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Spatial Planning and the Influence of Domestic Actors: Some Conclusions

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Abstract: The papers in this special issue have all focused on the extent to which spatial planning systems develop and evolve in different domestic contexts. The contributions indicate that many processes of change are place-specific, time-contingent and sometimes path-dependent. For this reason, each national spatial planning system in Europe is distinct, with its own set of territorial institutions, planning practices and actor constellations. Each of the contributions in the volume has helped to demonstrate that common challenges and driving forces of reform to spatial planning (highlighted in the introduction to this special issue) can have differential impacts in different places, which is often due to the influence exerted by domestic actors in the process of change. Even the impacts of common European debates on spatial planning show a high degree of heterogeneity in the five case studies contained in this special issue (Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal) and provide little evidence to suggest that spatial planning systems are converging.

Introduction

All of the case study papers to this volume have helped to highlight the crucial role of different communities of actors, variously engaged in spatial planning activities in different domestic contexts, in shaping processes of change in spatial planning. These communities of actors "interpret" and "filter" external inputs according to their values and beliefs and thereby shape the nature of planning debates, processes and outcomes. Interpreting the contributions from the five cases from Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Portugal from an actor-centered perspective (outlined in the introductory paper), this final paper in the special issue aims to shed some light on the interplay of actors involved in spatial planning policy development and to highlight the common elements among the different contributions to this volume. This paper begins by considering how the influence of the EU has produced a differential impact on the evolution of spatial planning systems in the five countries examined in terms of institutional legal frameworks, discourse and practices. It then considers the characteristics of the various communities of actors that, within the different domestic contexts, have played a role in promoting spatial planning policy shifts. Finally, the paper considers the concept of policy convergence, the various dimensions of policy-making to which such a concept can refer, and the evidence for and against convergence that can be drawn from the contributions to this volume.

Differential patterns of Europeanization

The different national contributions to this special issue suggest that the emergence of the EU territorial governance agenda has played an influential role in shaping the evolutionary patterns of spatial planning systems in the Member States. The promotion of a European territorial planning agenda over the last two decades (described in more detail by Colomb 2007 and Faludi 2010 for example) has led to various changes in spatial planning at the national and sub-national levels across Europe via processes of Europeanization (Dühr et al. 2007). These processes of Europeanization have not however led to the homogenization of spatial planning in Europe. Instead, they have produced differential impacts partly as a consequence of deeply embedded differences between European nations in terms of "policy cycles, objectives, priorities, distribution of responsibilities, processes of negotiation and consensus building of relevant EU policies and national and regional territorial development policies", recognized in the *Territorial State and Perspective of the European Union* by the Member States' Ministers responsible for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion (German Presidency 2007: 58). As some contributions in this special issue explicitly recognize, there are different facets of change that the Europeanization of national spatial planning systems can imply. These can for example include the evolution in institutional and legal frameworks, the shaping of domestic discourse and the transformation of spatial planning practices. These three facets of change are considered in turn below.

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Evolving institutional and legal frameworks

Despite the lack of any explicit competence in spatial planning, the EU has shaped and sometimes even triggered the reform of institutional and legal structures supporting spatial planning. Giannakourou's account for example asserts that EU cohesion policy and the related requirements for the participation of sub-national governments constituted an "external shock" for the Greek system of public administration and prepared the ground for domestic administrative reforms of the 1990s, leading to the amalgamation of small communities and the creation of regional authorities. In turn, the new institutional framework for spatial development formed the background for the elaboration of a new national law on strategic spatial planning. Similarly, Fritsch and Eskelinen's paper indicates that the establishment of regional councils in Finland was a direct consequence of accession to the EU in 1995, and this new tier of authority substantially modified the traditional "Nordic-style bi-polar administrative structure" comprising the central government and relatively strong local authorities. As in the Greek case, this reform provided Finnish spatial planning with a stronger regional dimension, as the regional councils were given new powers and responsibilities. In Latvia, too, several attempts towards devolution and regionalization were undertaken in the 1990s and the early 2000s, partly influenced by the need to anticipate EU cohesion policy, which led to the establishment of cross-sectoral administrative planning regions that represent local and regional interests in various policy preparation processes. On the other hand, Oliveira and Breda-Vázquez argue that the Portuguese legal and administrative framework was only marginally affected by the dynamics of decentralization, and maintains a strongly hierarchical form. While recent legislative reforms have increased local authorities' responsibilities, few impacts on day-to-day planning practices are evident. Meanwhile, in Italy, the spatial planning system has not undergone any radical administrative or legal reform due processes of Europeanization. It is also apparent from the contributions to this special issue that EU regulatory policies have had impacts on domestic institutional change in certain member states. The papers by Giannakourou and Oliveira and Breda-Vázquez both underline the importance of EU Environmental policy, notably the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) directive, in introducing new institutional arrangements and processes in Greece and Portugal.

Shaping domestic discourses

Various contributions to this special issue illustrate the links and interactions between EU and domestic discourses. They also present examples of how EU territorial governance often provides a cognitive logic and normative frame for meaning and action at the national and sub-national levels (Radaelli 2004; see also Giannakourou in this special issue). EU territorial governance can be seen here as a source of "discursive integration" based on European spatial planning experiences (Böhme 2002).

In the case of Latvia, Kūle and Stead illustrate how national spatial policy developments have been strongly influenced by European cohesion discourse since the 1990s. However, domestic debates have primarily focused on social equity, which was a more familiar concept and considered more relevant to the Latvian context. Although the term territorial cohesion does not explicitly feature in recent spatial planning and regional development policy, these policies do seem to be implicitly based on the ideas underlying the concept, especially in relation to mobility and accessibility issues, the provision of local services and culturally or environmentally important territories.

The Finnish case also represents an interesting example of domestic downloading and re-elaboration of EU spatial planning concepts and priorities. Fritsch and Eskelinen provide examples of how EU concepts and objectives were re-elaborated in relation to the territorial specificities of the country, through a process that the authors describe as of "acknowledgement, adaptation and adoption of European spatial planning concepts into national as well as regional planning documents and initiatives and, more widely, into the general planning vocabulary". Among the spatial planning concepts that permeated the Finnish spatial planning debate is the notion of polycentricity. The latter, virtually absent in domestic discourse before Finland's EU accession, started to appear in Finnish spatial guidance documents since the mid-1990s, but not before undergoing a process of reinterpretation *vis-a-vis* domestic territorial conditions such as low population densities, long distances between urban centers and the existence of highly rural areas (see also Eskelinen, Fritsch 2009).

In Greece, too, some of the main concepts underpinning the ESDP also had an important impact on domestic policy documents. In the 1990s, the national spatial planning agenda

was primarily focused on physical planning issues but progressively incorporated a more strategic and development-oriented spatial approach, resulting in official recognition of some of the basic policy options of the ESDP (e.g. polycentric and balanced spatial development, parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge and new urban-rural partnership) in the new spatial planning act. According to Giannakourou, the ESDP constitutes a main "reference point for domestic planning reforms in Greece". In this case, EU concepts and principles have played an important role in increasing "inter-governmental and social acceptance for proposal for domestic planning reforms", supporting the legitimization of national planning choices.

Portuguese spatial planning discourse has also been influenced by EU spatial planning policy concepts and ideas. The contribution by Oliveira and Breda-Vàzquez illustrates how such influence has permeated all territorial levels, where the concept of polycentricity for example "is used ubiquitously and indiscriminately in Portuguese spatial plans" due to the guiding role of the National Program of Territorial Policy and Development (PNPOT) that led to the diffusion and replication of ESDP concepts at lower scales. Unlike the Greek case where the influence of EU planning discourses declined after the turn of the 20th century, the Portuguese planning system became more closely aligned with EU discourse, including the Territorial Agenda of the European Union. Of particular importance here is the role of the Portuguese presidency in the drafting of the Territorial Agenda First Action Plan. This involved political and technical inputs from the Portuguese national administration which was also heavily involved in Portuguese spatial planning reforms, with the consequence that there is significant "conceptual alignment" between the processes.

The Italian case in this volume suggests a rather slow and weak alignment between European and domestic discourses on spatial planning. Cotella and Janin Rivolin ascribe this situation to a combination of factors, ranging from the low level of political recognition of spatial planning to the relative isolation of the domestic planning community. The authors of the Italian contribution argue that there is little evidence to suggest that the recent influence of EU discourse on spatial planning in Italy is related to the engagement of the domestic planning community with the EU spatial planning debate.

Transformation of spatial planning practices

While local practices may be influenced by path-dependence and the local planning culture that characterizes each specific context, the evidence from the contributions to this special issue suggests a permeation of concepts, both top-down and bottom-up, through a set of changes that have affected planning practice (see also Janin Rivolin, Faludi 2005).

In the case of Italy, Cotella and Janin Rivolin illustrate how the European spatial planning agenda has challenged the Italian "urbanism" tradition. This process was triggered by the participation of Italian actors in early EU cohesion policy initiatives, such as the Integrated Mediterranean Programs, the Urban Pilot Projects and the early Structural Funds programs. The Europeanization of the Italian spatial planning system occurred as a consequence of shaping the beliefs and expectations of domestic actors through a mixture of economic conditionality mechanisms (co-financing rules) and an interactive socialization and collective learning process. Because of the general lack of political support for spatial planning, the effect of discourse integration in Italy was limited. Nevertheless, several programs developed in the 1990s that progressively started to influence the logic of domestic actors and, in so doing, began to incrementally challenge established customs and routines at various levels.

Similarly, in Portugal, the reform of the Structural Funds and the establishment of Community Initiatives and Pilot Projects at the end of the 1980s led to the emergence and progressive consolidation of new practices in national territorial governance, which represented an innovative turn compared to traditional, regulative spatial planning procedures. Nationally-funded territorially-focused and governance-led development programs were subsequently introduced which have encouraged inter-municipal cooperation in the implementation of integrated actions and, in so doing, contributed to important changes in the country's institutional landscape.

The Greek contribution by Giannakourou also mentions the important role of European Community Initiatives as a vehicle for the introduction of new forms of governance in the planning practices, especially at the regional and local levels of territorial administration.

Planning and programming in parallel

As a direct consequence of the evolution of spatial planning practices, in both Italy and Portugal a "programming" approach has emerged in parallel to the traditional spatial planning activities. According to Oliveira and Breda-Vàzquez, similar trends can be identified in the majority of southern European countries, where there is an increasing coexistence between formal spatial planning and other kinds of territorial governance practices, notably area-based programming (see Gelli 2001; Getimis, Grigoriadou 2004; Gualini 2001; Novarina 2003; Vettoretto 2009). According to the authors of the Italian and Portuguese cases, the emerging gap between formal planning and programming can be attributed to the legalistic and highly formalized tradition of planning in southern Europe (see Newman, Thornley 1996). In these cases, more prescriptive attitudes to spatial planning appear to be challenged by innovative spatial development strategies and projects, leading to a "fracture" between traditional urban planning practices and more innovative "programming" inspired in the framework of EU territorial governance (see de Vries 2002). This fracture can be explained in terms of the different features that characterize traditional regulative spatial planning and programming. In the majority of the cases, the latter operates in almost complete autonomy from the procedures that characterize formal planning systems. Moreover, they are based on different logics and timescales and are characterized by elements that are extraneous to traditional regulative tools (e.g. contractual practices, public-private partnership, cross-sectoral and multi-level coordination).

As a consequence, many practitioners involved in traditional spatial planning have little or no awareness of the institutional dynamics that accompany programming governance practices. The planning and programming activities operate in parallel. According to the contribution by Cotella and Janin Rivolin, most ordinary planning practices in Italy are closely aligned to traditional administrative and professional cultures, and appear to be less permeable to discursive integration and more related to a prescriptive and "conformative" idea of spatial planning.

The emergence of a programming approach in parallel with traditional spatial planning approaches has links to debates about "hard" and "soft" spaces as well as "hard" and "soft" forms of planning that have recently been developed by authors addressing processes of territorial res-

caling (e.g. Haughton et al. 2010; Faludi 2010; Adams et al. 2011). While "hard" spaces with fixed borders are well suited to "hard" or regulatory forms of planning, a whole range of spatial challenges and opportunities do not respect these "hard" borders and, in these cases, regulatory forms of planning are less equipped to provide solutions. Applying this logic, Haughton et al (2010) argue for a combination of "hard" and "soft" spaces and forms of planning, suggesting that "soft" spaces can provide "a mechanism for encouraging more creative thinking, unconstrained by regulation and national guidance, and [...] greater opportunities for a range of non-planning actors to engage more productively with the planning process" (p. 240). This combination of hard and soft spaces and instruments appears to be taking place in various parts of Europe according to the contributions in this special issue.

The differential impact of domestic actors

The authors in this volume have presented an analysis of spatial planning systems according to an actor-centered perspective and have highlighted the role of different actors engaged in change processes related to spatial planning. The impact of the consolidation of the EU spatial planning agenda on the different domestic contexts and the mediating effect of different communities, as facilitators or inhibitors of domestic change, have been explored. A brief summary of the nature of these communities and of their role in shaping spatial planning policy shifts in different domestic contexts is presented.

In the Finnish case, Fritsch and Eskelinen highlight how groups of actors form part of policy and research communities in Baltic and Nordic territories. Through the membership of these transnational networks, Finnish actors have developed a greater interest and involvement in EU spatial planning discourses and policy development. These regional networks of actors have also helped foster shared perspectives and positions in macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (see also Stead 2011; Fritsch 2011). According to Fritsch and Eskelinen, research centers such as Nordregio and cooperation initiatives such as VASAB have been instrumental in bringing together communities of actors involved in spatial planning from across the territory. The arenas of communication exchange created important information sources for the planning and policy

community of Finland, and have provided an interface between European and Nordic/Baltic debates on strategic planning and cohesion policy. In addition, these arenas have promoted opportunities for the "cross-loading" of ideas between Nordic epistemic communities. As a result of the relatively strong ties between communities of actors involved in spatial planning issues in the Nordic/Baltic region, common positions and agreements can often be reached relatively quickly between these countries in European debates, as in the case of the NSPA Foresight 2020 exercise, described in Fritsch and Eskelinen's contribution.

These Nordic/Baltic arenas have also involved Latvian actors, although in a more passive way in the early 1990s when Latvia was going through rapid political and economic changes. Engagement with Latvian actors involved in spatial planning has occurred via channels including CEMAT and bilateral contacts with EU member states and institutions, especially immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when epistemic communities with claims to certain types of knowledge were highly influential in forming and transmitting discourses (Kūle et al. 2011; Kuus 2004). Despite a general openness of Latvian policy-making processes (developed in reaction to former Soviet control), consultation processes on future European policies is more restricted, which has limited the amount of public involvement in European issues and hampered the emergence of communities of actors concerned with EU spatial planning debates.[1] The lack of willingness or experience among certain groups in being involved in these processes acts as a further constraint to the formation of communities of actors. Consequently, the number of actors actively engaged in territorial cohesion policy debates in Latvia is relatively low. Two of the most important actors are the Union of Regional and Local Government and the Latvian Association of Large Cities, which were both actively involved in the consultation process that followed the publication of the European Commission Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. Meanwhile, the Union of Latvian Spatial Planners is a less important community of actors due to its rather fragmented nature and its main focus on local issues.

In Greece, an influential community of actors variously engaged with spatial planning issues began to consolidate at the end of the 1980s when the country's spatial planning system was reformed. The formation of a "mixed high-level working group" as an advisory board

for the reforms to spatial planning can be considered as an epistemic community comprising of senior civil servants from the relevant ministries and state agencies, representatives of the country's major stakeholders, university professors and independent experts. The contribution by Giannakourou describes four broad groups of actors that were central to the Europeanization process of Greek planning through their networking activities: (i) government actors, acting as the main political "entrepreneur" of policy reforms; (ii) technical experts, who supported the government on various planning themes; (iii) professional associations, which were invited to participate in various consultative organs and/or to give opinion on critical policy initiatives and planning documents and (iv) environmental NGOs, which not only appealed against certain planning decisions but also provided assessments of the impacts of various planning initiatives. Despite exerting some influence during the 1990s, this constellation of actors was weakened by the replacement of the Minister and Secretary General of Spatial Planning in 2001 and the subsequent dismantling of related advisory groups. Additional governmental changes further hampered the engagement of Greek actors in the EU spatial planning debate and resulted in a drop in interaction between knowledge communities and policy officials which had influenced the evolution of the country's spatial planning system during the previous decade.

Despite the similarities between Italy and Portugal highlighted in the previous section in relation to the emergence of a strong programming approach in parallel to traditional spatial planning domestic practices, the two domestic contexts are markedly different in relation to the engagement of their respective communities of actors concerned with spatial planning. In Italy, the debate about the nature and evolution of spatial planning has been constrained by the lack of political and societal recognition of the domestic planning profession, despite the presence of numerous professional associations. Italian actors have been relatively isolated from other similar communities in neighboring countries. Participation in international associations and initiatives (e.g. AESOP and ESPON) and general engagement with the EU spatial planning discourse is still restricted to a relatively small number of actors. Despite the development of an interesting set of EU-inspired innovative approaches that characterized the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s, Cotella and Janin Rivolin's contribution argues that

Italian planning scholars have generally given low priority to European spatial planning and EU territorial governance, and the potential for institutional innovation is not often recognized.

In the case of Portugal, on the other hand, the situation can generally be characterized in terms of a fracture between traditional spatial planning and innovative EU-inspired programming, while the hierarchical character of the national spatial planning system seems to have contributed to further engagement of domestic actors and communities within the EU spatial planning debate.

Conclusions: spatial planning and policy convergence

The different experiences analyzed through the contributions to this special issue suggest that the Europeanization of domestic planning constitutes a multi-faceted phenomenon that can be viewed as a process of actor exchanges and interactions and various coalitions and strategies. Different explanations shed light on the role of actors in the Europeanization process of domestic planning, which highlight the dynamics of rules, resources, discourses and ideas in producing domestic change. So although territorial governance in different parts of Europe is often subject to similar challenges and pressures, evidence from the various contributions in this volume suggests considerably different responses. This differential response to external stimuli, such as the influence of the European Union but also more global phenomena, appears to be linked to differences in institutional contexts and actor constellations. Following this line of reasoning, the differences between the development patterns of the spatial planning systems of the analyzed countries is no surprise. Furthermore, while there are some common elements in the cases examined in the contributions to this special issue, there is still little evidence of convergence, even in the case of planning systems that share similar traditions such as Greece, Italy and Portugal (see also Nadin, Stead 2008).

It is important to recognize here that policy convergence is a multidimensional concept where it is sometimes possible to identify convergence along certain dimensions but not along others (and even find divergence).[2] So, while the policy goals underpinning the spatial planning strategies of some countries may well have experienced some convergence as spatial planning attempts to respond to various issues that are common to authorities across Europe, there is much less certainty when it comes to the convergence of policy content, instruments and outcomes. All five case studies contained in this special issue emphasize the complexity of the concurring processes of Europeanization and actor engagement. In conclusion, despite similar policy agendas and common tendencies in approaches, the convergence of planning systems in the five countries does not appear to have occurred to any great extent, and various differences still remain. The evidence suggests that this situation is unlikely to change very quickly in the future: the differential evolution of spatial planning in different parts of Europe is likely to remain for some time to come, due in part to the role of actors in these processes of change.

Notes

1 This situation is reflected by Sørensen and Torfing (2009) who typify governance in central and eastern Europe as contexts where networks are generally negatively associated with the rule of old or new cliques, but a large effort is being made to develop a legal framework for public-private co-governance.

2 Following Bennett (1991) and Lenschow et al. (2005), it is possible to define the different dimension in which policy convergence may occur as (i) policy goals; (ii) policy content (including statutes, administrative rules, regulations, court decisions); (iii) policy instruments; (iv) policy outcomes; (v) policy styles or (vi) policy settings (the calibration of policy instruments and the procedural settings of policy review processes).

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