

## AFTER LEIPZIG

### 1. The Ministers of Planning

As all European planners with an interest in the development of the profession on spatial levels beyond the local will have noticed, the end of May of this year was a turning point for European spatial planning.

Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development met on 24 and 25 May in Leipzig for their "Informal Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion". Under the German Presidency of the EU, they reached agreement not just on the Urban Charter but also on the Territorial Agenda for the EU which began in 2004 at a meeting in Rotterdam under the Dutch presidency. The policy objective of Territorial Cohesion lies at the core of that Territorial Agenda.

In Leipzig the Portuguese Presidency was charged with the preparation of the Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the EU.

It is likely that the policy concept of Territorial Cohesion, adopted by the Ministers to balance social and economic aspects of EU cohesion policy, will become a major item in future spatial development and planning.

Although the policy concept requires elaboration in terms applicable for planners in the regions and municipalities, it is clear that the integrated approach of developments, trends, problems and opportunities in spatial entities such as regions and towns requires the involvement of planning experts. Co-ordination of sector policies within specific territories of various spatial scales is considered to be part of this integrated approach.

Consequently it may be expected that the adoption of Territorial Cohesion as the third pillar of the EU Cohesion policy will have a major effect on the discipline of planning.

The Portuguese presidency gladly took on the job of preparing the ground for implementation, and published the first draft of the Action Programme in July 2007.

The Action Programme envisages elaboration with the involvement of stakeholders. In a letter to the Portuguese Presidency, ECTP has announced its willingness to participate and reminded the Portuguese of the availability of experienced spatial planning practitioners. By this means, we hope that a sound balance between top-down and bottom-up actions may result.

## 2. The ECTP Debate

In the light of decisions of Ministers responsible for spatial planning, the ECTP email debate under the title "*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*" gained considerable importance. The debate started more than a year ago has gradually built up a following among planners on the ground as well as our academic colleagues. The subject matter is at the heart of the territorial cohesion policy and its implementation.

In the initial papers on "*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*" as well as subsequent reactions, several attempts have been made to modify the as-yet undefined policy concept of Territorial Cohesion into a concept that is capable of being applied in practice and is relevant for regional and urban planners.

In the debate, the definition of Territorial Cohesion is first addressed: what relations make a territory more coherent? Aspects discussed include:

- Which physical networks are important?
- What virtual networks are essential?
- How should the complex concept of *the region* be addressed?
- What is the process of working on a common spatial vision in creating cohesion?
- How can the integrated spatial planning approach be applied?
- How can the approach of layers be a tool in those processes?

In the spatial planners' integrated approach, not only territorial *quality*, but also territorial *efficiency* and territorial *identity* must be taken into serious consideration.

This all comes together at a time when the European Commission, in its *Fourth Cohesion Report*, identifies the need for more, and more

specifically, broader indicators. Neither the simple economic indicator of GDP nor the social indicator of employment rate will suffice any more.

Modern policies on development, aiming at innovation, creative societies, and sustainability, require a more comprehensive consideration of all relevant aspects. This also requires a wider focus of the studies carried out within the ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) programme.

If balanced sustainable development is indeed targeted for Europe's future spatial development, also aspects of natural and cultural heritage should be considered.

By doing so, we finally end up by the concept of spatial development planning for territories in which quality, efficiency and identity are factors for innovation and developments towards a prosperous, healthy and safe future.

The development of such comprehensive approaches for strategic spatial developments is the aim of ECTP's debate.

### **3. What Planners Can Do**

If spatial planners react appropriately and prepare themselves for the broad requirements of their involvement in strategic development processes, our discipline will have a great future. The time seems ripe and expectations are growing for increased involvement of spatial planners.

Although the spatial quality that results from sound urban design is extremely important for human wellbeing, the focus of our interest and activities should include higher scales of strategic planning: the regional and national spatial levels.

Joining in the email debate on "*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*" organised by ECTP is a good opportunity to acquaint more planners with those strategic processes. It would be useful to consider the papers that have been prepared up to now in this debate on the ECTP website. They are all available in the [Discussion Documents](#) area: the second item down is the round-up of the email debate so far, with 12 key questions and a description of the next steps to be taken. Earlier documents in the debate are lower down the page.

What you can do is: read the documents, react and participate in this email debate on basis of your experiences of specific projects and development processes.

There is a growing awareness in EU institutions that without the support of the planning practitioner, EU policy objectives risk remaining as fine words with no influence on real developments. It seems that Europe needs our capabilities.

Try to develop experiences in building agreements between stakeholders in spatial vision processes, and acknowledge that in many cases the process itself may be more important than the specific outcomes. Exchange your experiences with colleagues in other European countries and consider the differences, offering together Europe's cultural richness.

ECTP offers you the platform as well as the contacts.

It would also be good to assess, preferably through your national planning association, the way national Ministry of Spatial planning of your government interpreting the Territorial Cohesion objective in the national planning culture.

But above all, we need all planners to seek to develop spatial qualities that enhance the territorial cohesion, in their current projects and activities.

The experiences you gather by interpreting the territorial cohesion objective in specific situations will become of great value. Territorial Cohesion may well be used as a criterion for awarding financial support from EU institutions.

#### **4. What ECTP Does**

ECTP's expert service can make your and your colleagues' expertise accessible for projects in other European countries. Joining the register held at the ECTP secretariat may bring you into contact with organisations which need your views.

When it published the *New Charter of Athens 2003*, ECTP acknowledged the need for specific new capabilities of planners confronted with modern spatial development issues. That's why we

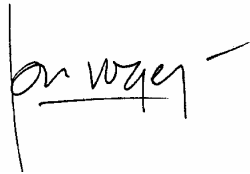
started discussions with the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) - to revise the minimum requirements of educating spatial planners.

ECTP also offered its help including the expertise of all well-educated, recognised planners, to the German presidency and now to the current Portuguese presidency.

But what we have to do first is our home-work, preparing ourselves by intensive participation in the debate about "*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*".

In the expectation that spatial planners united in ECTP will meet the requirements set by spatial developments in Europe, ECTP embarked on special preparation, for instance by co-operating with the Council of Europe (CoE), getting consultative status with the Conference of European Ministers of Spatial Planning (CEMAT) and with the Committee of the Regions, now very willing to explore common actions with ECTP and individual experts.

We as a discipline should prepare ourselves to meet the high expectations of involvement of planners in strategic processes. This may be a one-off opportunity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Vogel', with a horizontal line underneath the name and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jan Vogelij,  
ECTP President  
25 September 2007