European Territorial Cooperation and Learning

Reflections by the Guest Editor on the Wider Implications

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Abstract: European territorial cooperation is the third objective of the EU Cohesion Policy for 2007–2013, as well as being the new umbrella under which ESDP follow-ups, such as INTERREG and ESPON, can continue. Cooperation is inherent to planning, and so is learning, and this is even more the case for European planning. Learning in itself can become a source of change, such as when ESPON gave rise to the Territorial Agenda. The papers in this issue cast light upon the various aspects of European territorial cooperation and learning, both within the mainstream instigated by the European Cohesion Policy as well as cross-border and bilateral projects. This introduction also speculates on the wider implications of cooperation and learning: the emergence of a transnational group of experts who promote change.

On 21 December 2007, the European Commission approved 35 programs under European Territorial Cooperation, being the third objective of the European Union's Cohesion Policy for 2007–2013. These programs, the official announcement said, were mainly funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and provided support for cross-border and transnational cooperation among the Member States. Turkey, the Western Balkans countries, Norway, Switzerland, Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation would also take part in some of these programs with the support of the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Previously, the main source of support for such programs had been the Community Initiative INTERREG. Community initiatives were generally introduced in 1990 to explore new areas of EU policy. However, having been in operation since the beginning, INTERREG can no longer claim to be experimental. So, much as with its twin, URBAN, INTERREG has been mainstreamed, making it part of the routine operations of cohesion policy financed out of the Structural Funds, and, although it is no longer a Community Initiative, it is still referred to as INTERREG IV.

European territorial cooperation is the topic of this special issue, with an emphasis on its learning effects. However, as will become evident, neither cooperation nor learning is unique to INTERREG. There has been cooperation on territorial matters elsewhere, and this will continue to be the case. In fact, being about the integration of various policies and concerns, spatial planning always involves actors cooperating with each other. And, as many pertinent issues are no longer encased within the confines of national borders, let alone of the borders of subnational authorities, the formulation of policy nearly always requires some form of cooperation or other. Naturally, such cooperation results in learning, learning about one's partners, their views and concerns and, by seeing oneself in the mirror of their minds, about oneself.

Learning being the essence of planning is of course not a novel message, but worth reiterating nevertheless. This is particularly so since learning helps to accumulate one of the resources needed in governance: the capability for jointly identifying and solving problems. This resource is, furthermore, not finite: you can always do with more of it, which is why it is worth looking at the learning effects of territorial cooperation in whatever form of European planning it occurs, beginning with the making of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP).

The ESDP and its Follow-Ups Involving Learning

Indeed, the making of the ESDP (CEC 1999) has been a learning process of a special kind. Since spatial development is not covered by any of the EU treaties, it came about in what has been described as an institutional vacuum (Faludi et al. 2000). The process only succeeded through the cooperation of the member states and, more particularly, their planning representatives, with the Commission giving discrete support. There being no obligation on any of the member states to participate where its perceived interests were negated, such negotiations are subject to an even more stringent unanimity rule than unanimous voting in the Council of Ministers. There, ministers representing the member states have to give reasons why they reject proposals or demand modifications, as the

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case may be. In the setting in which the ESDP was formulated, each and every representative of a member state could have walked away. And there was plenty of opportunity for misunderstanding. As *The EU Compendium of Planning Systems and Policies* (CEC 1997), discussed by Nadin and Stead in this issue shows, member states view planning differently, so misunderstanding was rife.

The "roving band of planners" involved in the ESDP process (Faludi 1997) formed a network facilitating the mutual learning necessary for making progress with this novel type of undertaking. In the wake of the ESDP, its agenda has been pursued along various avenues, though mostly under the control, as is the case with the Structural Funds generally under "multi-level governance" (Hooghe, Marks 2001), of the Commission. This is where the Community Initiative INTERREG and the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) come in.

In these ESDP follow-ups, too, learning has been an essential element. Indeed, as the literature looking at various aspects of the application of the ESDP shows (Faludi 2003; 2006a; 2008; Janin Rivolin, Faludi 2005; Müller et al. 2005; Böhme 2005; see also the papers by Nadin and Stead and by Waterhout and Stead in this issue), if in anything at all, then the application of the ESDP has resulted in learning, so much so that Colomb (2007; see also Böhme 2005) argues convincingly that more systematic account needs to be taken of its added value in official evaluations.

Coming under regulations pertaining to INTERREG, ESPON was likewise under the Commission's control. Nevertheless, the Commission always relies on initiatives from below – this being a general characteristic of EU governance where, contrary to the picture painted by an often hostile press, national experts with a wide range of experiences and with diverse backgrounds always play an important role. This was and is also still true in European spatial planning. Thus, one strand of this Community Initiative, INTERREG IIC, operating in 1996–1999, was devoted specifically to transnational planning. The purpose was to spread the ESDP message and to give people much needed experience in transnational planning. This strand continued under the flag of "transnational cooperation", code-named INTERREG IIIB, in 2000–2006. Participating in no less than five of the thirteen cooperation areas, Germany undertook several evaluations of its role. The five programs consisted of altogether 500 projects. (Ahlke et al. 2007: 453). They involved 6,500 partners, with no less than one thousand coming from Germany. In another report, Müller et al. (2005: 1) estimate that more than ten thousand people throughout Europe were involved in INTERREG IIIB alone. The cross-border strand of INTERREG IIIA includes even more projects. Elsewhere in this issue, Stead and Waterhout give an approximate number of no less than 9,000. The overall number of participants is surely staggering, therefore. This must have had an effect, albeit diffuse, in terms of the Europeanization of state, regional and urban planning as intended by the makers of the ESDP (CEC 1999: 45), also the topic of a recent special issue of *Planning Practice and Research* (Dühr et al. 2007). Talking about a "learning machine", Faludi (2008) claims that the Europeanization of spatial planning through learning holds an important message for European integration generally, where learning is arguably more important than the distant goal of any kind of truly integrated Europe – whatever that may be.

The enlargement of the EU subsequent to its adoption in 1999 meant that the territory referred to in the ESDP has vastly changed, and so the learning effect of participating in the process could have had an immediate and beneficial effect. Contrary to expectation though, the ESDP has never been revised. Instead, the Commission put its money on a new-style territorial cohesion policy (Faludi 2006b). It must have expected that, if and when the "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe" were to come into effect, it would be able to exercise the right of initiative under the Community method applicable to cases where there is what the Constitution calls a "shared competence" of the Union and the member states. However, as is well known, the Constitution has never been ratified. Still, as far as territorial cohesion policy is concerned, much as the Constitution would have done, if ratified, the *Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community* (Conference of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States 2007) will give the Commission this right of initiative. If ratified, this treaty will come into operation in the first half of 2009 at the earliest, so this is for the future. In the intervening period since the demise of the Constitution in 2005, ESPON, financed under INTERREG but quite separate from it, has been the harbinger of change, leading among others to the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* being adopted in May 2007 (Faludi 2007).

The Territorial Agenda of the European Union

As mentioned, ESPON was set up to provide the analytical base for amplifying the ESDP agenda. Initially, the Commission financed a two-year experimental *Study Programme for European Spatial Planning*. ESPON itself got off the ground in 2002. The program for 2007–2013 has come into operation. This ESPON 2013 is financed from funds earmarked for "European territorial cooperation", and so the networking of researchers around territorial themes and issues continues.

A remarkable learning exercise, ESPON pursued relevant themes, initially based on the ESDP (Hague, Hachmann 2008: 25) and, since its belated start in mid-2002, has brought together researchers from across Europe. As the ESPON 2006 program states: "The organizational structure of the ESPON . . . raises expectations for intensive networking between the research institutes for all the various study subjects which will serve the objective of supporting the establishment of a scientific community in the different fields addressed by the ESPON" (ESPON 2003: 10f.). The plethora of results (tens of thousands of pages of text with hundreds of maps, all available on the Website www.espon.eu) induced member states to resume their planning initiative after a hiatus of five years and produce the "evidence-based" document: *The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union: Towards a Stronger European Territorial Cohesion in the Light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Ambitions* (Territorial State 2007). This, too, was a cooperative exercise and a learning experience for those involved.

To take this story further to its interim conclusion, on 25 May 2007 in Leipzig (German Presidency 2007), the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development of the Member States of the European Union adopted the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union: Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions* (Territorial Agenda 2007; see also Selke, Schön 2007; Faludi 2007; Schindegger, Tatzberger 2007). This Territorial Agenda relates to the Lisbon Strategy aiming for the EU to become by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council 2000). This may have been an unrealistic ambition, but growth and jobs remain the goal of EU policy (CEC 2005a) and its cohesion policy, including the activities under the European territorial cooperation objective, should contribute towards this goal. This is also the ambition of the Territorial Agenda, which claims that in pursuing competitiveness the diversity of Europe's regions is an asset. With the Treaty of Lisbon in the offing, the signs are that the Territorial Agenda and its follow-up, the First Action program agreed upon under the Portuguese Presidency in November 2007, will dovetail with the preparation of a Green Paper on territorial cohesion that the DG REGIO is planning to publish in autumn 2008. Whatever shape EU territorial cohesion will take, it will inevitably bear a strong relationship with the European Territorial Cooperation objective of cohesion policy, so territorial cooperation will continue to be a topic of high relevance. The next section puts it into the limelight.

European Territorial Cooperation

The Commission proposed European territorial cooperation as the third objective for EU Cohesion Policy for 2007–2013. It seems that this was intended as a vehicle for an interim territorial cohesion policy preparing the ground for dealing with a more favorable situation after ratification, then still a reasonable prospect, of the Constitution. This would explain the substantial funding foreseen under this title by the Commission.

Preparation for the Cohesion Policy 2007–2013, and with it for European territorial cooperation as one of its three objectives, started in 2004 with (no sooner had the ink dried on the draft Constitution) the Commission confidently publishing its Proposal for the New Structural Funds Regulations for the Period 2007–2013. (CEC 2004a) The proposal said:

"Building on the experience of the present INTERREG Initiative, the Commission proposes to create a new objective dedicated to further the harmonious and balanced integration of the territory of the Union by supporting cooperation between its different components on issues of Community importance at the cross-border, transnational and interregional level. Action will be financed by the ERDF and will focus on integrated programmes managed by a single authority in pursuit of key Community priorities linked to the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas." (CEC 2004a: 6).

From the above, it is clear that cooperation is seen as a means to an end: harmonious and balanced European integration. The very meaning of "harmonious and balanced development"

is vague. This ideal needs to be amplified and adapted to the particular situation at hand, and, there needs to be considerable negotiation between the various interests affected. Agreements are often ephemeral, but in the process those involved learn, and perceptions change and so, as argued above, this learning effect in itself represents a substantial, albeit hidden benefit of engaging in cooperation.

The Commission proposals for a new-style cohesion policy specified the eligibility for funding under the new third objective more or less along the lines of the INTERREG Program 2000–2006. The Commission also introduced the novel idea of the Council establishing strategic guidelines on economic, social and territorial cohesion as a framework for the intervention of the structural funds. For each of the objectives of the funds, those guidelines should give effect to the priorities of the Community with a view to promote balanced, harmonious and sustainable development (CEC 2004a: 32).

The Commission followed its proposals through by publishing the Communication *Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007–2013* (CEC 2005b). However, coming out at a time when it had become clear that the Constitution was in trouble, the Community Strategic Guidelines fudged the distinction between cohesion policy, pursuing economic and social cohesion, for which it had a mandate under the current EU treaty, and territorial cohesion policy, for which it did not. In addition, it was clear that from then on cohesion policy was to be part of the attempt to revive the Lisbon Strategy. So, as is also evident from the *Third Cohesion Report* (CEC 2004b) and even more the *Fourth Cohesion Report* published three years later (CEC 2007), growth and jobs are the overriding concern of cohesion policy. Even where cohesion policy pursues its original calling, achieving more equity throughout the EU, policies go through the sieve of the growth-and-jobs agenda, emphasizing the creation of capabilities rather than the removal of inequities.

As regards European territorial cooperation, the Community Strategic Guidelines distinguish between cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation, this being the same as the distinction between the three strands of INTERREG. Generally speaking, cooperation "should help speed up economic development and the achievement of higher growth. National borders are often an obstacle to the development of European territory as a whole, and can restrict its potential for full competitiveness. In the cross-border and transnational context, transport, water management and environment protection are clear examples of challenges requiring a focused and integrated approach that goes beyond national boundaries…" (CEC 2005b: 31).

The objective of cross-border cooperation in particular "is to integrate areas divided by national borders that face common problems requiring common solutions. Such challenges are faced by all border regions in the Union and they are generally related to fragmentation of markets, labor force, investment patterns, infrastructure, fiscal resources, institutions and including services of general interest" (CEC 2005b: 31). Also, cross-border cooperation should focus on strengthening the competitiveness of the border regions. Clearly, what authors like Delanty and Rumford (2005: 133) identify as borderlands where the local, regional, national and supra-national come together, are the darlings of the Commission.

Transnational, as against cross-border, cooperation relates to so-called macro-regions where there is a need to increase economic and social integration and cohesion. As indicated, transnational cooperation as practiced under INTERREG IIC and subsequently under IIIB has been the strand most directly related to the ESDP agenda:

"Transnational cooperation programmes seek to increase cooperation across Member States on matters of strategic importance. Support should therefore be given to actions that seek to improve the physical interconnection of territories (e.g., investments in sustainable transport) as well as intangible connections (networks, exchanges between regions and between the parties involved). The actions envisaged include the creation of European transport corridors (particularly cross-border sections) for the prevention of natural hazards, water management at river basin level, integrated maritime cooperation and R&D/innovation networks." (CEC 2005b: 32).

Finally, interregional cooperation refers to programs focusing on the "growth and jobs" agenda: strengthening innovation, small-and-medium enterprises and entrepreneurship, the environment and risk prevention.

"In addition, exchange of experiences and best practices regarding urban development, social inclusion, relationship between cities and rural areas, and the implementation of cooperation programmes will be encouraged." (CEC 2005b: 32).

These were the Commission proposals. Cohesion policy is an important item on the EU budget. It got embroiled in the conflict over the Financial Perspectives 2007–2013. In fact,

its survival seemed at stake. After all, the *Sapir Report* (Sapir et al. 2004) had questioned its rationale and setup, and six net-contributors to the budget argued for replacing it with transfers to the new member states, a return to the situation in the 1970s when Community regional policy amounted to little more than support for national regional policies, with few strings attached. The eventual agreement meant something less stringent, a reduction of the whole multi-annual package. In addition though, there was the commitment to reviewing the whole setup with a view to the next Financial Perspectives, this review to begin in 2008–2009 (Bachtler, Gorzalek 2007).

Territorial cooperation was the great loser in the budget battle, with its allocation in percentage terms virtually halved. Within the objective, there was a shift away from transnational cooperation and into cross-border cooperation (Bachtler, Wishlade 2005: 55). However, in the end, the European Parliament insisted on more funding for European territorial cooperation, with ESPON being one of the beneficiaries.

With the budget negotiations out of the way, the Commission published and the Council of Ministers approved the definite Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion Policy (Council of the European Union 2006). They require member states, as a precondition of obtaining cohesion funding, to formulate a National Strategic Reference Framework, followed by operational programs. At the time of writing, most have already been approved by the Commission under the relevant Council Regulation (Official Journal of the European Union 2006). As the third objective of the Cohesion Policy, European territorial cooperation falls under the same regime. Programs under all three strands of what continues to be code-named INTERREG IV and, as reported above, have already been approved.

The Papers in this Issue

The papers in this issue report from the shopfloor level of cooperation and learning in- and outside INTERREG. They demonstrate that there has been real progress, and there is no doubt that, many-facetted as it is, learning under European territorial cooperation will continue.

In *Promoting Learning in Transnational Networks*, Verena Hachmann discusses the concept of learning as such. In doing so, she shows that there is a range of literature that can be usefully tapped to help us understand – and improve upon – learning practices in planning, and, more specifically, learning within the framework of the European territorial cooperation objective of EU cohesion policy.

Learning from the Application of the ESDP: Influences on European Territorial Governance by Bas Waterhout and Dominic Stead discusses what has happened since the adoption of the ESDP. As previously mentioned, an important avenue for the application of the ESDP has been transnational cooperation under the Community Initiative INTERREG. However, not only INTERREG, but rather all forms of the application of the ESDP involve cooperation and learning. Moreover, it has been argued that, being about the formulation of integrated strategies, spatial planning always requires cooperative relations to be forged with sectors, other levels of government, stakeholders, etc., so that the surge of cooperative activities in the wake of the ESDP augurs well for the future.

The third paper by Vincent Nadin and Dominic Stead is about *Spatial Planning Systems, Social Models and Learning*. It approaches the theme of cooperation and learning from a different angle, that of the European model of society, a concept much discussed in the literature and in political circles. One of the features of this model is that it promotes the cooperation and involvement of stakeholders. Additionally, the very discussion of whether there is a European model of society results in mutual learning about differences and similarities and about things worth emulating, and this is also true for planning. In fact, as soon as the question arises of whether something like a European model of planning exists (referring to Böhme (2002), Stead and Waterhout in their paper invoke the notion of a European territorial governance discourse) one starts analyzing and comparing. The likely outcome is not agreement on a uniform model to be invoked across Europe. Rather, the outcome will always be a framework or a set of criteria, with the promotion of cooperative planning and learning surely being one of the prominent elements.

Targeting *Large Cross-Border Projects: The Experiences in Flanders and the Netherlands*, the fourth paper by Jochem de Vries is not about European territorial cooperation in the strict sense of the word. Rather, the author reflects on experiences that relate neither to cooperation under the third objective of cohesion policy, nor indeed under any other EU program, but to bilateral cooperation of the type that large-scale infrastructures crossing national borders necessitate as a matter of course. In setting out

a framework for analyzing such cooperation, the paper makes clear that the experiences gained in these projects are equally relevant to European territorial cooperation, and, on this basis, makes some recommendations.

The fifth paper is yet another demonstration of the multi-facetted nature of European territorial cooperation by dealing, much as Jochem de Vries does, with an operation outside the framework of the EU. The paper is about bilateral cooperation in the form of technical assistance extended by the German Federal Environmental Agency to one Polish and one Latvian town, both of them trying to make urban transport more sustainable. Written by Dominic Stead, Martin de Jong and Iveta Reinholde, the paper, entitled *Urban Transport Policy Transfer in Central and Eastern Europe,* conceptualizes this as a form of policy transfer (see also de Jong et al. 2002 and de Jong, Edelenbos 2006.) Indeed, one can easily frame European territorial cooperation in terms of policy transfers and thus avail oneself of a rich literature and draw on the practical lessons that these authors deduce from their case studies.

Challenges and Experiences of Working with the Planners Network for Central and South-East Europe (PlaNet CenSe) by Gabriele Tatzberger and Friedrich Schindegger is about experiences gained in key projects in what was perhaps the most challenging cooperation program under INTERREG IIIB, that for the CADSES area (CADSES standing for Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South-East European Space). Because of its complex nature involving a range of unlike partners, the emphasis was less on concrete outcomes and more on the formulation of new perspectives, in other words, on learning. The paper enforces the message that in the present uncertain state of European integration and planning, learning through cooperation is the most immediate and practical benefit to be achieved as opposed to the achievement of any concrete objectives.

The programs and projects under the European territorial cooperation objective are about to start. There will undoubtedly be many reviews, including the obligatory evaluations, and those participating will in due course look back at their experiences. Between them, the papers in this issue set out a framework within which to think about relevant issues and to position European territorial cooperation in the broader context of the Europeanization of spatial planning which, although perhaps somewhat tangential to the wider issues of European integration, nevertheless forms a laboratory within which one can try and understand the practical and theoretical issues facing Europe, as well as the intricate and challenging process of Europeanization.

Beyond Cooperation and Learning as a Means to an End

As indicated, the INTERREG IV regulations reflect the currently overriding concern with the growth and jobs agenda. Territorial cooperation and learning are seen as means to an end. However, it could be argued that learning is the whole purpose of the exercise, not only in planning, but in European integration in general. After all, in European integration, we are dealing with great uncertainties. Especially now that the federalist ideal has taken a massive blow, Jacques Delors' *bon mot* of European integration being an "unidentified political object" seems more to the point than ever. So what better strategy than keeping an open mind and engaging in intensive learning?

Learning has a great potential for change, one going beyond the insights gained. This added value derives from the capabilities and the outlook and collective interests of those forming parts of the networks. There is a huge proliferation of transnational networks of government officials involving experts on a variety of issues, not only in Europe, but also worldwide. Sassen describes the social effect of such networks already emerging in the post-World War II era:

"The work of the pertinent, typically highly specialized government officials began to be oriented toward a global project. One consequence has been an increased commonality among officials within each transnational network and a growing distance with colleagues from the national bureaucracies back home. In this sense, then, we can speak of an incipient global class." (Sassen 2006: 302).

This creates a capability for change, for the denationalization, the changing from within, of the nation-state, which Sassen regards as a more pertinent idea than that of its withering away. One can envisage the learning experience of being involved in European spatial planning, too, not only enhancing the skills, but also changing the outlook and maybe also the personalities of those involved, thereby generating a dynamic for change. One can see this in the emergence of a crowd of professionals moving about: people from national planning establishments with experience in European planning go to Brus-

sels on short-term appointments as "detached national experts" (and in so doing are becoming even more valuable resources for their home administrations). Others go out and fill the positions at INTERREG Technical Secretariats or they are recruited by the research institutes and specialized consultancies involved in European work. Of course, there are also the academics, like most of the authors of this special issue, orbiting around and interpreting the practices of European spatial planning. The people involved in these networks are boundary-spanners. They have a mission: promoting European planning, not in the least in their own best interests, and in so doing become not only a resource for operating the planning machinery as is, but also a source of change.

The annual congresses presented by the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), where there is always a track devoted to European planning, are nodal points in this network. The reader may be interested to learn that the papers in this issue were jointly presented in the European Territorial Cooperation and Cohesion Policy track, which was chaired by Simin Davoudi from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the editor of this special issue. The occasion was the 2007 Congress on Planning for the Risk Society: Dealing with Uncertainty, Challenging the Future held in Naples, Italy, from 12–14 July 2007.

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