

European Space between Consolidation and New Challenges. Spatial Planning and Research from 1975 to the Present.

International Conference in Rome – October 10th – 11th 2014

1. Research results to date and continuation of the working group's cooperation

The last conference in Berlin 2022, entitled “A New Beginning?”¹, dealt with the role of spatial planning and spatial research in Europe in the epoch from 1945 to 1975, a period marked by

- the reconstruction after the Second World War,
- the beginning of integration processes of various kinds in Western and Eastern Europe and
- a concomitant worldwide confrontation between East and West.

Despite the new division, this was a period in which Europe had to reinvent itself. After the loss of the colonies and supremacy over the rest of the world, the European states had to place themselves in new European and global geopolitical contexts. Not the least, this resulted in or produced new regional differentiations of success or decline within Europe itself.

As an integral part of the conference and the corresponding publication, particular attention was paid to the relationship between the ideas and concepts present in actual decision-making and spatial planning policy making in terms of analytical approaches and the actual intervening factors or interests, especially between the formation of concepts on the one hand and actual policy outcomes reflecting the factors of interest on the other. The reports from different countries highlighted the crucial relationship between spatial planning/policy and sectoral policies, especially the dominance of economic interests – in shaping spatial policies or neglecting their concepts.

¹ Based on a book with articles of invited scholars and published before the conference because the date has had to be postponed on account of the Corona restrictions: Briesen, Detlef; Strubelt, Wendelin (eds.) (2022): A New Beginning? Spatial Planning and Research in Europe between 1945 and 1975. Frankfurt/New York: CAMPUS.

After the Berlin conference, the participants have explicitly emphasized their desire to follow up the development of spatial planning and research from 1975 to the present in a new conference, because the question now arises as to what functions the academic disciplines and discussions or political and administrative institutions, their concepts and interests have had for further development. In doing so, this concept paper drafts its guiding ideas for the analysis of the years since 1975 from a predominantly Western European perspective. The foundations for the further development of the entire continent after the fall of the Iron Curtain were laid there in the western part, at least until the recent dramatic events, in particular the financial, Covid-19 and Ukraine crises – all these factors having heavy impact on the discussions and decisions about European spatial developments and policies. Added to this are the debates on globalisation and de-globalisation as well as climate change and climate justice.

We will therefore hold another conference with a view to publishing a new conference book and, for the reasons mentioned above, broaden the perspectives of our analyses: The basic idea is to switch the analytic comparison from the national level to the regional and European level. There are two main reasons for this:

- Firstly, in the period from 1975 onwards, it became widely recognised that important and dominant economic and related social developments were taking place at the regional level – resulting in new forms of regional success and decline.
- Secondly, the enormous importance of global economic processes has become even more apparent in recent years: In order to be able to steer here, the potential of the European states, even of the now only medium-sized former great powers such as Germany, France or Great Britain, is simply no longer sufficient in view of the emergence of global giants such as China and India.

In addition, especially in Europe's southern (Africa) and south-eastern "neighbouring" countries, there are sometimes considerable non-traditional security problems triggered by poverty and violence among other factors. Europe is directly affected by these, especially

through uncontrolled migration and fundamentalist movements and must find specific responses to these core problems.

Therefore, it is important to determine more precisely which political levels should have the decisive competences for mitigating current and future problems. For some time now, there have been three basic drafts for this, which are described with keywords such as European sovereignty, the Europe of nation states and the Europe of regions. Thus, the analysis of European regional development and policies is confronted by a scenery of multilevel processes and institutions.

2. Regional disparities as a major topic of spatial planning and research since the 1970s

After 1975, Western Europe was, on the one hand, in a phase of further consolidation, and on the other hand, a new wave of globalisation took effect. On the one side, this led to the decline of traditional industrial structures and, on the other, to the rise of new industrial and service centres. The polarised spatial development of the time had a considerable impact on solidifying regional differences and creating new constellations of spatial disparities. This was reflected not the least in the old but rather renewed “confrontation”, or rather “differentiation” between rural and urban regions on the one hand and between backward or degrading old, industrialized regions and the booming urban centres with high tech or service industries on the other – i.e. in the parallelism of regression and boom in almost all European states – with positive and negative impacts regionally and socially.

The growing regional disparities within the European Union or within the framework of its member states gave rise to two specific support programmes, which at the same time reflect in each case a different national and regional background:

- One dominant support programme aimed at agricultural structures to maintain and modernise or even industrialise them.
- The other was aimed at improving the situation in so-called backward regions, measured by their level of economic strength in relation to the European average.

- Not the least, all the inputs and programmes for social and regional cohesion, regionally, nationally, and European wide, their intention and reality, their positive and negative interactions should be analysed precisely.

As already mentioned, what was missing, however, was e.g. a European programme for coherent and adapted urban and regional planning. This was explicitly left to the participating nation states or – in states with federal structures – their administrative subunits which could lead to more or less incoherent or even dysfunctional structures. These constellations were criticised by the political representatives of the regions and their inhabitants or by experts of different orientations, however, lacking influential or even coherent policy fora. However, a common denominator was the concept of sustainability motivated by the intention to combine, or to coordinate social, economic, and ecological objectives in the most optimal way possible and thus to enforce them. Because of the inherent intricacies, the lack of integration of economic, ecological, and social interests not infrequently had created spatial complexities that had all too often been at odds with the goals of society as a whole or for its spatial “order”. Due to the lack of open discussion forums, this has often led to a disconnected parallelism of policymaking, implementation and evaluation that ignores the fundamentals and complexity of Europe’s intellectual, social and political development.

The ideas and concepts stemming from the Enlightenment and the specialist academic traditions created in dealing with industrialization and urbanization have long formed in Europe a common body of ideas and exchange – before the Second World War and afterwards. Their quite differentiated traditions and impacts have to be revitalised because their original intentions are losing their original importance under the dominance of an international focussed world mostly via English communicating but neglecting the spatial differentiations of the regions of the world.

3. Central ideas for the conference

As the Iron Curtain was lifted step by step at the end of the 1980s, the contours of a new Europe – politically and spatially – gradually emerged, which by the first decade of the new

millennium increasingly included former Eastern bloc states. The geopolitical situation may have changed, but the forms of regional differentiation or disparities and the competition between the various European economic areas increased even more. Germany, for example, was paradigmatically affected by this change on a pan-European scale through reunification. Anywhere in Europe, the regional disparities and the accompanying social divergences came to a head, to which another wave of globalisation with new forms of division of labour and production contributed considerably: The economy networked itself anew across Europe and the globe, creating new levels of interdependence and dependency. As a result, some regions experienced substantial strains, while others benefited significantly from the transformation. On the side of the European Union this was not accompanied by an explicit special policy because this did not belong to their duties but was strictly in the charge of the states – not the least on account of the political will of Germany.

However, the regional economic development programmes and the agricultural subsidies had an enormous influence on the shaping of the European territories. In addition, there is a continuation of urban-rural divergencies with considerable differences in their social and national configurations and in the perception and shape of spatial politics and policies in relation to their political implications – not the least in shaping political orientations and their impact on political culture, regionally, nationally, and Europe wide.

These considerations result in three central thematic complexes for the conference.

Theme 1: Intra-regional social and economic problems or boom and bust on an inter-regional scale

In the era since the mid-1970s, there is no longer a clear and common distinction between “urban and rural”, as there are strong differences in the two categories themselves. That is, the spatial formations within European nation states are far more diversified, characterised by booming and decaying cities on the one hand and thriving and desolate urban regions on the other. Similar diversifications can be observed for the quite different realities of rural regions. This required quite different and sophisticated spatial analyses, policies, planning concepts and institutions, even the intention to go beyond the borders of nation states or to

neglect them, as can be observed in the case of cross-border metropolitan regions or natural areas, e.g. the Alps, or border regions, e.g. the Upper Rhine Valley.

Theme 2: The challenges related to Europe's loss of importance on a global scale, regarding the European model of society and questions of environmental and climate protection

Since the 1970s, gradually, concern about the ecology of the Earth is growing: the Gaia perspective – protection of the natural foundations of life and the climate as a prerequisite for life on Earth – is developing as an idea but is still far behind in practice. In the context of the use of outer space, it is becoming increasingly clear that the unrestricted use of the Earth's "natural foundations of life" has enormous effects on life on Earth, such as so-called global warming.

The perception of the basic problem situations has expanded to include another dimension: In the context of the concepts of sustainability, ecological objectives have been added to the former dominance of social and economic ones, not to forget technological developments. And not the least, as the whole complex of energy supply in relation to climate development is of growing importance and is shaping new forms of global competition and cooperation with heavy impacts on regional developments – not only in Europe but on a global level.

But how far have we come in this process? The question therefore arises as to how renewed regional approaches can be harnessed for the decisive goal of preserving European diversity while at the same time maintaining the common welfare state and expanding environmental protection creating sustainability as a real planning approach not just as a verbal challenge, e.g. how to realise the systemic transition goals and policy adopted by the EU toward 2050.

Theme 3: The actual functioning of the transformation paradigm for the mitigation of the above-mentioned problems, beyond purely normative or rhetorical policy approaches

Since the 1970s, experts and politicians, and to some extent also citizens, have been talking about change, currently under the catchword transformation. But what means transformation at all and how does it differ e.g., from the promotion of change through the moderation of endogenous development processes that has been established since the 1970s?

Are there good practices that the planning community can rely on? What differences in planning policy can be observed in Europe? Beyond practical success, which planning concepts are still used or even dominant, and which have been developed since 1975? What relationships can be observed between central steering decisions and local/regional considerations? Do new common planning concepts exist to replace old ones, like the traditional central place theory, or developing them under new circumstances or conditions?

Where has the learning process gone that showed us that it is indispensable for development to actively involve all participants in processes of change? How are the current semantics to be evaluated in view of a long experience of advancing processes of change through discourse and dialogue, especially regarding participation – between political demand and reality? With which concepts and ideas is it possible to create and realise solutions beyond particular interests and entrenched attitudes – in relation to scientific developments on the one hand and the attitudes/tendencies to return to old forms of human and societal/national interactions or traditions on the other hand? What impact has globalization and the growth of social interactions via social media? What are the tensions between apparent populism and scientifically based or oriented political rationality?

4. Focal points of the conference in Rome

Structural aspects to be reflected and discussed in the conference with a view to the development and perspectives of European regional planning design:

- National and supranational perspectives on regional affairs
- Case studies and comparative considerations
- Details on influencing factors and developments that affect all or only certain regions
- General and national traditions on space, ecology, and urban and rural differentiations
- Continuities and discontinuities of traditional spatial differentiations/traditions, nationally and across Europe

- Emergence of new and “inherited” spatial differentiations beyond the objective of cohesion
- Links between social and regional disparities – rich and poor regions
- The role of new social differentiations, such as migration and gender
- The persistence of democratic participation and decision-making – new forms of political communication, for example through social media
- Old and new dominance of vested interests, political and economic
- And finally, the impact of the new geopolitics on regional development, e.g. China’s Belt and Road Initiative in particular

5. Aims of the conference

The conference in Rome is our third in a row of meetings initiated by us on behalf of ARL (Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association). The first one was concentrated on Germany.² The now initiated conference (organised with the contribution of University of Rome Tor Vergata) is not only intended as a mere continuation of the last conference in Berlin and the publication preceding it at that time because of the Covid-19 restrictions, but the theme of the conference in Rome deals with the developments after 1975 and the perspectives for the future. The aim is therefore to analyse the recent decades and thus arrive at innovative approaches to overcoming the problems at hand – always with a focus on the opportunities and threats for spatial developments in Europe.

The conference will be documented in another book to be published by CAMPUS/University of Chicago Press, with the most important contributions to the conference and possibly additional essays to be solicited.

We want to invite cordially colleagues from all over Europe to join us with their respective scientific and spatial background. For any details, please refer to the Call for Papers.

² Strubelt, Wendelin; Briesen, Detlef (eds.) (2015): Raumplanung nach 1945. Kontinuitäten und Neuanfänge in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Frankfurt/New York: CAMPUS.

Detlef Briesen, Andreas Klee, Maria Prezioso, Angela D'Orazio, Wendelin Strubelt

Hanoi, Hannover, Rome, Bonn, December 2023