field of urban policy and encourages local actors to take part in relevant activities at upper levels. In this way, local actors are encouraged to critically evaluate, and engage with, existing policies, processes, values, and actor constellations. Its numerous activities also contribute to connecting processes and projects that run in parallel and ensuring that synergies are optimally exploited. CIPU also supports cities and research institutions in acquiring EU funding for urban development projects and the identification and formulation of research needs. CIPU can, thus, be understood as a context-sensitive, institutionalised interface –a facilitating repertoire – between urban development policies developed at the European, national and local levels as well as between urban research, policy and practice.

CIPU participated actively in the elaboration of the RFSC on behalf of Luxembourg's urban stakeholders both during the development, testing and dissemination phases and functioned as a facilitator for the dissemination, the use and the adaptation of the tool at the national and local levels and conditions. The CIPU consortium was enlarged by members from the inter-ministerial committee for sustainable development to create Luxembourg's national support group for the RFSC.

Bottlenecks in the transfer networks

By virtue of its focus on mobilities and mutations, the policy mobilities approach offers the possibility to critically reflect on processes of policy transfer in Europe. The experience of the RFSC and CIPU show that the 'materialisation' of sustainable urban development policies and practices occurs through multiply scaled, dynamic and relational processes. These are what characterise policy transfers and it is strongly influenced by multi-scalar complexities, its agents and the ways in which policies and experiences are conveyed and understood. Institutionalised interfaces such as CIPU can help to translate and embed European policy initiatives in the field of urban sustainability at the local level, shaping them again at the European level in turn.

Experience shows that transferring the RFSC from the European to the urban level is a multi-scalar, dynamic and relational process, where many different sets of socio-spatial relationships emerge, but an insensitivity to local specificities runs the risk of failure. What is more, member states and the national scale play an important but not necessarily a crucial role during the mobility and mutation processes. Cities can act at the European level in shaping the sustainable urban development policies of the EU in their own right, for example, by giving feedback during the testing phase and participating actively in the conception of the tool – an aspect that institutions such as CIPU, with their facilitating repertoires, can support. Institutionalised interfaces such as CIPU can play a key role in multiply scaled, dynamic, and relational transfer processes. Because of its function as an interface between veracious scales, actors and spaces, CIPU takes on the role of an 'interconnection'. It constitutes an important infrastructure in which policies and practices like the RFSC are circulated and to some extent even produced. Moreover, cities can influence policies at higher levels using CIPU turning interfaces, thus, into important 'sites of encounter, persuasion and motivation' (Temenos and McCann, 2013, p. 346). These co-productive, nonlinear processes reveal that the limits between the various scales are blurred

and tightly interconnected. The concept of rigid download/upload policy transfer between bound levels as depicted in the Europeanization literature can therefore be challenged. The caveats of attempted top-down delivery of EU tools can, respectively, be quickly identified.

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Territorial cohesion as a vehicle of sustainability

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Introduction

While territorial cohesion remains a rather blurred policy concept in the European Union (EU), it constitutes one of the primary vehicles of delivering an EU defined sustainability. This paper aims at exposing some of the possibilities and limitations of this policy approach. In the first part, we discuss the general aims underlying territorial cohesion that, next to the objectives of economic and social cohesion, became one of the central objectives of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. It is said, that globalisation and EU integration generated “asymmetric shocks, territorial marginalization, and relocation of businesses” (Robert, 2007, p. 26), and the principle of territorial cohesion should help in correcting these problems, primarily through financial support. By achieving a more (so called) cohesive spatial development, sustainability across the EU would be reached. Also, EU sector policies concerning, for example, agriculture, competition, transport and environment all have considerable territorial ramifications. Territorial cohesion was conceived as a means of supporting cross-sector coordination and subsequently their sustainable development. It is seen, however, that to date the objectives of territorial cohesion are still not entirely clear, and that there are difficulties in isolating clear methods of implementation as a result. It seems a moving target. In a second part, we outline some of the challenges in operationalizing territorial cohesion. To do so, we investigate some of the instruments and applied research projects developed in the framework of the European Spatial Observatory Network (ESPON) that was established to monitor European spatial planning through applied research, gathering data and developing tools that can aid practitioners and decision-makers at various levels of government. The objective of ESPON is to provide concrete and operational examples to foster territorial cohesion and endorse sustainable development. However, it is challenging to operationalise and measure territorial cohesion that does justice at different levels of governance.

1. Reading territorial cohesion through the lens of sustainability

Two crucial aspects of territorial cohesion are significant in its effective implementation. First, the principle of territorial cohesion implies that the spatial impacts of EU sector policies should be taken into account and coordinated at the EU level (Dühr et al., 2010: 188; Faludi, 2006, p. 669-670). Second, it acknowledges the territorial diversity of the EU and aims at strengthening “the global competitiveness of all regions of Europe” and “mobiles[ing] the diverse territorial potentials for sustainable economic growth and job creation” (European Commission (EC), 2008, p. 3). In short, by emphasising the so called “territorial dimension” of EU policies, it aims at bringing the territorial dimension into the discussion at the EU level. These rather wide and abstract objectives have the advantage of being easily adaptable to ever-changing policy needs, and socio-economic contexts. They can however also lead to dispersive and uneven implementation. This question is particularly significant since the cohesion policies are supported by the second largest EU budget.

As noted by Faludi (2010), some scholars question the effectiveness of this EU policy and view its re-nationalisation as the most effective way to implement its endeavours. These debates result from the concept of territorial cohesion containing so many goals and significations that it runs the risk of

meeting only a few of them. The three objectives defined by the green book on territorial cohesion (EC, 2008) are iconic in this respect.

- 1) “Connecting territories: Overcoming distance” (EC, 2008) - This priority aims at ensuring a better accessibility to infrastructure and services, such as transport, education, health, energy and communication networks. Before the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), the provision on “services of general interests” (art. 16) in the Treaty of Amsterdam (European Communities, 1997) was the only European-wide policy addressing the need for equal access to public services irrespective of geographical location. In 1999, the “European Spatial Development Perspective” (ESDP) translated this idea in spatial terms. This non-binding document fosters “balanced and sustainable development” (Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, 1999), endorsing “not only environmentally sound economic development which preserves resources for use by future generations but also includes a balanced sustainable development” (Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, 1999: 10). The notion of “development” plays a particularly important role for newer EU member states where cohesion policy acts as a tool in supporting the modernisation of their economies and infrastructures.
- 2) “Concentration: Overcoming differences in density” (EC, 2008) - This priority underlies the objective of strengthening local economies. It aims at “reducing the negative externalities of agglomeration and ensur[ing] that all groups can benefit from highly specialised and productive economies”. It is an instrument to support regions’ and cities’ competitiveness – an aspect taken up again in the EU2020 strategy, which replaced the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, for “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (EC, 2010).
- 3) “Connecting territories: Overcoming division” (EC, 2008) – This priority highlights the need to facilitate transnational cooperation at national and sub-national levels as transnational flows of people, goods, capital and services are constantly on the increase. The EU INTERREG programmes, facilitating interregional and transnational cooperation are considered as crucial tools in this respect. Also addressed by this policy objective are the governance challenges (across sectors, levels and countries) in achieving sustainable spatial development.

Territorial cohesion is considered as a major lever to support the implementation of the EU2020 strategy (“towards smart, sustainable and inclusive development”). However, one might wonder if territorial cohesion is a “moving target”. First, there is not formalised definition of territorial cohesion at EU level (Peyrony, 2005; Faludi, 2007; ESPON & University of Geneva, 2013). Second, territorial cohesion was originally oriented towards solidarity and coherence, but more and more emphasis is placed on competitiveness and territorial assets – especially since the formulation of EU2020. Third, its concrete implementation relies on multiple networks of actors involved. The coming years will reveal how the objective of territorial cohesion and these policy goals evolve, given the lack of precise goals.

The blurriness of territorial cohesion objectives poses challenges in implementation. It is foreseen in the next programming period (2014-2020) to address this problem. The EC will emphasise a so called place-based approach, encouraging local and regional authorities to develop area-specific tailor-made strategies. They will be asked to generate concrete territorial cohesion strategies, adhering to milestones listed in a “road map” provided by the Polish Presidency (2011) and agreed upon by the member states. This road map defines a first division of labour between the member states and at different levels of governance. One can identify, therefore, a specific form of multi-level governance. It is too early to evaluate this process. However, it can be remarked that territorial cohesion will operationalised primarily at (sub)national levels, thus challenging the notion of international coherence and, by extension, cohesion.

2. ESPON: guidelines for implementing territorial cohesion at EU, national and sub-national level

ESPON has the task of delivering research (“territorial evidence” in the jargon) to support decision-making at EU and (sub)-national level. In order to obtain a European “picture”, it works mainly with quantitative data from Eurostat. ESPON researchers are also involved in a regular consultation process with stakeholders working respectively at EU or regional levels. Additionally, the EU projects Indicators of Territorial Cohesion (INTERCO) and Key Indicators for Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning (KITCASP) proposed a list of indicators to measure territorial cohesion (Table 1), reflecting as well the three pillars of sustainability. These procedures confirms that territorial cohesion is a transversal, trans-sector objective deeply anchored in spatial planning.

Table 1: Indicators defined by the INTERCO and KITCASP for measuring territorial cohesion. (Sources: ESPON & University of Geneva, 2012, p. 3; ESPON & National University of Ireland, 2013, p. 9-10)

| INTERCO | KITCASP |
|---|--|
| <p>Strong local economies ensuring global competitiveness: Measures labour productivity, Gross Domestic Product (GDP)/capita, Purchasing Power Standards (PPS), overall unemployment rate, and old age dependencies.</p> | <p>Economic competitiveness and resilience: Measures Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita/ Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita, employment rates of population aged 20-64, total Research & Development (R&D) expenditures as percentage of GDP, balance of external trade, and economic structure.</p> |
| <p>Innovative territories: Measures rates of tertiary education among 25-64 year-olds, intramural expenditure on R&D, and employment rates among 20-64 year-olds.</p> | <p>Integrated spatial development: Measures population density/population change, changes in housing stock, modal split, land use change, and access to services.</p> |
| <p>Inclusion and quality of life: Measures levels of disposable household incomes, life expectancies, proportion of early school leavers, gender imbalances, differences in female-male unemployment rates, and ageing indexes.</p> | <p>Social cohesion and quality of life: Measures rates of tertiary education among 30-34 year-olds, population at risk of poverty, green space accessibility, well-being index, and dependency ratios.</p> |
| <p>Attractive regions of high ecological values and strong territorial capital: Measures potential vulnerability to climate change, air pollution, soil sealing per capita, mortality, hazards and risks, biodiversity, and potentials for renewable energy.</p> | <p>Environmental resource management: Measures renewable energy production, greenhouse gas emissions, population at risk of flooding, the number and status of protected European habitats and species, and water quality.</p> |
| <p>Fair access to services, markets and jobs: Measures access to compulsory schooling, hospitals, grocery services, universities, accessibility, and mobility potentials of road, rail, and air travel.</p> | |
| <p>Integrated polycentric territorial development: Measures population demands for public services, potential for polycentricity, net</p> | |

migration rate, degree and intensity of territorial cooperation (based on INTERREG programs), and a polycentricity index.

ESPONS' operationalization of territorial cohesion raises questions concerning policy implementation, and by extension, the ability to achieve EU defined ideas of sustainability. On the one hand, it can provide orientation for stakeholders in sector policy fields such as transport, agriculture, research, economy. In order to effectively execute the principles of territorial cohesion, coordination between sector policies would be necessary. On the other hand, the challenge of achieving territorial cohesion also relies on the operationalization at sub-national level. ESPON data and tools provide an important support for regions and cities to benchmark themselves in Europe. This represents a useful first step to position themselves in Europe. However, implementing territorial cohesion at sub-national level requires more refined data at a local level and a concrete understanding of territorial cohesion as such. The effective implementation of the territorial cohesion objective would therefore need a regional and local appropriation of this concept.

Conclusion

The purpose of the territorial cohesion is to achieve a European-wide sense of sustainability. Territorial cohesion seeks a coherent spatial development, it places emphasis on the balanced development of environment, society and economy, and implies integrated governance at various levels. Camagni suggests conceptualizing territorial cohesion as "the territorial dimension of sustainability" (2007, p. 135). Rooted in the French notion of "services publics", the original intent of territorial cohesion was to ensure a balanced development in Europe. Financial support, scaled up to the European level would ensure solidarity across the continent. In recent years, it has served as a vehicle to "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" – a different kind of sustainability, one emphasizing also competition. It has thus been shown itself to be flexible and adaptable to changing policy needs, a characteristic made possible by its fuzziness. At the same time, it faces the risk of being dispersed or diluted as it is interpreted across the various local policy fields. In this way, this article contributes to the already long and ongoing debate on the meaning of this concept. Furthermore, there remains the pressing challenge of governance, as the composite governance structures in the member states and the different sectoral policies having different degrees of competences at EU level make the further conceptualisation and concretisation of territorial cohesion very complex and not necessarily coherent. ESPON provides useful data and tools to support sub-national authorities in identifying strengths and weaknesses of their own territorial development. To be operational, territorial cohesion does not only need this quantitative information. but first and foremost a sense of ownership by sub-national authorities.

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This is an Author Pre-print. 'The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Planning Theory & Practice*, published online January 26, 2015, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2014.991544

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2014.991544#.VNH2My6d9-4>

Sustainable urban development and the challenge of global nodes and spatial integration: Madrid-Barajas Airport and development on the periphery of the global city

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Can colossal global nodes such as international airports and office districts be spatially integrated into their surroundings and the city-region in a way that conforms to the sustainable development agenda? Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport and its surroundings in the north and east of the Madrid can be read as a space that provides a basing point within significant global networks, yet presents a challenge to the existing discourse on integration for sustainable urban development. This paper observes the spectacular transformation of Madrid's built environment in the early 2000s, and identifies limits to the practicability of sustainable development through spatial integration with regards to the planning of globally-oriented nodes on the urban periphery such as airports and massive corporate headquarters. The restructuring and repurposing of peripheral lands towards the project of competitive globalised urbanization have produced a well-connected built form on the edge of the city, and a rather unsustainable artefact of Madrid's status as a global city-region that spatial integration alone cannot reconcile.

Sustainable development and spatial integration

The subject of spatial integration has emerged recently as a key concept sustainable development, with various viewpoints as to its effectiveness (Stead & Meijers, 2009), with some being particularly critical (Cowen, 2010; Enright, 2013; Martin, 2013). International airports and other mega-structures such as the corporate headquarters built on the urban margin seem integral in connecting urban agglomerations to the world economy, yet there is little consensus over how these *connectivity machines* can be sustainably integrated into their surroundings. The mismatch in scales becomes especially apparent as the large-scale developments are juxtaposed to existing former villages (such as Barajas, in between central Madrid and its airport), producing new forms of externally-oriented and explicitly global, yet internally fragmented and undeniably local built forms. Although the continued rise in air traffic may be, to a certain extent 'inherently unsustainable' in terms of its ecological impact (Freestone, 2009, p. 171), with regards to social sustainability another challenge also remains: the social spatial integration of large-scale airport expansions, new business and corresponding residential developments with existing communities.

Ambitious investments in infrastructure, as in the airport system and similarly ambitious high-speed train networks and highway expansions – like those in Spain – represent a very strategic and confident '*worlding*' project (Roy & Ong, 2011). Transportation infrastructure – and major international airports especially – can be understood as a vital

component in a “tightly coupled system of [global] integration” (Martin, 2013, p. 1033). In the context of global city competition and mobility, the necessity that Madrid has a major airport with the capacity to grow alongside the globalizing city-region exemplifies such ‘new spatial logics’ (Cowen, 2010, p. 17) of globalised urbanization. The airport expansion driven by powerful national and public airport authorities and spatial planning authorities at the subordinate local and regional levels in Madrid, however, were clearly guided by proactive urban entrepreneurialism as seen across other competitive and globalizing Western European agglomerations (Brenner, 1998; Harvey, 1989). This was further reinforced by high levels of speculation, leading to an “explosion” of contemporary architecture (Cohn, 2011, p. 155), and an extremely uneven urban fringe, where new colossal, privileged nodes in wider economic flows – such as the Barajas’ new terminal and massive corporate headquarters on the periphery – stand in stark contrast to adjacent, older, once rural residential areas. The ‘*in-between city*’ explored in this paper reflects a major shift in urban-regional growth, as the importance of once centralised urban forms such as Central Business Districts (CBDs) and ports has been usurped by “a more pervasively sprawled metropolitan landscape entirely dedicated to providing the most efficient conduit for global capital” (Keil & Young, 2011, p. 7).

This paper problematises the notion of integration as a means of planning and implementing sustainable development by presenting a case study of an area fundamentally fragmented by an emphasis of economic rationales over social and other imperatives. The quandary of how to reconcile the complex scales and functions presents an unresolved paradox to normative visions of integration as an essential aspect of sustainable development (see Holden, 2012). Spatially integrating the airport and other global nodes into the urban fabric in a manner that counteracts dominant socially-polarizing and externally-oriented growth pressures often found in global city-regions and their ‘subordinate territories’ (Graham & Marvin, 2001) may be too tall an order.

The new shape of Madrid and its periphery

Since undergoing an intense period of growth and speculation since the 1990s and the ongoing financial crisis, Madrid’s built environment shows that what was once considered quintessentially urban has moved to the periphery at and around the airport – a process that began in the 1980s when Spain opened itself to outside markets. Meanwhile, as Spanish corporations such as Telefónica and Ferrovial dominated the infrastructure, financial services, and leisure sectors elsewhere in Europe and Latin America (Guillén & García-Canal, 2010, p. 18), the majority located their headquarters in Madrid, often to the north of the city center (Rodríguez López, 2007, p. 53). Madrid-Barajas Airport is now part of an archipelago of disparate purposes and spaces, some of which are very well connected to the airport and flows of influence, power and privilege, collectively functioning as the essential infrastructure of a global city and its ‘command and control’ functions (Sassen, 1991). Designed by Richard Rogers Partnership and built by Ferrovial, Terminal 4 was inaugurated in 2006, doubling the previous airport capacity of 35 million passengers per year, and transforming Madrid-Barajas Airport into Europe’s fifth busiest airport, carrying 49 million passengers in 2011 (Eurostat, 2012). At almost eleven kilometres long and six and half kilometres wide, Madrid-Barajas

Airport today spans an acreage larger than the entire central city (Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea (AENA), 2013). Critics of the airport extension see the megaproject as part and parcel of larger shifts in urban governance as development seems to privilege business interests and exacerbate social spatial imbalances in Madrid, such that much of this development is concentrated in the north and east of the city-region to the detriment of the deindustrialised south (Alguacil *et al.*, 2011, p. 126).

Madrid-Barajas and other 'global infrastructures of logistics and connection' are said to, in tandem, constitute a regional axis of 'new areas of specialization and privilege' that begins at the Paseo de la Castellana, extending further to the north and east along highway corridors (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2007, p. 678-679). Although large-scale developments such as Cuatro Torres Business Area, the Telefónica District and the extension of Madrid-Barajas Airport do have new metro connections, the challenge remains to functionally integrate these new global-local enclaves with the city-region's 'subordinate territories' and broader social fabric (see Graham & Marvin, 2001). Likewise, Telefónica's enormous new headquarters is also seen as part of the process where '*business has left the city*', creating an 'autonomous island' for corporations at the periphery, in the northern suburban municipality of Alcobendas (Isasi, 2006, p. 59-60). The expansion of the massive Madrid Trade Fair Institution (IFEMA) conference center complex, the extension of the regional highway network, the airport, the national high-speed train, and regional greater-metro commuter networks, have together produced 'segregated and monofunctional' use as the city positions itself in the world economy (Alguacil *et al.*, 2011, p. 132).

While the adjacent community from which Barajas takes its name, did receive its own subway station when the Metro was extended to the airport in 1999 (Centre for Innovation in Transport (CENIT), 2012, p. 3), newer suburban developments such as in Paracuellos del Jarama are consistent with the North American model of middle-class suburban sprawl, including low-density neighbourhoods and challenges for delivering adequate public transportation in such a car-oriented community. Built on a plateau overlooking Barajas, this residential area is, to a large extent, spatially disconnected from the city, connected only by regional bus lines and auto-oriented transportation planning. Traffic congestion is also remains a persistent problem between the Airport and the city center (CENIT, 2012, p. 22).

Selective integration consequently fragmenting, achieving sustainability only for awhile and for some

Co-produced by a complex variety of public and private actors at the local, regional, national and global scales, the airport and recent development in the area can be understood to collectively constitute both a node, a basing point, and a re-purposing of peripheral land at the expense of territorial integration. The expansion of Madrid-Barajas Airport can be seen as an example of the 'cementing of the power of the new metropolis as an engine of the national economy and as a site of global prestige' (Enright, 2012, p. 798), whereby a certain sustainability of flows is achieved by aligning certain interests, financial means and spatial prerogatives. The juxtaposition of these global nodes with the surrounding urban fabric – older residential neighbourhoods and new low-density suburban developments in the shadow of

these new iconic global nodes – presents as significant challenge to planners who will need to reconcile the global city-region's globally-oriented infrastructure and existing fragmentations with the needs of tomorrow.

In planning circles, integration has arisen as the magic remedy for fragmentation, and that the proper balance of sectors and interests can achieve sustainable development. Yet, as part of a greater project of repositioning Madrid within a network of global cities, the fragmented and uneven urban growth around the Airport is beyond the scope of the existing discourse on sustainable urban development through integrative spatial planning. The quandary of how to reconcile the complex scales, functions and intentions of places such as the one described in this paper presents an unresolved paradox to normative visions of integration as an essential aspect of sustainable development. Given the already spatially and institutionally fragmented space described here, there is reason to be sceptical that the existing discourses on integrative spatial planning have the potential to resolve the unsustainable tendencies of such globally-oriented urban-regional planning and governance as described above. In fact, vague goals of sustainable urban development through integrative planning strategies such as transportation infrastructure expansion have been shown to produce and spatially reinforce the polarizing tendencies of globalised urbanization.

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Distorted density: Where the views of developers and NGOs on sustainable urban development intersect

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This paper introduces the general observation of 'distorted density' as a recurring problematic in the discourse of sustainability planning. I refer, firstly, to the notion of density that surfaces again and again in sustainability discourses, as a means of providing sustainable land use, maximizing efficient mobility, and enhancing neighbourly interaction. While these may be enticing arguments, there are certain pitfalls and shortcomings of density that are well described in the literature. Secondly, and this is my claim here, there is a mutually co-dependent relationship between land use profit maximization, insider actor relations, and NGOs pushing for density. This will be exemplified in the case of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. As the government's policies for spatial sustainability are largely focusing on concentration and density, they trigger huge economies of scale-profit for the real-estate community. Meanwhile, the country's pressing scarcity of land and housing, which is a by-product of its unprecedented levels of growth and wealth achieved over a few decades only, remains unchanged. As a consequence, i) social inequalities are intensified, ii) middle-class families are forced to seek property at even more remote locales, and iii) the environmental burden of land consumption moves from suburban fringes toward exurbs. Altogether, this drives current urban transformation into non-sustainable directions. The associated 'political economy of density' contradicts place-based urban sustainability policies. This calls for a re-thinking of density and, further, for fostering institutional reforms.

The roots of the density discourse

Density, which can be defined as the measurement of population or buildings related to a given spatial unit, is probably one of the most important organizing principles of urban development. Urbanization is based on the concentration of people, buildings, economic activities, and social gatherings, and these are increasingly effective in dense association of space and time. More recently, density has also become a powerful 'organizing metaphor' for urban design, planning, and policy. In this regard, it is notable that the definition and use of this term has changed significantly, since it first appeared in the social sciences, geography and population studies literatures more than a century ago.⁽¹⁾ The rather critical assessments that were made concerning density during the peak of industrialization – i.e. regarding detrimental living conditions in heavily industrialised towns – have been shifting towards a positive perception of density more recently. By the end of the 1960s, urban design discourses discovered the benefits provided by population and building densities, often linking concentration and compactness of the urban fabric to urbanity, that is, the quality of life and the amenities offered by a city. While never proven as part of a causal relationship in certain detail, density was considered to be a precondition for urbanity. These changes are an outcome of both common perceptions of the nature of urban problems, and the outcome of certain ideologies: The shifting discourse between urban development guidelines comprised of two extremes: one in favour of a decentralised urban development, the other seeking density by building high-rises or multi-story buildings and concentrating people. Concrete measurement, however, was depending heavily on the taxonomy applied and the chosen scales (parcel, neighbourhood, district; see Boyko et al., 2011, 6ff.).

More recent treatises of sustainable development and new urbanism have re-emphasised the

significance of density (Alexander & Tomalty, 2002). Altogether with compactness and mixed-use, density seems to be essential for making a city sustainable. It combines issues as diverse (and conflicting) as relative environmental compatibility, social stability and distributive justice, economic vitality, publicity, and civility. Correspondingly, spatial ordering principles such as central-place hierarchy and a balanced system of built environment and open spaces have become key ingredients of regional sustainable development planning. Thus, the dense, compact city and region has become a template for sustainability, a model that remains prevalent in today's green districts and cities.

Conceptualizing density in sustainability contexts: pitfalls and shortcomings

However, increasing doubts have arisen in recent years about the validity of this claim in programmatic and planning theory discourses (see the extensive reports in Boyko et al., 2011; Dempsey et al., 2012; Quastel et al., 2012; and most recently, Holman et al., 2014). On the one hand, such doubts refer to the actually existing processes of sub- and peri-urbanization – bringing about distinct areas in city and region where the traditional model of the dense, compact city may not necessarily suit. Also, the degree of density in urban, suburban and even more remote areas varies significantly. On the other hand, it remains undecided as to how compactness in general and density in particular can be implemented such that they fit with broader planning goals and related expectations.⁽²⁾ The political economy of land use works against a complex background of structure and agency, driven mainly by market behaviour and political regulation, and pre-determined by the historically specific trajectories of urban development. These settings and conditions are hard to steer, in order to achieve a calculated, causal impact evolving from the metaphysics of population distribution and measurement – an issue that is astonishingly ignored by the advocates of density planning.

In addition to these limits to implementation and impact, there are also some contradictions that need consideration in claiming for density. This has come out of recent research on climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this debate, dense and compact settlements are usually considered helpful in reducing energy consumption and air pollution; however, this is not only difficult to ensure, but also leads to problems in other respects – namely, that dense and compact urban design patterns contributed to heat effects that can cause major health problems (see the related debate in Schindler & Caruso, 2014). This is already the case under today's weather conditions in large urban areas, and it may become even more common in the future, given the rising average temperatures caused by climate change.

The marriage of density-rhetoric and profit: Luxembourg's land markets

Proponents of density are quite visible in the case of Luxembourg, where official planning schemes and policies are based on the guidelines of i) decentralised concentration at the regional scale, and ii) on high building densities at local scale. The specific setting turns out to be rather important. Luxembourg is a global financial capital and hosts major European institutions, yet is only a minor metropolis (about 100,000 inhabitants in 2013). The city is a magnet for a far-reaching international labour market and has experienced an extraordinary growth path over the last two decades, achieving one of the highest GDP-rates per capita worldwide. Regarding the geographical outcomes of its economic trajectory, Luxembourg may be best described as a relational or 'entrepôt'-city of the 21st century, as Sigler (2013) has put it. One consequence of this development trajectory is an extremely distorted real-estate market, with rents and house prices being - on average - twice as high as they are in the neighbouring countries of Belgium, France and Germany.

In response to this situation, state, municipalities and developers tend to focus on building at high-densities, legitimised by the guideline of decentralised concentration across the city-region. These policy trajectories materialise in large-scale urban projects that house the service industries that brought growth and wealth to the country. They are massive in size and hard to integrate into the urban tissue of the small state and the built environment of the rather small towns. The blueprint development was the new office town of 360 hectares created on the plateau Kirchberg in the capital city that was started in the early 1960s. Its most recent version is the 120 hectares research campus and shopping mall, in

Belval, with about one million square metres office space under construction. The latter is considered in policy circles to be sustainable, primarily because of density in its urban layout.

Institutional fragmentation makes the issue even more contentious and contradictory. Further growth and development remains a priority of most mayors, and the municipalities are most important here because they are responsible for making land-use decisions. Growth is also actively managed by the state, sometimes respecting its own planning rules, sometimes not. In opposition to the state's enduring politics of growth, environmental NGOs, most notably the *Mouvement écologique/MECO*, blame the state and municipalities for allowing 'urban sprawl' to develop (MECO, 2014). This is not only a somehow strange statement given the particular dimensions of decentralization in the country, which are far from any serious comparison with situations elsewhere e.g. in North America, where this term is rooted. This critique also lacks sensitivity of the social dimension of sustainability, particularly access to property and housing which is limited for many. Moreover, it is ironic to see that these two distinct milieux, real-estate corporations on the one hand, and environmental NGOs on the other, are apparently standing in strong opposition to each other – yet they jointly promote a means of density oriented development that has its pitfalls and shortcomings.

Those actors who benefit most from density as it is practiced are land owners and real-estate developers, whose profit margins explode with every additional story they can build. Today, almost all the developable land that is no longer owned by public entities or Luxembourgian families is in the hands of developers. All parties have been involved in, and driven, a great deal of speculation. This institutional setting is mediating or, in a manner of speaking, *cultivating* scarcity; that is, dealing with land and property is following a routinised, distanced attitude – it is being emphasised in some ways, yet without getting too explicit and too critical of the land owners position, and it will thus not solve the problem of housing shortage and unequal access to property. Consequently, for many people it remains almost impossible to i) acquire affordable property, and ii) to realise a project without a developer (who, by contractual agreements, most often also control the construction firms).

As a result of these framework conditions and associated political processes, the scarcity of land and housing intensifies social inequalities. Access to property is only possible for the very wealthy or for those who inherit land. Even middle-class families with two job-holders are forced to seek property at more remote locales, i.e. beyond the borders in Belgium, France, or Germany. Altogether, with expanded individual activity spaces (given the rising distances between homes and jobs), and a growing amount of commuter traffic, the environmental burden of land consumption no longer occurs in Luxembourg-City, but is moving from the suburban fringes toward exurbs or rural areas. The associated 'political economy of density' indeed represents a conflict between different dimensions of sustainable development, particularly in respect to the environmental pillar (protecting land) and the social pillar (providing access to housing). This is already known from other cases, where containment contributes, at best, to density and compactness locally, yet at the expense of growth in sub- and ex-urban locales (see Alexander & Tomalty, 2002).

In Luxembourg, the two distinct positions – the real estate community claiming density for profit reasons, and environmental NGOs making the case of density for sustainability – are only apparently contradictory. They are articulated by different groups, represent distinct interests, and are probably based on competing ideological positions. They have in common, however, that they reinforce the current situation, by calling for density, delimiting the urban perimeter, and thereby effectively keeping the housing stock restricted. One does it for the sake of the environment, the other seeks to control supply and, thus, profit. This, in turn, reinforces the housing crisis, and renders complaints about housing shortage rather (or conveniently) rhetoric.

What is the role of density? As an organizing principle, it can no longer be used, given the difficulties and contradictions as described above, as it reveals to be an organizing metaphor that permits certain actors to position themselves. It seems, thus, an empty signifier, rather than a useful concept. If the housing problem should be really solved, even NGOs would have to open up their thinking to alternatives. Lower densities would indeed transform or 'consume' open space and, thus, receive critical

appraisal from NGOs. The same likely applies to the real-estate community, although for different reasons. However, what seems much more urgent than insisting on abstract policies of density is substantial institutional reform, including a halt to speculation, a price freeze and the like, making owner-occupier housing projects or building co-operatives possible that would bring more people to property. Related strategies of lower-density building would also provide more adaptable urban designs that fit better into the small-scale setting of the country. This would allow place-based urban sustainability policies to emerge, instead of squeezing middle and lower classes out of the country and primarily serving commercial interests.

Conclusion: Density as a constructed entity

Density represents a regularly asserted tool useful or necessary towards implementing sustainable development. There are, however, serious doubts as to whether this promise can be delivered. Density appears as a simple measure that deals with rather complex processes, and its limitations are evident. Sometimes density is even more contradictory, as the struggle between the *have's* and the *have not's* in the case of Luxembourg reveals, where density receives support from quite different points of view, yet is mainly effective in preserving the status quo. This confirms critical readings of density as an abstract, superficial benchmark, and an outcome of a social engineering view of the world, rather than something that pays justice to the complexities of contemporary urbanization. Insofar this critical view is in line with recent attempts to understand density as a product of discourse (Holman et al. 2014).

It is also ironic to see that, at a time when density is about to experience another round of revival among planning *practitioners*, the historical lines of *research* on density have been almost entirely fading out, due to its epistemological limitations (Roskamm, 2011b, p. 81). It appears as if the claim for density in urban regards gets increasingly less powerful and convincing, the more it is being considered a generic tool and means for development. A closer look at the various contradictions underlying density discourses also reveals its shadow sides, particularly as illustrated in the case here, where the pressure for profit gets married with the call for more environmentally friendly building policies.

Notes

- 1) Early ideas on density in urban and societal contexts were framed by sociologists Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel, and by geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel and Alfred Hettner. Density was also key to rather naturalistic argumentations of national economy and population geography, not to forget the 'Volk-ohne-Raum' rhetoric ('*people without territory*') of Nazi-Germany; see Roskamm's (2011a, b) very instrumental historical treatise on density as a policy means and also as a socially constructed entity.
- 2) For a dense, compact overview of the vast literature on this issue, see e.g. Boyko & Cooper (2011), Dempsey et al. (2012), Gordon (2008) or Echenique et al. (2012). The latter publication triggered a debate among the readership – mostly planning officials – who were questioning the validity of the authors' findings. For me, this dispute perfectly illustrates the normative if not ideological nature of density in such contexts.

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This is an Author Pre-print. 'The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Planning Theory & Practice*, published online January 26, 2015, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2014.991544

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2014.991544#.VNH2My6d9-4>

Overcoming Politics with Markets? The co-production of sustainable development in urban and regional planning

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Introduction

Scholars and practitioners of regional development and planning alike have witnessed significant changes to the relationship between economic development, environmental concerns, and social equity over the past two decades (c.f. Beatley, 1999). Indeed, concepts of sustainability have become firmly ensconced in regional development discourses in the USA and UK since the mid-1990s (Haughton & Morgan, 2008). The portmanteau concept "eco-regions", for example, has brought together two concerns that 25 years ago, as a matter of practice, would have seemed enigmatic (Gibbs, 1996). For developers in the 1980s environmentalists were obstructionist; they were tree-huggers who prevented capital from realizing the potential of their investments. In contrast, environmentalists viewed developers as greedy who were hell-bent on destroying the intrinsic value, the integrity and beauty, of biotic communities. Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, local and regional development and planning agencies, couched in the rhetoric of environmentalism and embedded in the logic of economic reform, have annihilated the schism between these once disparate interests and established common ground between them. Yet, how have they done so?

New policy approaches with names like compact urban development, smart growth, and new urbanism, have emerged since the mid-1990s that capitalised on concerns of both groups. In the United States, for example, smart growth, which emerged in Maryland, used market-based reforms to provide incentives for developers to ply their trade within the boundaries of the city, rather than on the urban-rural fringe (c.f., Krueger & Gibbs, 2008). Developers were content because their transaction costs declined and properties in the derelict inner cities were cheaper and easier to acquire than suburban agricultural and riparian lands. Moreover, environmentalists were assuaged because urban regeneration shifted development from increasingly scarce and ecologically significant lands to the built environment (Flint, 2008).

These reforms and transitions did not stop here, however. Indeed, architects of these policies introduced market principles, the source of vitriolic debates two decades previously in economy-environment relations, to mediate the tensions associated with development. While environmentally progressive, these reforms crossed other political boundaries too. Because they were founded on principles of the free market, they found support from both liberals and conservatives. In his recent book, the economic historian Philip Morowski (2013) notes that the market economy, and therefore market-based approaches, became so pervasive during this time that any countervailing evidence served to convince its followers of its own truth.

This essay all too briefly explores the concept of market-based sustainability through the concept, or idiom, of coproduction from the Science and Technology Studies (STS) literature.

The “Co-Production of Sustainable Development Policy, Planning, and Practice

The Mirowski point above suggests that it has become unfathomable in this day and age to question market mechanisms—in some circles, at least. Why? Because, the market became a technology, a technical system, through which all value could be mediated. By extension, technologies are often viewed with the status of political “neutrality” and scientific “objectivity”; they are promoted as practical and technical baseline requirements for the global economy. Furthermore, understanding markets and market mechanisms in this way, where the production of knowledge as separate from the politics, ensures the objective application of this knowledge to policy. Here, knowledge is often thought of as neutral, even objective. Not surprisingly, such approaches emphasise ‘getting the knowledge right’ and then advocating for increased efficiency in the uptake of this knowledge into policy.

Coproduction, which is a central concept of the Science Technology Studies literature, suggests that there is an intimate link between knowledge production and characteristics of social order (c.f. Jasanoff, 2013). Such characteristics include values, beliefs, and norms, but also related power structures and interests. The coproductionist idiom enables us to understand policy practices and goals, and the knowledge that supports them, “as neither a simple reflection of the truth about nature nor an epiphenomenon of social and political interests” (Jasanoff, 2004, p. 3), but as an artifact of the interactions between them. The rest of this paper explores these interactions, albeit all too briefly.

Co-producing the New Economy and ‘Sustainability’ Planning

Throughout the 2000s the region established itself as the new economic engine for global capitalism. National economic growth and regional economic competitiveness became synonymous (c.f. Hesse, 2013). Yet, innovative and productive city-regions such as, Shanghai, the South East of England, and the San Francisco Bay Area, Luxembourg City, Luxembourg became successful, saw their growth potential wane as extra-economic conditions appeared and raised concerns about the competitiveness of some regions. These concerns included a diminishing quality of life, the lack of affordable housing, and the loss of environmental amenities. These concerns emerged against the backdrop of planning regimes that were considered anathema to market principles and a related decreasing appetite for the state in directly regulating land use.

There were also institutional and physical constraints to growth. In the UK, for example, the planning system was considered to be archaic, and not responsive to the current market. Finally, land scarcity was increasing initial investment costs. Alongside this, environmentalists were driving up transaction costs through legal proceedings, which also served to increase the uncertainty surrounding some developments coming to fruition.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s regional planning policy evolved as the state diminished its role as regulator and underwriter of the public good, to one actor among many in a policy process defined by broad contours rather than specific requirements. Perhaps surprisingly, during this time environmental concerns, especially in terms of amenity and quality of life, had a higher profile than any other time in history. While we can applaud the increased interest in environmental concerns, one must ask how robust such concerns are given that these arrangements are defined by the market. This requires a new way of framing relationships; one that extends beyond formal institutions, formal rules, and formal decision makers. Indeed, new relationships between all stakeholders have evolved through this regulatory restructuring of the environment and regional development.

The Coproduction of Market-Based Sustainability

Compact urban development and smart growth redirected investment toward inner cities, which had been ignored for a generation, encouraged population density, and mixed-use developments that would encourage walkable communities and put people nearer to their jobs. This new synthesis, while orchestrated by the state, did not include a new state-centric regulatory structure. Rather, while the state established public goals, it sought to utilise a privatised delivery system. Sure, local government would ensure that schools could accommodate additional pupils and adequate sewerage infrastructure.

However, there were no “hard” targets for, say, affordability, only suggested ones. Moreover, such developments were in no way required, but only encouraged through incentives. The idea was to attract developers to fill a gap left by the market. In the UK, in some cases, the role of the local authority was reduced to one actor among many involved in the development process, as central government encouraged a new culture of planning ‘guidance’ and ‘collaboration’. In both cases, these reforms resulted in what some have called ‘soft policy making’ whereby no clear policy direction exists *a priori* but it is codified through actors working in specific contexts. Section 106 agreements in the UK are one example of this.

Scholars of political economy have long been concerned about power relations among economic actors. The promise of market-based approaches to governance is that it creates an inclusive and equitable political milieu. Organizations with interests in land use development have certainly proliferated in the US and UK and had their voices heard. In Massachusetts, USA, for example, no fewer than a dozen groups avail themselves to combating urban sprawl inside Boston’s beltway. Moreover, they come together not to promote or debate policy but to promote their “reading” of the problems associated with contemporary regional development. The focus is not on new policy *per se* but the coproduction of issues; it’s a battle over framing these dilemmas. Thus, returning to the Massachusetts case, the debate focuses on regional quality of life and housing affordability. However, affordability does not count for those who need it most—those on entitlement and chronically unemployed—but those workers who work in the region’s signature sectors, such as biotech, life sciences, and data storage. Quality of life was defined by kilometers of bike paths, hiking trails, and trendy mixed use developments. These new relations have enabled some strange bedfellows, to be sure. Who would have thought that a Republican governor from Massachusetts could be a champion for urban and regional sustainability and align his policy initiatives with the Audubon Society, and other environmental groups?

For the seasoned observer of capitalism and its capacity for creative destruction, maybe this is not such a surprise. After all, the US, after six years, is just starting to shake off the mortgage crisis that thirty years ago could have never been imagined. The ability of elites to include environmental concerns into the environmental calculus was, perhaps, a matter of time. The seasoned observer also knows that capitalist accumulation comes at a cost to someone or something. Today, the coproduction of this new planning for “sustainability” paradigm has come at a cost. This cost is not spread to some obscure animal species. The cost, rather, is borne by human beings.

Conclusion: Coproducing Sustainability, Economy, and Market Actors

‘Sustainable’ urban and regional development has come at the expense of people and groups who are already alienated from the accumulation process. The market has enabled new actors, new framings of the land use development discourse to emerge and gain traction. It has done so, however, through a process of environmental gentrification or another form of environmental injustice (Curran & Hamilton, 2012). It’s sustainability for some, those who can afford it. For others it means a poorer quality home, less insulation, lead paint, a longer commute—and increased costs, and more time away from family. Indeed, over the past 20 years we have witnessed the impossible: the environment as a factor of production that is valuable enough for developers to recognise its value.

The past two decades of regional development clearly illustrates the creative power of capitalism. On one hand, it shows how once disparate interests can align in unpredictable ways. Yet, it also undoubtedly shows, that no matter much many third wave, big society, and caring capitalists would have us believe, there is no free lunch. Someone or something will not have standing in the debate; they will be silenced; they will lose. This fact underscores the need for deliberative and democratic policy making with the force of a powerful state to support the needs of a region. Market forces alone do not have efficacy to bring about outcomes that align with the principles of sustainable development, where social equity, environmental integrity, and economic prosperity comingle.

The concept of coproduction provides a way of framing this milieu, to understand the dynamic interactions, and how praying to the false gods of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' bring emancipation for some while obscuring the alienation of others. Technologies, whether it's your *Nespresso*, or a market based approach to planning, are designed to make life simpler. With your *Nespresso* your life is simplified because you must order capsules of coffee designed for your machine. No more grinding, difficult choices at the market, and a simple calculation of per unit cost. Because you trust Nestlé, you know that each capsule will fall within a range of acceptable quality. Simple. If only all economic transactions were so simple—and yes I am simplifying here to make a point. The key is, perhaps, to simplify life and without dumbing down life's inherent complexity. Today, however, the coproduction of economic and social life has become so intertwined we have confused what it means to be a citizen versus a consumer.

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