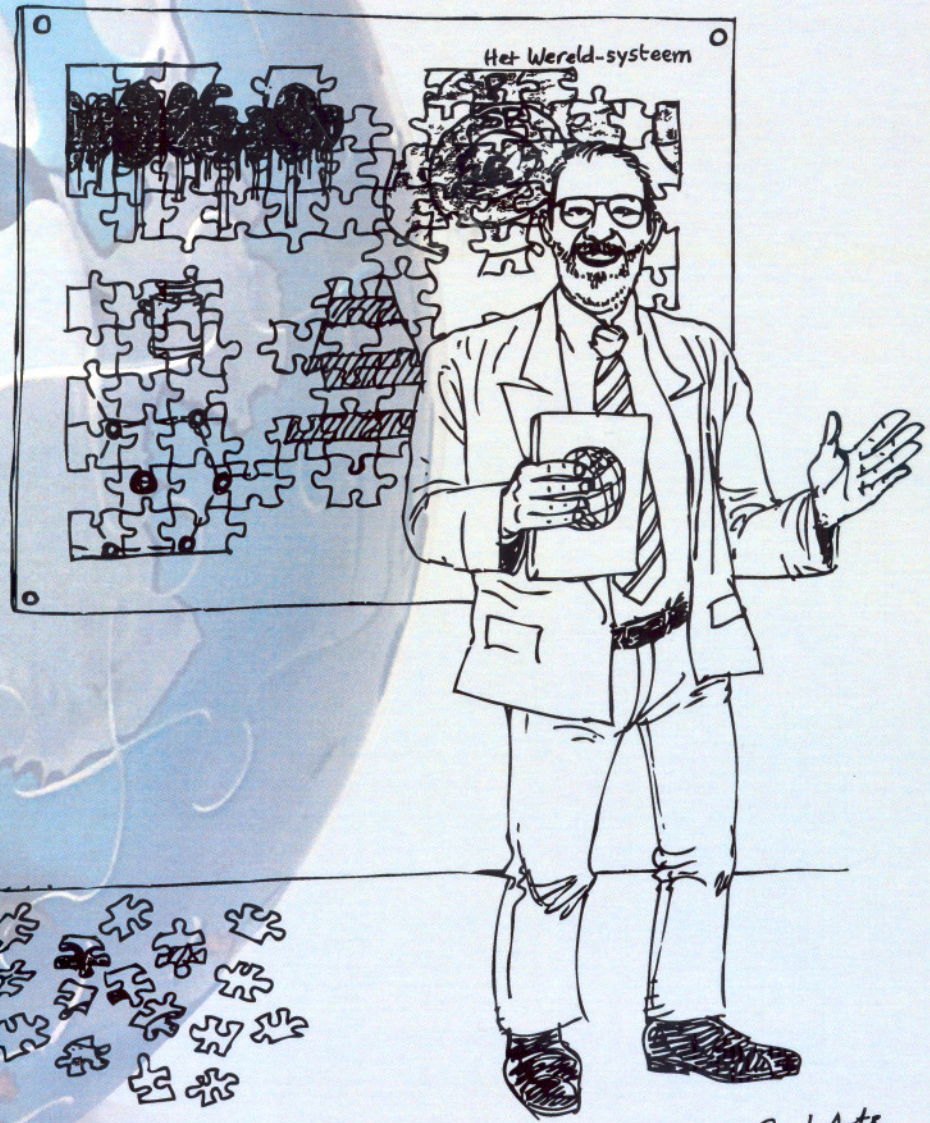


Van Christaller tot Wallerstein

Liber Amicorum Prof. Dr. Pieter Saey



Paul Arts
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POLYCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ESPON-STUDY REPORTS

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Abstract

The European Community financed, through the Interreg-programme and the ESPON 2006-2007 programme¹, study reports on different issues and themes on spatial development in Europe (urban and rural).

One of the projects aims to look at potentials for polycentric development in Europe. Under the umbrella of ESPON, project partners have elaborated a scientific report (nr. 1.1.1) on polycentrism and polycentric development². No Belgian research institute or centre has been selected as project partner, although Belgium (as partner in ESPON) is represented in the ESPON Monitoring Committee³ and although Belgium has a scientific reputation concerning scientific research in the field of urban and regional geography and regional planning⁴.

¹ The partnership behind the ESPON-programme consists of the EU-Commission and the Member States of the EU25, plus Norway and Switzerland. Each partner is represented in the ESPON Monitoring Committee. Information can be found on www.espon.lu.

² Overview of the 14 project partners of ESPON 1.1.1. Potentials for polycentric development in Europe:

- Nordic Centre for Spatial Development (Nordregio), Stockholm
- Danish Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning, Copenhagen (Lead Partner)
- OTB – Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies, Delft University of Technology
- CNRS-UMR Géographie-cités, Paris
- Centre for Urban Development and Environmental Management, CUDEM, Leeds Metropolitan University
- Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning, OIR, Vienna
- Spiekermann & Wegener, S&W, Dortmund
- Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio, Politecnico e Università di Torino, Turin
- Quarternaire, Porto
- Department of Urban and Regional Planning, National Technical University, Athens
- Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, NIBR, Oslo
- Institute for territorial development and Landscape, IRL, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich
- Hungarian Institute for Regional and Urban Development & Planning, VATI, Budapest

Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, UPIRS, Ljubljana.

³ The Belgium contact point of the ESPON-programme is located in Leuven – Afdeling Sociale en Economische Geografie.

⁴ I think here especially on the issues of the scientific approach of the functional urban regions, the city regions, the network approaches of Christaller, Lösch, a.o.

A good reference and overview is found in the special report made under the sponsoring of the Gemeentekrediet van België (1985, nr. 154: De Belgische Stad van vandaag: waarheen?).

Especially I also would like to refer to my colleague Pieter Saey who has been elaborated many scientific-critical articles on the urban network system approaches, mostly in a theoretical framework.

Our reflection starts with an overview of the ESPON-report from 2004 (revised version, March 2005). We go also into questions, definitions and methodology and look to some applications. At the end we try to give some recommendations for further research.

1. The scientific report 'Potentials for polycentric development in Europe' (2004/2005)

The ESPON-report (1.1.1.) is oriented to the concept of poly-centricity (origin, meaning and questions for research) and the application in national policies.

Within the concept of poly-centricity, various issues are studied, at different scales. Scales are sometimes mixed up and so are the concepts. The problem of the scale at which poly-centricity is studied needs to be clarified.

In the report poly-centricity is promoted as a continuum while the structuring role of cities is perceptible at two scales: on one hand, the framing purposes of territories as providers of people services (the more execution of production activities from a Christallerian angle); on the other hand, the issue of insertion points in the globalized economy

2. The concept of poly-centricity: origin, meaning and questions for research⁵

Encouraged by the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), poly-centricity is now developing as a key concept in policies for spatial planning in Europe.

Poly-centricity is primarily about the creation of synergies from local assets through cooperation between cities and city regions. The idea of poly-centricity relates to other political ideas such as balanced regional development (cohesion), taking local assets and endowments as the point of departure for regional development and economic growth (competitiveness) and widening the ownership of political decisions (governance).

The term poly-centricity is a novelty in European discussion. Although it makes sense to associate the emergence of the concept with the agreement over the ESDP (1999), the polycentric approach was first introduced in 1993 (at the moment of the main principles of the ESDP were discussed – the Leipzig principles).

Going even further back, the earliest expression of poly-centricity 'avant la lettre' is probably that of the French concept of 'métropoles' d'équilibre' (of the early 1960s) which was part of a policy-approach aiming at economic 'équilibre' at the national level. This approach had to do with the political context of the economic dominance of the French capital. The 'métropoles d'équilibres' were all located at the outer edges of the French hexagon. The agency DATAR (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale) was established in 1963 to initiate this new French policy. During the 1970s the policy of counterweight metropolitan areas was replaced by a policy putting the emphasis on medium sized cities and rural areas. An EU-type polycentric concept, laying the emphasis on the larger

⁵ Based on the electronic final report of ESPON 1.1.1. (2004/2005).

French cities however again rose to prominence in the course of the 1980s in the wake of the European debate on the ESDP.

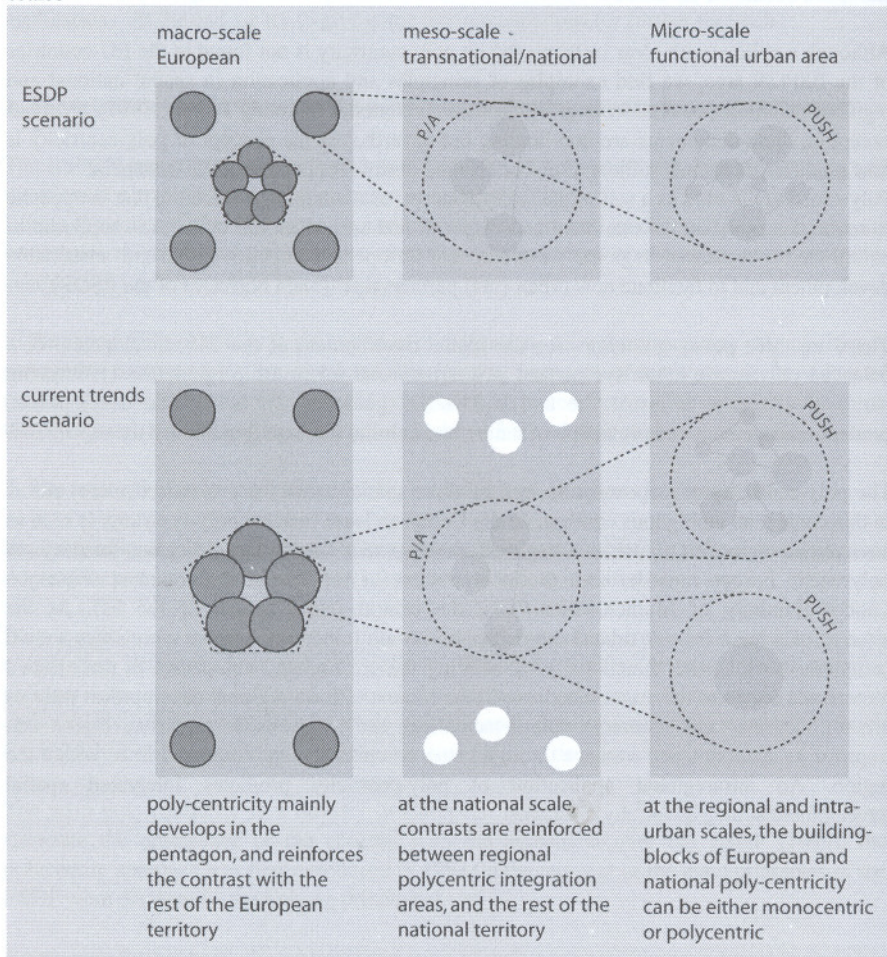
Although a policy (with clear instruments) on poly-centricity is not found in the EU-countries of the ESPON area, we find examples of principles and application in spatial national and regional planning documents. (e.g. in the Danish National Planning Report, 1997). Without exception these documents are non-binding but nevertheless the concept of poly-centricity is now on different agenda subject of discussion and discourses in several EU-countries.

Poly-centricity is used as a self-explanatory concept, characterising something that is opposite to mono-centricity on the one hand and dispersal and sprawl on the other. It is supposed to contribute 'to balanced regional development, European competitiveness and sustainable development and to facilitate new urban-rural partnerships' (main objective of the ESDP).

There are three policy guidelines for the spatial development of the EU: development of a balanced polycentric urban system and new urban-rural relationship (guideline 1); securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge (guideline 2); sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage (guideline 3).

The poly-centricity-concept must be seen on three spatial levels (macro, meso, micro) and is in this context an ambiguous concept. At the European level (macro) poly-centricity is seen as an alternative model to enhance regional development across the European territory. A polycentric Europe must be seen as the alternative of the European dominated 'Pentagon London-Hamburg of Munich-Milan-Paris, the central (core) region of the EU. At the interregional level (meso), urban complementarities are important. Two or more cities should complement each other functionally by offering the citizens and companies in their joined hinterlands access to the urban functions. In the context of intra-regional development (micro) urban functional and economic complementarities are emphasised. An urban region can improve its economic performance through better co-operation and improved links within the region. An intraregional application of poly-centricity promotes integrated spatial development strategies for city clusters.

Figure 1: The 3 spatial levels in Europe and the link toward poly-centricity seen at scenario scales



Poly-centricity has two complementary aspect-approaches. The first relates to morphology, it is the distribution of urban areas in a given territory (number of cities, hierarchy and distribution). The second concerns the relations between urban areas, namely the network of flows and co-operation. These flows are generally related to proximity, though networks can also be independent of distance.

Let us have a look to the two complementary approaches: morphology and interactions/relations.

3. The morphological approach of the urban system in Europe

The building blocks of poly-centricity are the functional urban areas (FUA's). A FUA consists of an urban core and the area around it that is economically integrated with the centre. In countries that have definition of travel-to-work areas, commuter catchments areas, urban poles, local labour market,... These criteria are used for the identification of FUA's. In countries lacking official definitions, the identification of FUA's was based on insights provided by national experts.

The use of national definitions means that the choice of FUA's is not totally comparable across Europe. In the ESPON-report a FUA is defined as having an urban core of at least 15,000 inhabitants and over 50,000 in total population (for EU-countries with more than 10 million inhabitants). For smaller countries, a FUA has been defined as an urban core of at least 15,000 inhabitants and more than 0,5% of the national population, as well as having functions of national or regional importance.

A total of 1,595 FUA's (all areas with more than 20,000 inhabitants) have been identified in EU27+2 with at the top three London, Paris, Madrid (all 3 more than 5 million inhabitants) and 44 FUA's with more than 1 million inhabitants).

Most of the European countries have a national definition for Functional Urban Area existence of such areas is an important prerequisite for an analysis of polycentric trends; indeed, statistics based on morphological boundaries or administrative boundaries will in most cases not reflect the actual role played by a city. However, different definitions of FUA's can create a bias in a comparative European analysis.

By establishing a European map of national FUA areas, ESPON 1.1.1. seeks to illustrate these different national approaches. Furthermore, these delimitations allow for an analysis of the internal structures of FUA's across Europe. Internal structure partly explains the way in which the FUA relates to other cities in the national and European urban system. Delimitations of FUA's across Europe contributes to making an analysis of the interplay between the regional and European scales of polycentrism possible. It is therefore an important contribution to the analysis of cities, both as nodes in a European polycentrism, and as spatial contexts for regional and local polycentrism.

Finally, as statistics seldom exist for FUA's as such, identifying which municipalities the FUA composed of is helpful when gathering data (e.g. identifying the infrastructure present of significant company headquarters in each FUA).

This preliminary methodological discussion deals with the cases of France and the northern Countries, for which information on the NUTS 5 (region) composition of each FUA has been readily available. As shown below, these cases illustrate some of the difficulties that can be encountered when gathering and comparing different kinds of FUA's.

Definitions of areas based on commuting patterns vary greatly from country to country, and are more or less based on predetermined statistical criteria:

- In France, the FUA is an area attracted by an Urban Pole, i.e. a group of municipalities with over 5000 jobs. Municipalities are considered to be attracted to the urban pole if over 40% of the active and employed resident population work there or in any other municipality attracted by it.
- In Sweden and Finland, the FUA is an area attracted to a labour market centre. A municipality is considered a labour market centre if less than 20% of its resident employed population commutes to areas out of the municipality, and if no other municipality attracts more than 7,5% of this resident employed population. All municipalities that do not satisfy these criteria belong to the FUA of the labour market centre to which the greatest number of resident employees commute. If a municipality sends the greatest number of employees to another non-labour market centre, which itself sends the greatest number of employees to a labour market centre (chain migration), all these municipalities belong to the FUA of the labour market centre.
- In Norway, more qualitative criteria have been used, even if the delimitation is in general based on travel times and commuting patterns. A first group of labour market areas is composed of municipalities within 30 minutes travel time of an urban core area, as well as those within a 75-minute travel time distance, which send at least 10% of their resident employed population to the core urban area. Other municipalities with little out-migration constitute the second group, and these municipalities are then grouped into one entity if the travel time from one to the other is less than 30 minutes. While the first group corresponds to the general approach of FUA's, the latter should rather be envisaged as non-attracted areas. This is also the case for the municipalities that are not grouped to any other in this classification, unless their internal labour market is considered to be of significant importance.
- In Denmark, a Commuting area (CA) is an area in which the number of people living and working is more than twice as large as the number of daily commuters (in- and outgoing commuters) to and from the area.

This review shows that each definition should be analysed carefully, and may perhaps be improved if one can gain access to the original data used for delimitation. Indeed, when statistics on migration from municipality to municipality exist, these can be of great help in homogenising different national approaches.

A second major parameter is the size of municipalities. The limited size of French municipalities allows for a precise distinction between the Urban Areas and the rest of the territory, although municipalities in Finland, Norway and Sweden create erratic delimitations of FUA's. In inner and northern parts of these countries, one finds FUA's with an extensive spatial delimitation; despite the fact that all of their population is concentrated in a single urban centre. This leads to functional urban areas with population densities below 10 inh/km². Delimitations could, in such extreme cases be revised, in order to correspond better to demographic and economic spatial structures.

4. How polycentric or mono-centric are the European countries?

In the ESPON-study project the degree of poly-centricity is embedded in the territorial level 'country'. With the FUA's as building blocks, ESPON analysed the national urban systems on the basis of the three dimensions of poly-centricity: size, location and connectivity of a functional urban area. These three dimensions are in line with the distinction between the

morphological aspects of poly-centricity (hierarchy, distribution, number of cities) and the relational aspects (flows and co-operation between urban areas at different scales). Size and location are morphological aspects, whereas connectivity describes relational aspects. The three dimensions are measured in the ESPON-study by indices. For details of measuring, weights for the three indices, threshold values, aggregations, score-evaluations it is important to have a look to the final report. The result of the calculations is given in table 1 with the overview for each country of the three indices and the comprehensive index of poly-centricity⁶.

Table 1: Component Indices and Poly-centricity Index of Countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>No. of FUAs</i>	<i>Size Index</i>	<i>Location Index</i>	<i>Connectivity Index</i>	<i>Poly-centricity Index</i>
Austria	24	63.3	39.3	77.1	57.4
Belgium	21	86.6	60.5	67.1	70.3
Bulgaria	31	77.1	80.2	52.6	68.5
Switzerland	48	82.9	57.9	62.3	66.6
Cyprus	4	75.7	100.0	89.1	87.3
Czech Republic	25	79.2	51.7	63.5	63.6
Germany	186	86.4	56.1	75.2	71.2
Denmark	35	71.6	90.9	59.3	72.5
Estonia	10	64.7	94.8	26.4	54.3
Spain	105	81.6	30.7	62.3	53.6
Finland	35	73.9	32.1	50.6	49.1
France	211	66.4	77.3	60.9	67.6
Greece	45	36.6	95.9	73.6	63.4
Hungary	77	61.6	57.7	50.4	56.1
Ireland	7	63.1	100.0	70.6	76.1
Italy	253	87.5	52.0	65.0	66.3
Lithuania	8	76.5	83.5	18.5	48.9
Latvia	8	35.5	97.0	52.4	56.3
Netherlands	39	86.0	60.2	73.8	72.2
Norway	36	75.1	22.3	52.7	44.4
Poland	48	84.1	83.1	58.7	74.0
Portugal	44	49.0	55.8	73.3	58.3
Romania	59	78.3	80.9	46.6	66.3
Sweden	47	80.4	37.3	69.0	58.9
Slovenia	6	76.0	91.6	72.0	79.1
Slovakia	27	83.5	77.0	41.6	64.2
United Kingdom	146	77.3	55.5	70.6	66.8
ESPON Space	1,588	88.5	35.0	57.9	56.2

⁶ The comprehensive index of poly-centricity is a weighted aggregation of

- size index (33%): population (50%), GDP (50%)
- location index (33%): Gini coefficient of size of service areas
- connectivity index (33%): correlation of population and accessibility.

In table 1 we see the high scores of the size index for Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and Italy with their long tradition of merchant cities and small independent territories. About the location index (the equal distribution of cities over space) we see, somewhat surprising, some peripheral countries such as Ireland, Estonia, Latvia, Greece, whereas the larger central-European and Nordic countries have more clustered patterns of cities.

Amazing is the low score of Belgium as 'connectivity'-index. The connectivity-index measures the equality of accessibility as an indicator of potential interaction. The connectivity of the FUA's constitutes one of the central factors of poly-centricity. Any sharing of economic functions can not be really effective unless accompanied by transport, infrastructure and good accessibility.

With our several port and airport nodes over small distances (Ostend, Zeebrugge, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Luik) and the high density of the Belgian infrastructure network, the polycentric transport system is in Belgium a reality which we do not find in the interconnectivity index of the ESPON-study.

As poly-centricity is not a goal in itself but an instrument to achieving policy objectives such as economic competitiveness, social equity and sustainable development, in the ESPON-study combination has been found between poly-centricity and GDP per capita. The ESPON-study confirms that countries with a more polycentric structure are economically more successful and that there is a correlation between energy consumptions (an indication for sustainability) and poly-centricity, sharing that polycentric countries use less energy. However, it is difficult to deduce any causal links from them, as both better economic performance and lower energy consumption in polycentric countries may be linked to other factors.

5. The functional specialisation of urban nodes

Functional specialisation is important dimensions of poly-centricity as it is these functions that make cities different from each other and produce the flows necessary for economic and political integration. ESPON has mapped the functional specialisation of the FUA's and made a classification of the urban areas in EU 27+2.

All FUA's are obviously not of the same importance in the national or European urban system. Some are larger than others, and do therefore display a greater variety of functions and services. Some are of national and/or European significance based on the strengths of their manufacturing or service industries; others are the sites of regional, national and/or European administrations.

Only limited access is available to statistics on the level of FUA's. ESPON identified seven functions of urban areas. Each FUA has been ranked according to its importance for each variable. The analysis reveals the following pattern:

- Population: For both private and public-sector investments the demographic weight naturally constitutes the most favoured indicator for choosing the location of certain services and facilities. Population is concentrated in the Pentagon, though there are extensions reaching down to Southern Italy and to central and Eastern Europe, where there is a strong

concentration of large urban agglomerations. In peripheral Europe most of the large urban agglomerations are more insular.

- **Transport:** The connectivity of the FUA's constitutes one of the central factors of polycentrism. Any sharing of economic functions cannot be really effective unless accompanied by an efficient transport infrastructure and by accessibility. Transport is measured by means of the main airports and major container traffic harbours, in order to explicitly identify transport-oriented cities. As a result, the general picture is rather monocentric, particularly in the geographically small countries. The busiest transport nodes are found in the Pentagon. Not one acceding country has a transport node of European significance.

- **Tourism:** Tourism is an indicator for attractiveness. Most of the FUAs strong in tourism are different from those that score highly in other functions, and they are mainly located in the Mediterranean area and the Alps. Only a few highly tourist-oriented FUA's of European-level significance exist beyond these two zones. Globally significant urban destinations are to be found in London, Paris and Rome. Capital cities are in general also important nodes as regards tourism.

- **Manufacturing:** The urban systems are in many countries the result of industrialisation. Manufacturing industries are in decline in most regions, though they remain however the backbone of the economy in many others. Many industrial FUA's are trading globally, even the smaller ones. As such, industrial strength was measured by calculating the gross value added in manufacturing. The strongest FUA's are to be found in the Pentagon. Gross value added is often low in the acceding countries, except in capital regions and in Poland.

- **Knowledge:** This function is measured by calculating the number of students attending higher education institutes. In all countries, the capitals are the strongest nodes in knowledge terms, though many other FUA's are also important. The general picture is therefore rather balanced, as higher education is distributed across all parts of Europe, and within most of the countries as well.

- **Decision-making in the private sector:** Any urban system's 'capacity to influence' is not solely dependent upon its level of competitiveness and demographic weight, but also on its actual economic attractiveness to private investors. The distribution of the headquarters of top European firms is an indicator of economic attractiveness. Business headquarters locate in places with good accessibility and where they are close to business services. Decision-making however remains highly concentrated to the Pentagon, as Stockholm is the only FUA outside the Pentagon that makes the top list.

- **Decision-making in the public sector:** Strong hierarchies within urban systems are often due to the development of administrative functions. The current picture of Europe is thus the result of the growth and development of individual national systems with the capitals being the main nodes of the European administrative system.

Most crucial economic functions such as the location of European decision centres are concentrated within the Pentagon. The knowledge function is more balanced due to the location of universities in national educational systems all over Europe. The tourism and transport indicators are different, showing a pattern of the functional division of labour at the EU level. Thus, tourism is concentrated in the Alps and the Mediterranean coastal regions and transport within the northern-most parts of central Europe.

6. Some comments and recommendations

The analysis of the FUA of the ESPON-study is very descriptive. The study shows that the preconditions for poly-centricity are best where cities are located in proximity to each other.

In a future perspective the study has looked also to new FUA, created through increased integration and co-operation, which can change the European urban hierarchy. Morphological proximity is no guarantee of co-operation and proximity does nevertheless provide cities with a better opportunity for functional integration. The hypothesis used in the ESPON-study is that cities with overlapping travel-to-work-areas have the best potential for developing synergies. For each of the FUA's, the study calculated the area that can be reached within 45 minutes by car from the FUA-centre. The resulting areas are labelled PUSH (Potential Urban Strategic Horizons).

The general comment on the ESPON-study is the lack on good data, time series and flow data. Although data at the municipal level is available for all countries, it needs to be gathered in a systematic way with metadata indicating the differences in methodology from country to country. Also, coherent time series data at the municipal scale needs to be built up so as to allow for the analysis of trends.

Data on flows at the intra-urban level is in the most countries non-existent. It is of great importance to have better insight in the flow of persons and goods. Statistical research is needed to set up indicators for functional speculation and there is a great need for case-oriented examination on the interrelationships between statistical information measures and political/institutional factors.

On the European level (European poly-centricity/macro level) better research on the impact of globalisation towards new economic and social functional relations across national borders must be made. In a Belgian/Flemish cross-border scale-context we think at the FUA Kortrijk-Lille and Ghent-Terneuzen-Flushing, which are in the ESPON-study not taken into account because the 'nation'-scale of detection the FUA.

This kind of research (cross-border and comparative on poly-centrism), although essential in the EU-policies (think about the Interreg-programs), has been worked out relatively thin on the field.

Furthermore, while poly-centricity has been examined from a spatial, economic and demographic point of view, very little has emerged in relation to governance. Research is needed to investigate types of governance and functional relationships between the elements of the FUA and its identity and representation. Results from the VLISTERGENT-studies (Allaert, 2006) indicate that it is easier to co-operate on economic issues than on spatial development or, surprisingly on transport.

Formalized governance structures, designed to encompass and encourage poly-centricity across the board in the city-regions are still in the early stages of development (Allaert, 2006). In all cross-border development co-operation rather than joint decision-making is the norm,

and powers were generally limited to making recommendation. It is clear that partnerships require more robust political and policy frameworks if they are to operate success fully.

There is a need for greater political commitment from higher tiers of government and it should be supported by a investment-programme of resources (funding). We need a new legal framework by the national government, oriented to facilitate the inter-municipal co-operation with direct or indirect incentives.

New EU-policies concerning EU-funding regimes are necessary, e.g. the harmonisation of the programmes INTERREG, PHARE, TACIS. Concerning the EU-policies on poly-centricity, the European Union depends for a polycentric development too much on the national policies. There is a big gap between the theory (e.g. the ESDP) and the application. The application depends of the strategic/spatial planning and the relation on decision-making and application inside each EU-country. The discourse is not incorporated in the legislation (Europe and national).

Spatial planning is still not identified in the EC Treaty as a formal competence of a European institution. Going back to the ESDP's main objective, namely to achieve a balanced and sustainable development of the EU-territory against the background of 3 goals (economic and social cohesion, the conservation of national resources and cultural heritage, and, a more balanced competitiveness) the polycentric development policies in the ESPON-countries are only linked to two of the 3 goals (cohesion and competitiveness) and not explicitly to the overarching objective of sustainable development. Cohesion and competitiveness are often perceived as contradicting each other, although the creation of an integrating strategy (in a strategic plan) promoting both cohesion and competitiveness remains the challenge of poly-centricity.

We have seen that the ESDP barely contains a conceptualisation of the European territory and it does not come much further than the metaphor 'Pentagon'. A spatial conceptualisation is an interpretation in maps and/or words of the 'main' structure (axes, gateways, nodes) of the territory. Polycentric policies (like in Flanders with the spatial structure plan, 1997) are Europe still in a preliminary stage of development, but we are still far from a broad public-private debate on decisions at the European level. As our first Flemish Structure Plan with the more than 500 pages text (1997), the ESDP is a 'soft' planning instrument. It is no more than a general frame and source of reference for actions of decision-makers, according to transport and infrastructure, agriculture, environment,... (see also Cabus and Saey, 1997).

On the micro-level (intra-regional/inter-urban) poly-centricity must be seen as the action to enhance regional and inter-urban strengths in order to stimulate welfare and social-economic development. Here a set of guidelines of poly-centricity at regional level is necessary in combination with a restructuring of the structure-funds. The separate programmes for urban and urban developments including the care-edge-development strategies must be rethought. Let us hope that the new EU-programmes from 2007 will set out the first policy-lines for territorial complementarity and territorial cohesion of urban-rural networking within trans-national/regional horizons and based on new content of the PIA's (polycentric integration areas). But here we must go much further than to identify 'morphological criteria'.

Stakeholder research on social, financial, knowledge, research and political networks will be a main key in the study field on the functioning and the functional specialisation of city regions.

Epilogue

The ESPON 1.1.1 programme is conceived as an academic study undertaken by a team of research centres (14 research units). In the descriptive and analytical study there are several unquestioned hypotheses.

The descriptive value of the concept of poly-centricity is shifted into a rationale of action, as a potential leverage to be used by planners and policy-makers to develop an efficient spatial planning policy. Even though this might be a result of the analysis, a scientific approach should not take for granted such assumptions which eventually has incidence on the conceptual framework of the study and on its methodology, where the normative discourses are abusively implemented into unquestioned research hypotheses.

The study made for ESPON seems to waver between a scientific analysis of poly-centricity and a normative discourse in favour of poly-centrism. To keep an objective scientific position a recent interim report 'Study on Urban Functions' also made for ESPON (May 2006) put 3 aspects for a better approach: a more explicit underlying hypothesis in the analysis; a critical approach on ESDP's objectives and goals a clear distinction between the scientific study and the policy objectives of ESDP. The results are underway, but even with this new report (2006/2007) there will be still a long way to go to a 'polycentric Europe'. Let us hope that Flanders and Belgium will play a more substantial role in the European spatial area in the near future, both on the scientific level and political level.

On the scientific level the generation of my colleague Pieter Saey⁷ has been disappeared from the international-scientific arena. Let us hope that the new generation urban/regional geographers and planners can put their 'mark' in the European debates for a sustainable polycentric and regional development in the EU.

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⁷ We are thinking here at scientific researchers such as: Modest Goossens, Herman Van der Haegen, Hendrik Keeris, José Sporeck, a.o. This generation urban-regional geographers have disappeared from the scientific fora.

Abbreviations

ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
MEGA	Metropolitan European Growth Areas
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective
PIA	Polycentric Integration Area
FUA	Functional Urban Area
FUR	Functional Urban Region
UA	Urban Agglomeration
PUSH	Potential Urban Strategic Horizons