

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD - REFLECTING ON THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Oliver Sykes^a

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) was a policy document produced and agreed jointly by EU governments during the 1990s with the support of the European Commission (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). It was intended as an indicative framework to guide spatially significant public policy making in the EU at all spatial scales from the Community level, to the regional and local levels. A non-binding policy statement, the ESDP sought to guide institutions in the exercise of existing competences which influence spatial development and its application was to be through voluntary co-operation based on the principle of subsidiarity. Integrated application of the ESDP policy options was to be achieved by a reorientation of national spatial development policies and community sectoral policies, at three levels of spatial co-operation - the (European) Community Level; the transnational/national level; and, the regional/local level. In order to achieve this, the ESDP called for 'horizontal' co-operation between the authorities responsible for sectoral and spatial policies at each administrative level as well as 'vertical' co-operation between the different levels - for example, between the national and local level. The extent of its explicit and implicit application was the subject of academic and policymaker reflection in the years following its adoption (see ESPON, 2006) with its degree of influence being seen as variable across contexts and scales.

This special issue brings together a series of papers written in the period between the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the ESDP in Potsdam, Germany in 1999, and the adoption of the new EU Territorial Agenda 2030 (MRSPTDTC, 2020) in December 2020. This seemed an apposite moment to reflect on the legacies of the ESDP and the present and future prospects for European territorial development and urban policy.

a Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK. E-mail: Olivier.Sykes@liverpool.ac.uk

As the novelist L.P. Hartley once wrote 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there' (Hartley, 1953). Understanding where 'we are coming from' is often seen as crucial in thinking about 'where we are going to' in human affairs including in the field of planning. Reflecting this notion of 'looking back to look forward' the present collection of papers takes a 'long view' of the ESDP's influence. A number of the papers go back to the adoption of the ESDP in 1999 and recount the evolving story of European spatial planning and territorial development policy since then, before considering contemporary developments such as the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the prospects for territorial development in Europe in the 2020s and beyond.

One theme which emerges from the papers is the enduring relevance of the ESDP's analyses and policy orientations. Indeed, a number of the authors observe that many of these are arguably even more pertinent and urgent to address today than they were at the end of the 1990s. Some contributors also note that, had certain of the ESDP's policy orientations been more completely and vigorously pursued in the intervening decades, then this might have attenuated some of the contemporary challenges facing Europe. Whilst the language in which the priorities of policies pertaining to territorial development are couched may have subtly evolved, the issues it invokes often remain remarkably constant.

Some of the ideas articulated in the ESDP have demonstrated a notable staying power. This is the case of polycentric development which - though it drew on a heritage of spatial thinking that predated the ESDP - received a notable fillip from its inclusion as a core tenet of the document. Its characteristic of 'multi-interpretability' (Purkharthofer this issue) ensured it was the most widely discussed and at times and in some contexts 'applied' of the ideas in the document. It has continued to feature in the ESDP's putative 'successor' documents - the series of Territorial Agendas. It is, for example, implicit in the Territorial Agenda 2030's strapline of a 'future for all places' and explicit in its invitation to 'policy makers from all levels to promote polycentric development models that offer a role for all places' (MRSPTDTC, 2020, p.15). The idea has also resonated around the globe in contemporary debates about how development might be planned and managed in the 'urban century'. For example, polycentricity is promoted in the UN's Urban Agenda of 2016 which supports 'the implementation of integrated, polycentric and balanced territorial development policies and plans' (UN Habitat, 2017, p.24) and lists 'polycentricity' alongside staple spatial development principles such as 'compactness and density' and 'mixed uses' (UN Habitat, 2017, p.15).

Despite these legacies and ongoing relevance, some papers in this special issue also argue that the European spatial planning/territorial development agenda since 1999 has not lived-up to 'the aspirations of 1999' (Böhme in this issue). More widely, whilst Europe and the EU have traversed moments of confidence and optimism such as the enlargements of the mid-2000s, there have also been some challenges and reversals - notably in the second decade since the ESDP's adoption. In some ways the fluctuating fortunes of the post-ESDP spatial development and territorial agendas have mirrored these wider trends. But there are also more specific dynamics at play relating to changing perceptions and paradigms of regional development and place-based policy, and views of the role that EU Cohesion Policy is expected to play as a component of the wider 'European project'.

In thinking more widely of the general historical conjuncture, or 'moment' when the ESDP was developed - notably from the vantage point of 2021 - it is perhaps a little too easy to 'romanticise' the Europe of the 1990s with its return to growth following the lean years of the 1980s in many places and the sense of promise following the end of the Cold War and fall of the Iron Curtain (the situation for those caught-up in the Balkan Wars at the time, for example, was altogether more difficult and traumatic). Yet as regards ideas about planning and regional development models, it is probably fair to say that the ESDP - rather like many regional and urban strategies and plans of the economically buoyant post-World War 2 period - was reflecting on how to promote more balanced and sustainable development at a moment in time when there was a greater anticipation that adequate resources and institutional capacity to do so would be available. However, in the period since then, especially after 2008, and again perhaps mirroring earlier cycles in planning history - for example, the challenging years of the 1970s and 1980s which in many contexts saw shifts from comprehensive regional and urban policies and plans towards more selectively targeted regeneration and attempts to attract inward investment - EU structural investments and place-based policy have increasingly been expected to contribute to growth and recovery objectives. This shift in context and priorities towards 'doing more with less' and working with territorial and sectoral specificities was arguably less propitious for the development of more comprehensive 'bigger picture' visions and strategies (Santamaria and Elissalde this issue).

The star of European spatial planning/development - as conceived of in the ESDP and debates at the time about its potential and that of European spatial planning - has thus waned since 1999. A number of contributors note how the Territorial Agendas of 2007 and 2011 did not gain the same traction as the ESDP amongst planning communities across Europe. Planners were less involved in their formulation and the resulting documents were less like typical planning documents in terms of structure and content. The ESDP was also adopted at a different time with perhaps a less congested policy landscape to 'shine out' from, whilst Purkarthofer (this issue) also notes how more practical issues may have led to a lower take-up of the Territorial Agendas by planners, such as their limited availability in different language versions and in hard copy.

With just over two decades having elapsed since the adoption of the ESDP, the papers in this special issue thus reflect on the legacies of the ESDP and the present and future prospects for European territorial development and urban policy.

The paper by Andreas Faludi explores the notion of European spatial planning 'beyond sovereignty'. He points out the essential fact that sovereignty and power are not one and the same thing in the contemporary international arena. The paper takes a realistic look at the EU's institutional set-up, eschewing the reductionist terms of public debate which 'perceives a seminal struggle between a non-elected Brussels bent on supranationalism and individuals' own democratic governments defending their turfs'. Regarding the question of whether the EU is a supranational or intergovernmental entity, Faludi concludes that 'supranational - like a federal state - it is not' - yet given its extensive powers and institutional apparatus the term 'intergovernmental' no longer quite fits either. It is perhaps therefore *suis generis*: a category to itself. This wider context defined not only the parameters for the 'making of the ESDP' (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002), but has also conditioned the subsequent story of European spatial planning. Faludi concludes by arguing that that perhaps viewing European space, not as a vast administrative-legal territory, but rather as an archipelago where the sea gives superb access to the islands (i.e. various European states and territories) and to the wider world, could be a way to conceptualise and advance future developments in European spatial planning.

In their paper, Frédéric Santamaria and Bernard Elissalde argue that since 1999, the ambitions of the ESDP to promote reflection on, and the development of, the whole EU space seem to have been dissolved in the notion of territory, notably as regards EU Cohesion Policy. They emphasise how the context of European integration today is profoundly different from that which prevailed at the end of the 1990s. The trend, they argue, is at best towards particularities and at worst towards dislocation forces, leading to the risk of triggering a process of 'de-europeanisation'. Against this backdrop they note how the idea of territory has been the subject of many debates. These range from attempts at definition to its rejection as representing a renunciation of the 'big picture' perspective on spatial development that the ESDP once advocated. Using a constructivist definition of territory, they argue that it is not possible to separate territory as a 'container' from the various realities of space in so far as these two dimensions are closely intertwined. They conclude that considering these two dimensions when analysing EU space can support reflection on spatial planning at this scale.

The paper by Kai Böhme also notes how the world has changed substantially since the adoption of the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (MSPTD, 2011). This is typified by the financial crisis of the late 2000s, COVID-19, migration, climate change, and digitalisation. Meanwhile the rise of concern for so-called 'places left behind' suggests that ideas supporting balanced development and cohesion need to be re-emphasised in policy to ensure that the achievements of European integration are not put at risk. Yet despite so much change, Böhme notes how most of the ESDP themes are 'so timeless that they are still valid 20 years later' and echoed in the Territorial Agenda 2030. Notably 'The underlying aim of the ESDP, to push the EU towards a more balanced and sustainable development of its territory, is still valid today, not least given the territorial impacts of COVID-19'. He thus notes that 'it is time to bring new life to the original objectives of the ESDP and support them with clear governance and implementation tools'.

The paper from Eva Purkarthofer looks back over the experience of the ESDP and what 'enticed' policymakers at different levels to engage with it. She notes how the effects and impacts of European policies strongly depend on their interpretation and application by domestic actors. This is especially true for fields such as European spatial planning and development, which are characterised by informal agreements and fragmented competences. Given this status domestic actors in the field of urban and regional planning are not always

obliged to interact with EU policies. Consequently, EU policies only gain importance if such domestic actors consider them relevant and meaningful and establish links to their respective areas of influence. In this respect, the ESDP is often regarded as a success story in European spatial planning having been relatively well known among planners across Europe. However, the Territorial Agenda documents - often considered successors to the ESDP, have not been met with the same enthusiasm and interest. The relative success of the ESDP in appealing to planners is explored using the concept of storytelling and the role of planning education in fostering interest in European spatial development amongst 'future planners' is stressed.

The final paper from Carlotta Fioretti and Martina Pertoldi considers the functional area approach promoted by EU regional policy discourse, and how it shapes and legitimates new spatial configurations, with implications for urban analysis and policy approaches. It notes how the two separate discourses in EU policy frameworks which emerged from the 1990s onwards around firstly, urban policy, and secondly, spatial or territorial policy discourse (as developed, for example, through the ESDP) started to converge in the 2000s. This influenced the understanding of the urban dimensions of EU policy, and growing attention was paid to the spatial and territorial development of EU cities and city-regions. The paper presents findings of an analysis of nearly 1000 strategies for Sustainable Urban Development funded by the EU in 2014-2020. This reveals that the functional area approach applies not only to metropolitan areas, big cities and Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), but different types of territories, beyond metropolitan areas. The paper concludes there is a need for further research on what spatialities and territorial arrangements emerge from the functional area approach as it will be a focus for integrated territorial and development strategies under EU Cohesion Policy (2021-2027) and is supported by both the new Leipzig Charter (EUMUM, 2020) and Territorial Agenda 2030 (MRSPTDTC, 2020).

References

CEC - Commission of the European Communities (1999) *European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. doi: ISBN 92-828-7658-6.

ESPON (2006) 2.3.1 *Application and effects of the ESDP in the Member States*.

EUMUM - EU Ministers for Urban Matters (2020) THE NEW LEIPZIG CHARTER The transformative power of cities for the common good, Adopted at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Matters on 30 November 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf

Faludi, Andreas and Bas Waterhout (2002) *The making of the European Spatial Development Perspective: No masterplan*. London: Routledge.

Hartley, Leslie Poles (1953) *The Go-Between*, London: Hamish Hamilton.

MSPTD - Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development (2011) *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions*. Agreed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development on 19th May 2011 Gödöllő, Hungary.

MRSPTDTC - Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development and/or Territorial Cohesion (2020) *Territorial Agenda 2030 – A future for all places*, Adopted at Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development and/or Territorial Cohesion 1 December 2020, Germany.

United Nations (2017) *New Urban Agenda*, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016, Habitat III Secretariat.