

## **AESOP Head of Departments Meeting, Leuven, 14 April 2007**

### **Presentation by Jan Vogelij, ECTP President**

ECTP consists of the national associations of spatial planning professionals in the countries of the Council of Europe. It has 27 members, and though it does not completely cover the EU, in broad terms ECTP can be seen as representing the national professional organisations of spatial planners in the EU. ECTP is the connection point for spatial planning professionals with the European Commission and the EU. It organises the biennial European Urban and Regional Planning Awards and supports the Permanent International Working Party for the Biennial Meetings of European Towns and Town Planners as well as other events and conferences (sometimes at the request of the Commission).

Even though as Anna Geppert has explained in her presentation, the urgency in terms of time pressure of a common platform for the planning profession may be relative, we should not underestimate the amount of work that has to be put into it. For that reason, it is important to act now.

As you know, the Common Platforms are a feature of the General Services Directive (DG Markt), introduced to facilitate the free movement of professionals through Europe.

A common platform will also strengthen the planning profession in important ways. A characteristic of planning in Europe (in comparison with other professions) is its fragmentation (because of different national legislations, cultures of governance, situations concerning planning practice as well as education). A common platform will also be helpful in making planning more recognisable (as an illustration: spatial planning has many different names, unlike, for example, architecture).

The question of whether we want to be regulated is another one. Planning is not regulated at the European level (there is no "sectoral regulation" as there is for architecture or the medical professions). The European Commission has decided not to regulate other sectors in that way any more. The spatial planning profession therefore falls under the General Services Directive.

Spatial planning is regulated in different ways in a certain number of countries. This is important, because the European Commission takes the national regulation as a starting

point. They do not want to impose their regulation. As a result, the situation is very complicated and fragmented.

ECTP has been in contact with DG Markt about establishing the common platform for planners since 2003. During that period confusion about definitions of “regulation” and what the Commission wants took up a great deal of time. Within ECTP changes in responsibilities among elected officers meant that we lost some time. One of the first things we did was to find out what the EU exactly meant by regulation, and to review the situation in the various countries.

But as I said, the question of the common platform goes beyond the question of regulation. By working on a common platform, we can specify what planning is, and what is its common core throughout the different European countries. This will allow us to reinforce the profession. As such, the process of working on the common platform is probably more important than its direct outcomes.

In order to work towards a common framework, a necessary first step is to refresh the current criteria for the planning profession. The current criteria date from 1995 and it has taken ECTP a long time to elaborate and agree on them. Several universities refer nowadays to that Common Core of the profession, and for instance the regulation office for spatial planners in France applies the criteria.

Since 1995 both society and the planning profession have evolved considerably. So ECTP initiated a wide discussion among the European planning associations about planning policy objectives and planning principles in order to meet the requirements of the city of the 21st century. The resulting “New Charter of Athens 2003”, the ECTP’s vision for cities of the 21st century, promoting the concept of “the Connected City, was agreed in October 2003. For this new document, the reference to the “classical” Charter of Athens was used to illustrate the fact that this “new” Charter is a real break with the past. The ideas of what planning should be in current society are very different from the ones on which the “classical” Charter of Athens was built (then mainly by architects). Now there is a new and fundamentally different Charter underlying the activity of spatial planning.

This New Charter of Athens 2003 is a good starting point for the AESOP action to refresh the criteria which define the profession of spatial planning, because it has been unanimously approved and adopted by all the national associations of planning professionals.

In order to proceed with the platform, the ECTP is investigating the existence of barriers between countries. A first survey has been carried out (see the presentation of Dominique Lancrenon). The outcomes of this survey, which need to be refined, will be taken further in order to provide evidence of the existence of barriers for mobility of planners between European countries. DG Markt has explicitly asked us to provide them with information assessing the actual situation with regard to the free movement of professionals. ECTP has already agreed on the definition of what a spatial planner is (spring 2006), one of the other requirements of the EC DG Markt

But these are only first steps, and we should really not underestimate the work that is required for the elaboration of a common platform for the planning profession. The fragmentation mentioned above is really an important handicap.

What AESOP can do in that respect is to provide the planning education view of what planning is and establish what the minimum requirements are (finding the common core in systems of education and training which differ widely at present.)

On top of that it is necessary to analyze the extra requirements imposed on planner education by current planning practice, in accordance with the New Charter of Athens 2003. The documents which Dominique Lancrenon has prepared for the common platform contain a first formulation resulting from work in the ECTP done by Robin Thompson and Paulo Correia. The requirements should be formulated in terms of competences of planners as outcomes of the education, rather than in terms of input.

The results of such an exercise, which we hope AESOP might provide on the basis of an investigation among its members, could be an important input for the platform. Then efforts can concentrate on establishing compensating measures for planners working in countries other than the ones in which they were educated. Those activities can very well coincide with those AESOP envisages for its quality assessment.

ECTP really wants to take this further and thinks that it is very important to do this in collaboration with AESOP.