

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN ACTORS IN THE EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING DEBATE. TIME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Abstract. The EU eastward enlargement formally opened EU spatial policy arenas to new member states' actors. However, European spatial planning developed as the product of an epistemic community admittedly rooted in north-west Europe and it is unclear whether such perspective will be altered anytime soon. The paper elaborates on this issue arguing that the differential engagement of domestic actors with the European spatial planning debate has a direct influence on the prevalence of specific policy agendas and approaches over others. In this light, it explores the extent of engagement of Central and Eastern European actors with the European spatial planning knowledge arenas: the intergovernmental debate, the territorial cohesion debate and the Cooperation Platform for Territorial Cohesion in Europe. It concludes that, despite the limited overall level of engagement, the increasing commitment of some CEE member states suggests that this situation is changing albeit differentially.

Keywords: European spatial planning, EU enlargement, Europeanization, knowledge, discursive integration, intergovernmental debate, territorial cohesion, Central and Eastern Europe.

INTRODUCTION – A NEW EASTERN PERSPECTIVE IN EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING?

Over the last two decades, numerous authors have discussed the apparent increasing importance of the spatial dimension of European Union (EU) policies (among others: Williams 1996; Faludi 2001, 2010; Waterhout 2008; Duhr *et al* 2010; Adams *et al* 2011). Despite spatial planning competences

remaining firmly in the hands of the member states, a number of somewhat ambiguous European guidance documents, policies and interventions characterized by a specific ‘spatial’ or ‘territorial’ focus have emerged under the umbrella of *European spatial planning* (Williams 1996; Faludi 2001; Waterhout 2008; Duhr *et al* 2010). The introduction of the Objective of economic and social cohesion in the Single European Act in 1986 and the subsequent re-organization of the Structural Funds in 1988 can be identified as the symbolic starting point of this process, whereby the EU obtained the power to define the criteria underpinning the distribution of the structural support for its regions. This allowed the European Commission to undertake the necessary analysis for the publication of the studies *Europe 2000* and *Europe 2000+* (CEC 1991, 1994) and to support the ten-years-long inter-governmental process that eventually gave birth to the *European Spatial Development Perspective* in 1999 (ESDP - CEC 1999). As the other side of the same coin, the European Commission started to launch and run an increasing number of actions and interventions directly targeting member states in the field of urban development, territorial cooperation (respectively under the Community Initiatives URBAN and INTERREG) and transport (through the promotion of the Trans-European Networks). More recently, the publication of the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* (DE Presidency 2007a) and of its renewed version with time-horizon 2020 (HU Presidency 2011), the institution of the *Cooperation Platform for Territorial Cohesion in Europe* (COPTA - www.eu-territorial-agenda.eu/) and the affirmation of the ‘territorial cohesion’ objective in the EU Treaties constitute further step of this process and potentially open the door to a further institutionalization of territorial actions at the European level (cf. Waterhout 2008 for a thorough overview of the institutionalization of European spatial planning).

While the mentioned elements – and the ever-increasing share of the EU budget dedicate to its cohesion policy – constitute as many evidences of the rapid consolidation of EU spatial policy, the logics and mechanisms standing behind the evolution of the latter are less clear. In this regard, Faludi describes European spatial planning as an ‘anarchic field’, characterised by high ‘uncertainty regarding content as well as on the positions of the various actors’, that owe its genesis and evolution to the emergence of “an ‘epistemic community’, admittedly with its roots in North-west Europe” (Faludi, 2000: 249). This is particularly relevant in the context of the recent revival of the debate over evidence-based planning, suggesting that evolution of EU spatial policy depends more and more on the extent and nature of the engagement of academics, practitioners and policy makers with a ‘politics of expertise’ (Faludi and Waterhout 2006; Davoudi 2006; Faludi 2008, Adams *et al* 2011): the fact that the actors that contribute to the evolution and consolidation of the European spatial planning debate belong to a specific geographical area, implies that also the policy arenas in which this debate has fuelled might be dominated by a North-western perspective (cf. Janin Rivolin and Faludi, 2005 on the different perspectives of European spatial planning).

The recent eastwards enlargements of the EU provide a particularly useful context for the exploration of the logics and mechanisms that underlie the evolution of European spatial planning. Previously characterized by a strong western flavour, the EU has now to confront with a dramatically different reality in terms of economic, social and territorial development (Davoudi 2006). The macroeconomic situation affecting many Central and Eastern European (CEE) nations has presented significant social, economic and spatial challenges for diverse strategic policy sectors such as the economy, education, environment, transport and social welfare (CEC 2007). The eastward shift of the frontier of European integration has opened up European spatial planning to new questions, new challenges and issues, new actors, and new forms of engagement and ‘arenas of action’ (Steinmo *et al* 1992; Hall and Taylor 1996; Lowndes 1996, Adams *et al* 2011). However, whereas the opening of European spatial

planning arenas to actors from both old and new member states could theoretically lead to new ideas and approaches being generated, until recently only limited efforts have been made at the EU level to capitalize on this diversity (Finka 2011), which can potentially present itself more as an obstacle in terms of coordination capacity and mutual understanding than an asset.

A preliminary understanding of the extent and nature of the engagement of CEE actors within the knowledge arenas of European spatial planning lies at the heart of this contribution, that aims at shedding some light on the logics underpinning the ‘framing’ of spatial planning and policy for an enlarged EU. First, the author builds on earlier works that offer a ‘knowledge’ perspective on the exploration of spatial policy development in the EU (Nunes *et al* 2009; Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2010; Adams *et al* 2011, 2012; Cotella *et al* 2012; Stead and Cotella 2011) to introduce the main elements and features that characterise the evolution of the European spatial planning discourse, providing the interpretative lens through which the presented evidence may be read. He then discusses the engagement of CEE actors with the main arenas that characterised, and influenced the evolution of European spatial planning over the last twenty years: the intergovernmental debate, the territorial cohesion debate and the more recent Cooperation Platform for Territorial Cohesion in Europe (Waterhout, 2008; Adams *et al* 2011; Cotella *et al* 2012). A conclusive section rounds off the contribution, with some reflections on the relevance of the performed analysis and its results. The paper argues that the overall level of engagement of CEE actors in the European spatial planning debate has been limited when compared to that of their North-West European counterparts. However, recent trends – and in particular the activities undertaken by the Hungarian and Polish EU Presidencies in 2011 – show that the situation is changing albeit differentially. Despite being by no means self-evident of the achieved institutional capacity of CEE member states’ actors to alter the North-western perspective that dominates the European spatial planning discourse, these trends suggest that the time for CEE actors to make a difference in the evolution of the latter may eventually have come.

EUROPEANIZATION OF SPATIAL PLANNING. HOW THE DIFFERENTIAL ENGAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC ACTORS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The EU is a very peculiar institutional subject (Hix 2005), characterised by an open-ended integration process featuring the coexistence of a multitude of national, subnational and supranational authorities (Nugent 2006). Against the backdrop of great complexity and instability of the EU institutional framework, the concept of ‘Europeanization’ has been introduced, to overcome the ‘grand theories of European integration’ (cf. Duhr *et al* 2010: 86-100 for a detailed explanation) and, explaining complex adaptation paths and logics of co-evolution, focuses rather on the impact of such a process on national contexts and on the supranational sphere (amongst others: Olsen 2002; Wishlade *et al* 2003; Radaelli 2004; Lenschow 2006). Europeanization studies prove to be of particular interest for those policy fields in which the share of competences between the EU institutions and Member States are mostly undefined, and this is certainly the case of spatial planning (the so-called ‘competence issue’ has been extensively commented in: Faludi and Waterhout 2002: 89-92; Waterhout 2008: 37-38). In this light, studies focussing on the Europeanisation of spatial planning originally aimed at the exploration of the impacts of European spatial planning activities on the EU Member States’ spatial planning systems (Giannakourou 1998, 2005; Dabinett and Richardson 2005; Dühr *et al* 2007; ESPON, 2007a, 2007b, Böhme and Waterhout 2008, Stead and Cotella 2011). However, the concept soon lost the meaning of unidirectional process of ‘reaction to Europe’ (Salgado and Wool 2004: 4), rather starting to address the complex dynamics – either top-down and bottom-up (Wishlade

et al 2003) or vertical, horizontal and circular (Lenschow 2006) – that entwine the supranational and domestic spheres, therefore influencing the evolution of European spatial planning itself.

In particular, bottom-up Europeanization – or in other words the ‘upload’ of domestic logics at the supranational level – appears to be a particularly complex process to analyse, as it requires to simultaneously take into account as many as twenty-seven national contexts (and a multitude of subnational contexts) and related, more or less explicit attempts to exert an influence on the EU spatial planning agenda [1]. To understand this process, of particular importance is the notion of European spatial planning discourse. As argued by Richardson (2001) in situation where high-level of uncertainty exists a particularly relevant role is played by increasing need for knowledge and information. This induced several authors to suggest that evolution of EU spatial policy depends more and more on the extent and nature of the engagement of academics, practitioners and policy makers with a ‘politics of expertise’, and therefore calling for a revival of the debate over evidence-based planning (Faludi and Waterhout 2006; Davoudi 2006; Faludi 2008, Adams et al 2011, Cotella et al 2012). In this light, the evolution of European spatial planning could be described as a rather heterogeneous discursive process characterized by a multitude of actors and arenas of debate where ideas and concepts are debated, validated and then consolidated into spatial approaches and policies. As the ESDP elaboration process masterfully highlights (Faludi and Waterhout 2002), the lack of legal or binding provisions for European spatial planning makes discourse in this field largely open to competitive dynamics, overall developed in a joint cooperative process aimed at catalysing consensus on a ‘common path’. This produces a non-coercive delivering process framed by the will of various participants to agree, by way of collective deliberation, on procedural forms, modes of regulation and common policy objectives, preserving at the same time the diversity of respective beliefs as well as the right to pursue their own selected interests (Bruno *et al* 2006).

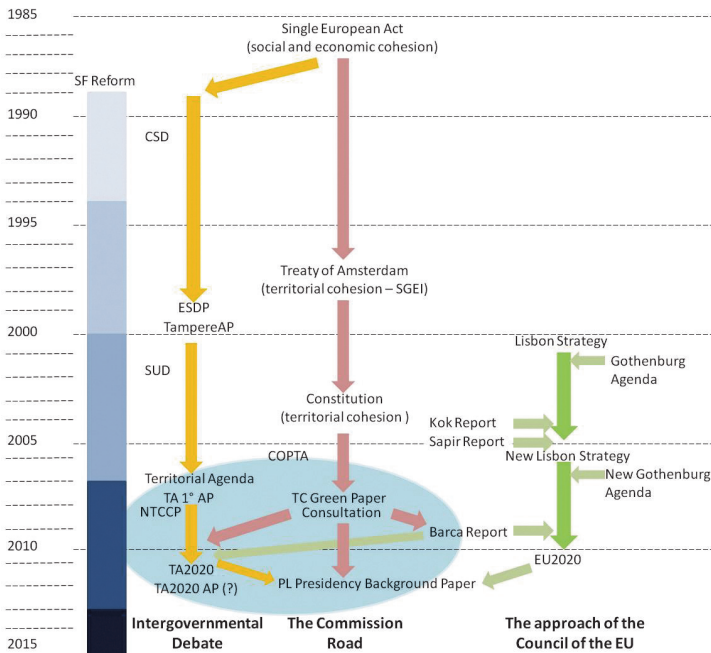


Figure 1: European spatial planning as the product of three discursive macro-arenas

Beside the mainstream discourse advanced by the European Council official documents and resolutions, at least two other interlaced macro-arenas contribute to influence the evolution of European spatial planning, namely the 'intergovernmental debate' and the 'Community debate', (see Figure 1. Cf. also Waterhout 2008). The former is driven by the so-called 'Informal Council' of EU Ministers responsible for spatial planning policies, known especially for the elaboration of the ESDP (CEC 1999) and of the more recent EU Territorial Agendas (DE Presidency 2007a; HU Presidency 2011). The latter constitutes what Waterhout (2011) referred to as 'the Commission's road': driven by the views recurrently expressed through official reports and communications by the European Commission's Directorate General of Regional Policy (DG Regio), it is mainly pivoted around the evolution of the territorial cohesion debate. Far from being mutually impermeable, the two macro-arenas are continuously overlapping and influencing each other, also thanks to the activities of specific transnational initiatives focusing on the promotion of discursive integration, as the European Observation Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON, formerly European Spatial Planning Observation Network) and the recently established Cooperation Platform for Territorial Cohesion in Europe (COPTA).

The overall outcome of these arenas of debate is a result of the interplay of knowledge and policy development in relation to both the norms and values underpinning spatial policies as well as to the set of powers that permeate the arenas where discussion and negotiation take place. That is to say, how knowledge resources are channelled into specific arenas where they are tested/validated or subject to debate/institutionalised rules of policy evaluation, or employed selectively in the representation of policy problems/opportunities or in the advancement of vested interests (Nunes et al 2009; Adams et al 2011; 2012; Cotella et al 2012). Importantly, it is the agent interactivity across these arenas that gives impetus to the suggested interpretation. The influence that actors belonging to different domestic contexts can exert over the evolution of European spatial planning is all in all framed by their more or less active participation to the various arenas characterising the European spatial planning discourse, as well as by their capacity to compete in a 'contested field' (Faludi 2001: 250) [2]. Whereas the recent enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007 and the concomitant eastward shift of the frontier of European integration have provided the potentials for a substantial reloading of the concepts and logics underpinning European spatial planning (Cf. Pallagst 2006 for a full discussion), the extent to which this is actually occurring is open to debate. To shed some light on this issue, the following sections explore the extent of engagement of CEE actors within the European spatial planning knowledge arenas, and its potential meaning.

THE ENGAGEMENT OF CEE ACTORS WITH THE EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING DEBATE

While the progressive integration in the EU offered support and set out demands for CEE countries (Cf. Cotella 2009), informal policy areas such as European spatial planning struggled to effectively metabolise the enlargement. CEE countries have indeed raised some interest in European spatial planning prior to their accession and the opening of the Iron Curtain in 1989 can be interpreted as a major development impulse for European spatial planning (Pallagst 2000). However, while exercises in European spatial planning have increasingly sought to integrate CEE countries, the actual engagement of CEE actors within the discursive macro-arenas where European spatial planning is debated and brought forward has been very limited until recent years. Since the on-going reforms could be perceived as one of the decisive factors for development in European spatial planning, at

least according to the contents of the document Europe 2000+ (CEC 1994), the European Commission initiated several studies that were specifically related to CEE. Among them was the 1990 report on the *Socio Economic Situation and Development in the Regions of Central and Eastern Europe*, which was the first to investigate regional development conditions in CEE countries (Bachtler 1992), as well as the *Scenarios of Spatial Development of Central and Eastern European Countries*, analysing the territorial impacts of the development of CEE countries on spatial development in the EU (CEC - Directorate General Regional Policy and Cohesion 1996). However, only a limited number of studies focused solely on CEE spatial planning issues, and almost none of them involved CEE actors in its preparation to any relevant extent. A notable exception is constituted by the *Central and Eastern European 'Boomerang'* (Gorzalak 1996), that presents a conceptualized idea of the Central and Eastern European territory development potentials and was for some subject of debate among academics (cf. Pallagst 2006). However neither the boomerang nor other attempts managed to find their way into the core of the European spatial planning debate, whose arenas remained dominated by a strong north-western perspective at least until the end of the 1990s (Faludi 2000).

THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL DEBATE

Beside the mentioned studies commissioned by DG Regio, the 1990s constitute indeed a “boom era” for European spatial planning (cf. Faludi 2010), dominated by the inter-governmental activities of the Committee for Spatial Development that eventually resulted in the publication of the ESDP (CEC 1999). The long-term deliberation process that shaped the document and the roles of different actors is vividly portrayed by Faludi and Waterhout in *The Making of the European Spatial Development Perspective - No Masterplan* (2002). According to the authors, at a certain moment of the process it turned out that the EU was confronted with new spatial challenges under accession conditions and, due to this specific reason, integration aspects and enlargement were added in a separate (the last) chapter of the ESDP. Here, the need for a full integration of CEE countries into European spatial planning is stressed as a necessary condition for a successful development of European spatial planning for an enlarged Europe. However, whereas in principle the ESDP suggests the application of its political options in the candidate countries and it calls for cooperative and conceptual development on the European level together with CEE actors, at this stage CEE actors were mainly observing the process and only had a marginal role in shaping its outcomes (cf. Faludi and Waterhout 2002; Pallagst, 2006; Cotella et al 2012).

As a result of the ESDP process, and following the recommendations included in the latter, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON – now relabelled European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion) was established in 2001, and soon became the most influential arena for the production of European spatial planning and development empirical evidence. ESPON developed as an arena within which research institutions and networks throughout the EU could generate knowledge resources “to support policy development and to build a European scientific community in the field of territorial development” and to “increase the general body of knowledge about territorial structures, trends and policy impacts in an enlarged European Union” (ESPON no date). In the beginning CEE countries were not involved in the programme, as they signed the agreement only at the dawn of their accession. Since 2003 all new projects have had to consider the then candidate countries in their analysis, providing useful information on the territorial impact of EU enlargement as well as potentially extending the ESPON organizational network to involve the new member states. However, whereas over time, an increasing number of CEE actors have become active within ESPON’s organizational structure (e.g. Monitoring Committee, Coordination Unit, Knowl-

edge Support System, etc.), an examination of the composition of the Transnational Project Groups (TPGs) responsible for ESPON 2006 projects reveals a bold dominance of Western actors: of the 138 partners involved in the Core Teams of the 34 completed projects, only 23 belonged to CEE (mostly institutions located in Warsaw and Budapest). Furthermore, only one project features a Lead Partner from CEE (ESPON 2006) [3]. Recently, with the operationalization of the ESPON 2013 Programme, this trend has begun to shift as some projects explicitly insist on the new eastern dimension of EU territorial development (Cf. ESPON 2009, 2010) and, more importantly in the context of this paper, a slightly increased participation of actors from specific CEE countries can be observed. Whereas the participation of CEE actors in ESPON 2013 Priority 1 and Priority 2 projects [4] still lags behind that of their western counterparts in absolute figures (of the 237 partners constituting the 43 TPGs only 41 are located in CEE), CEE actors have found their way into 16 out of the 21 TPGs responsible for the development of Priority 1 projects, and into 12 out of the 22 TPGs established under Priority 2. More interestingly, actors from Poland and Hungary are involved in 12 (10 P1 and 2 P2) and 8 (6 P1 and 2 P2) TPGs respectively (ESPON 2011). These figures exceed the average for CEE member states, as well as those for many western member states.

With the ESDP process finalized for some time and the ESPON projects database at hand, the time had come to launch a new policy document for an enlarged EU: *The Territorial Agenda of the European Union* (DE Presidency 2007a; c.f. also Waterhout 2011). The Territorial Agenda is an offspring of the informal European ministerial meetings on spatial planning, and the process behind its publication had already started in 2003 with an expert document on *Managing the Territorial Dimension of EU policies after Enlargement* followed by several more ministerial meetings (Faludi 2009). The Agenda highlights ‘territorial cohesion’ as the major goal for European spatial development (c.f. Faludi 2009). The disparity issue is of high importance for the CEE Member States, although they are explicitly mentioned only once in the Territorial Agenda when it comes to overcoming disparities. Unlike the broad discursive process that had delivered the ESDP, the timeline for launching the Territorial Agenda was short and its validation was seen to be the evidence-base produced by ESPON (DE Presidency 2007b). Yet the document’s imminent claim for networking suggests that there is still a tremendous need for knowledge exchange with a broad stakeholder involvement that is evidence-based and links evidence to policy-making. As regards the involvement of Central and Eastern European actors in the agenda process, ministers from the new member states were engaged in the Territorial Agenda process from the beginning. A pivotal role was played here by Polish DG Regio Commissioner Danuta Hubner and by her successor Pawel Samecki because the European Commission’s Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG Regio) was a key player in the Territorial Agenda process, this suggesting some degree of potential CEE influence at a crucial point in territorial development policy.

THE COMMISSION’S ROAD

In parallel to the mentioned activities, the evolution of European spatial planning has been strongly influenced by the debate pivoted around theoretical boundaries and operational implications of the territorial dimension of the cohesion objective, raised by the European Commission – and by DG Regio in particular – as a potential picklock to break the standstills often characterising the intergovernmental debate and therefore to contribute to a further institutionalization of European spatial planning. The concept of territorial cohesion was introduced in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), though at that time the ESDP planners paid it little attention (Waterhout 2011). As time went by, the debate on territorial cohesion started to gain momentum in the context of initiatives such as the

Treaty of Nice (2001) and the Laeken European Council (2001) (see Faludi 2009). The fears that the accession of a large number of significantly less prosperous regions would result in increasing internal disparities and eventually in the disintegration of the European project played an important role in the inclusion of territorial cohesion in the draft of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Cotella 2009). Despite the ultimate demise of the Constitution, the territorial cohesion objective has been explicitly linked to the Growth and Jobs Agenda through the Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013, and then ratified under the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

In order to enhance the visibility of the concept, the Commission published a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion in early October 2008 (CEC 2008). The Green Paper preparation process was less transparent than that of the ESDP or the Territorial Agenda, and it occurred primarily at the Commission level (c.f. Evers 2007; Evers et al 2009). Rather than providing a clear view of for what 'territorial cohesion' may involve, the Green Paper sought to stimulate a debate among a wide diversity of actors with regard to the value and possible interpretations of the principle. In this sense, it represents a clear attempt by the European Commission to widen the discourse beyond the narrow expert community that has traditionally been engaged in European spatial planning. The mobilizing power of the Green Paper turned out to be extensive [5], with the launch conference in Paris attracting over 1.000 participants and the consultation round, open until February 2009, seeing almost 400 reactions being submitted from both Member and non-Member states. A comprehensive analysis of the respondents has been performed elsewhere (Cotella et al 2012). However, to support the argument took forward by the present paper it is interesting to point out that in contrast with the homogeneous distribution of national responses [6], the majority of regional and local bodies participating to the process are located in North-west European countries (43 per cent) of which 19 per cent were from the United Kingdom. Only ten responses came from CEE regional and local bodies, all of them located in the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic). No responses were received from regional and local bodies in Bulgaria, Romania or the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Of the responses from the Visegrad countries, one out of eight NUTS II regions and two out of fourteen NUTS III regions responded in the Czech Republic, two out of sixteen NUTS II regions in Poland, two out of seven NUTS II regions in Hungary and three out of eight NUTS II regions in Slovakia. Among the universities, research institutes and consultancies that responded, only three out of seventeen are located in CEE – namely two in Poland and one in Slovenia. Here again the geographical spread of the consultation is far from homogeneous, with the vast majority of respondents coming from Southern and North-western Europe and with no responses produced by actors in the Baltic States.

A more in-depth analysis of the interest groups responding to the Green Paper provides additional insights [7]. Out of a total of 152 contributions, 38 per cent include at least one member from Germany, while 47 per cent have members from France. Among actors located in CEE new member states, Polish actors appear to be the most active, being involved in 24 per cent of the interest groups that have responded to the consultation, followed by Hungarian and Romanian actors. Again, actors from the Baltic States appear to be less active and Latvian actors were involved in the least number of interest groups of all EU member states. The responses of the interest groups may be also examined to determine whether they could be allocated to a specific EU macro-region, in order to monitor the extent to which different macro-regional perspectives could theoretically fuel into the debate (c.f. also Janin Rivolin and Faludi 2005 on European spatial planning macro-regional perspectives). Once again North-west European groups appear the most prominent with forty-nine groups, six being located in the Visegrad countries and only two in South Eastern Europe. Overall, the dominance

of French and German actors is clear and they were involved, either autonomously or in the context of transnational organizations/interest groups, in the preparation of 174 and 85 responses respectively. The engagement of CEE actors on the other hand appears to have been more limited. Of the CEE countries, actors from Poland appear to have been most active contributing to forty-six of the responses. Generally speaking actors from the Visegrad countries appear to have been more active than actors in the Baltic States and South-eastern Europe.

THE COOPERATION PLATFORM FOR TERRITORIAL COHESION IN EUROPE

Within the framework of the First Action Programme of the Territorial Agenda, approved in the Azores in 2007 (PT Presidency 2007), the Cooperation Platform for Territorial Cohesion (COPTA – <http://www.eu-territorial-agenda.eu>) was designed to support information and communication among all concerned with the Territorial Agenda of the EU and its implementation process. The COPTA is made up of representatives of the member states, the candidate and guest countries, the EU institutions and other relevant territorial stakeholders, and acts in parallel to the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP). It aims at providing technical support for the cooperation of the Ministers responsible for spatial development in the implementation of the Territorial Agenda. Beside resulting in the further institutionalization of European spatial planning (cf. Waterhout 2008), the institution of the COPTA and the NTCCP favoured an increasing overlapping of the two macro-arenas of debate presented above, i.e. the intergovernmental debate and the Commission's road. The intergovernmental activities that had led to the publication of the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda and the territorial cohesion debate were joined together under a single discursive framework, and constantly brought forward by the subsequent EU Presidencies, although differentially.

This allowed for the possibility for new member states to exert an unprecedented influence on the evolution of European spatial planning, as they were to host the EU presidency in the years to come. More specifically, four CEE countries hosted the presidency in the period 2008-2011, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland respectively. In the first half of 2008, the Slovenian Presidency established a number of working groups where Member States and Commission representatives also met with representatives from institutions and organizations such as Eurocities and the European Council of Spatial Planners. These working groups continued under the French Presidency in the following semester. Their activities were enriched by the participation of institutions such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament, the Association of European Border Regions, the Council of Maritime and Peripheral Regions, ESPON, and DG REGIO and DG EMP (Employment). These working groups operated as temporary knowledge arenas, providing actors with valuable opportunities to meet and to discuss the recent trends in European spatial development, as well as the relative roles and competences of the European Commission and the Member States in future EU cohesion policy. In the following year (1st semester 2009), it was the turn of the Czech to hold the baton of command. The highlight of the Czech Republic's presidency activities was the international conference on the 'Future Development of the Cohesion Policy and Integrated Local Development', that took place in Prague on March 2009. The aim of the event was to discuss the past performance of the policy and to consider its future development in the light of pressures and ideas for reform.

However, it is with the Hungarian and the Polish presidencies that covered the whole year 2011 that the the growth of CEE engagement in the COPTA and NTCCP activities and, more in general, CEE actors' will to make a difference in the European spatial planning debate, became evident (cf. Cotella et al 2012; Adams et al 2012 for full discussion). This is particularly evident in the pivotal role

that the Hungarian Ministry of Regional Development and especially VATI (Hungarian non-profit company for regional and urban development) have played in the process that led to the publication of the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (HU Presidency 2011) in the first half of 2011. The process, that had started in the second semester of 2009 under the Swedish presidency and had continued with lose momentum under the following Spanish presidency, suddenly increased its pace under the Belgians, with the Hungarian taking the reins together with the Polish in a sort of strategic alliance between experts. When the presidency moved to Budapest, the VATI acted in close coordination with a set of experts nominated by the Polish Ministry of Regional Development, and took the drafting of the document to its conclusion, and to the publication of the final version in Gödöllő, on May the 19th, 2011. Once the EU Presidency moved to Poland in the second semester of the year, the same experts that had played an active role in the Territorial Agenda drafting process were entrusted by the Polish Ministry of Regional Development – together with two other renowned experts [8] – with the preparation of a ‘Background Report on How to Strengthen the Territorial Dimension of Europe 2020 and EU Cohesion Policy’ (Böhme et al 2011). The Polish Presidency later published an official Issue Paper, on the basis of this report, titled ‘Territorial dimension of EU policies. Strategic programming, coordination and institutions territorially-sensitive for an efficient delivery of the new growth agenda – Who does what and where?’ (PL Presidency 2011). In the view of the Polish Ministry for Regional Development, this report should constitute a key reference or ‘knowledge resource’ for influencing on-going COPTA debates and, in turn, the operational detail of post-2013 cohesion policy.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

As argued by Faludi (2010), spatial planning in Europe seems to have reached a turning point. On the one hand, the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and the consequent inclusion of territorial cohesion among the shared competences between the EU and the Member States, has provided the European Commission with the possibility of making legislative proposals on territorial matters. At the same time, the debate about the future of cohesion policy is ongoing with many net contributors appearing to favour the redirection of these funds from the Commission to national administrations. Within this broader scenario, European spatial planning continues to evolve, though the shape and direction of this evolution remains unclear. In this context, the adopted knowledge perspective offers an interesting entry point to further reflect upon the impact of EU eastwards enlargement on European spatial planning debates and upon the nature and extent to which actors belonging to different areas of the EU exert their power to influence policy development.

The evidence discussed in the text suggests that the role of CEE experts in the process has until now been rather limited, implying that CEE planning agendas at the different domestic levels are likely to continue to be influenced by elements matured within north-west European dominated knowledge arenas. This supports the view of Maier (2011), that territorial knowledge communities in many CEE countries do not yet appear to be consolidated sufficiently to play a pivotal role at the supranational level, due to their ‘weak and fragmented’ nature. However, during the 2000s the ESPON programme activities, the Territorial Agenda process, the Territorial Cohesion debate and more recently the COPTA activities display a growing engagement of CEE actors with European spatial planning knowledge arenas and, in turn, may eventually lead to the potential re-conceptualization of European spatial planning for an enlarged EU territory.

In particular, the case of the Hungarian and Policy EU Presidencies begins to demonstrate how the knowledge arenas through which epistemic communities may have an influence on policy-making

activities, are sensitive to particular events and ‘policy windows’ (Kingdon 1995). However, despite the relevance of the Presidencies’ activities, CEE actors’ ‘differential merger’ (Cf. Pallagst 2006; Cotella and Pallagst 2012) with European spatial planning suggests that it is by no means certain that actors from all CEE member states will progressively move towards the centre of the European spatial planning debate at the same pace, or at all (cf. Lave and Wenger 1991 on the concept of ‘situated learning’).

There is indeed a variety of potential reasons behind the differential engagement across CEE countries, as well as for the apparently limited levels of engagement among CEE actors when compared to actors in North-west Europe. These reasons may be attributed to a range of factors from lower levels of institutional capacity at the regional and local level (cf. Adams et al 2011; Dabrowski 2011, Kule et al 2011; Cotella et al 2012) to different cultures of engagement, or to the limited genuine political interest in EU discourses when compared to ‘talking the talk’ for the sole purpose of increasing EU funding support. This paper has begun to address only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to examining CEE actors’ desire, or institutional capacity to exert influence over the arenas of ESP discourse, and additional research on the matter is surely required.

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NOTES

[1] Whereas the impact of the EU on domestic spatial planning systems can be explored separately in each Member State (cf. Stead and Cotella 2011), the evolution of European spatial planning derives from the complex and very fluid engagement of a heterogeneous multitude of actors active within several domestic contexts with the supranational sphere.

[2] Intensity and quality of the exerted influence may depend on different variables. Arguably, ‘the likelihood of integration between domestic and EU discourse increases the more that public policymakers have institutionalised relationships with epistemic communities that promote EU rules and the more that domestic structure are conducive to the influence of new ideas’ (Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier 2005: 23). In other words, discursive integration operates especially ‘when there are strong policy communities active at European and national levels and direct links between them’ (Böhme 2002: III).

[3] Such an unbalance in relation to the actors actually involved in the research activity suggests that the latter may potentially bear a more or less explicit western perspective in terms of adopted methodologies and approaches, as well as policy options and recommendations delivered.

[4] Projects developed under the ESPON 2013 Programme are divided according to five priorities: Applied Research on Territorial Development, Competitiveness and Cohesion (Priority 1), Targeted Analysis on User Demand (Priority 2); Scientific Platform and Tools (Priority 3); Capitalization, Ownership and Participation (Priority 4); Technical Assistance, Analytical Support and Communica-

tion (Priority 5). Priority 1 and 2 are devoted the highest share resources, and constitutes the scientific core of the programme.

[5] In comparison with the intergovernmental process that gave birth to the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda, the territorial cohesion debate has had much more exposure to the 'outside world'. As Waterhout (2011: 93) pointed out, this may be partly due to the fact that territorial cohesion has become an official EU competence and therefore 'all stakeholders concerned eagerly watch the Commission's moves'.

[6] National institutions from all 27 EU Member States except Ireland responded to the consultation, in some cases (Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece and Sweden) submitting two responses, either from two separate government departments or one from the administration and one from the parliament.

[7] The interest groups represent a wide diversity of interests with either a geographical or thematic focus. There is also great diversity in the size and nature of the groups, some consisting of only few partners whereas others have almost a hundred members.

[8] They were Kai Böhme, former Head of the ESPON Coordination Unit, and Philippe Doucet, one of the 'fathers' of the ESDP.

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