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Spatial planning policies and conceptions on the European level – influences on national spatial planning systems

Despite of its informal character, spatial planning on the European level has become a sphere of research and activities of its own in recent years. Meanwhile it attracts EU-institutions as well as EU-member countries. On the European level it is therefore no longer enough just to have knowledge about the spatial planning systems of neighbouring countries. In the frame of the ongoing processes of change within spatial planning it becomes more and more obvious that there is the need for critical analysis of the national planning systems and to strengthen their transnational capability. The question arises, if there will be a harmonisation of spatial planning systems in the long run and which indicators can give an orientation in this development.

The paper relies on the thesis that the experiences gained so far within spatial planning on the European level can offer essential points for a future oriented development of national spatial planning systems, as they are based on a minimum European consensus. Formulating such “minimum standards” for national spatial planning systems on the European level can for example support central and eastern European spatial planning systems which are still undergoing a fundamental transition.

On this basis the following expressions show an attempt to develop a profile of demands for national spatial planning systems based on spatial planning on the European level. The most important characteristics of spatial planning on the European level which can be generalised will be taken into account.

1. Developing a profile of demands on national spatial planning based on spatial planning on the European level

Spatial planning on the European level is not based on an organisational or legal frame like national spatial planning systems, but it is brickstone-like formed by different competencies and tasks. One should also keep in mind that the development and further elaboration of spatial planning on the European level was to a great extent influenced by the member countries. For this reason different planning cultures are put together on this level.¹ It is no surprise that spatial planning on the European level nowadays is more or less a melting pot of different approaches and understandings of spatial planning and can function as a platform to harmonise different spatial planning systems of the EU member countries.

¹ Examples are France, whose regional planning which is based on financial means influenced today's structural policy of the EU and the Netherlands, whose conceptual development within spatial planning gave the impulse for spatial development studies on the European level.

To investigate these topics it will be necessary to develop a profile of demands for national spatial planning systems based on spatial planning policies and conceptions on the European level. The following questions will be relevant to elaborate such a profile:

1. Which factors that characterise spatial planning on the European level could be useful for national spatial planning systems?
2. Which additional demands arise for national spatial planning systems from the necessity of participating in spatial planning on the European level?

The main characteristics of spatial planning on European level will be elaborated to formulate potential demands for national spatial planning systems.

Indicator 1: Subsidiarity as a principle of organisation

First of all it is important that spatial planning on the European level is a working sphere where no institution obtains formal competencies.

In these cases on the European level serves the principle of subsidiarity. Through a bottom-up-approach the member countries of the EU are responsible for activities in the frame of European spatial planning. First examples are the process of elaborating the ESDP², the policy of Transeuropean Networks or creating the Trend Scenarios for the European Continent³. These activities show that this principle is already in use within spatial planning and development.

In spite of this there is no comparable term like subsidiarity in spatial planning. Neither the term “participation” or the German „Gegenstromverfahren“⁴ match the character of subsidiarity. For this reason the first demand for national spatial planning systems will be - subsidiarity.

► *Demand: Subsidiarity*

At the same time the principle of subsidiarity leads to growing competencies on the local and especially the regional level. Following the trend of „Europe of regions“ has e. g. the Committee of the Regions been established. By this means the regional level gets an important role within the European planning hierarchy. As another demand for national spatial planning systems can therefore the strengthening of the regional level be concluded.

► *Demand: Strengthening of the regional level*

Indicator 2: the importance of EU structural policy for spatial planning

Structural policy of the EU contributes to a great extent to the spatial development of the member countries. The spatial implication of EU regional policy mainly results from the input of financial means and an approach which is oriented on projects and measures. The implementation of projects and activities from regional policy is often

² European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP); final version adopted by the informal European Council of EU Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning in Potsdam at the 10-11 May 1999.

³ BfLR (Hrsg.): Trendszenarien der Raumentwicklung in Deutschland und Europa - Beiträge zu einem Europäischen Raumentwicklungskonzept, Bonn 1995.

⁴ Development, planning and protection of parts of an area shall fit into the conditions and requirements of the whole area; development, planning and protection of the whole area shall take into account the conditions and requirements of its parts (§ 1 (3) ROG).

higher than of several spatial plans of the member countries. Due to this planning oriented on implementation can be a demand for national spatial planning.

▶ *Demand: Planning oriented on implementation*

In addition to that structural policy of the EU requires regional entities in the national states to support the distribution of financial means and as a basis for collecting statistical data. Of course this does not allow an evaluation of their competencies, but nevertheless these regions must at least be established by the member countries. As it was described for the the principle of subsidiarity a strengthening of the regional level can be concluded.

▶ *Demand: strengthening of the regional level*

Another characteristic of EU regional policy, especially of the Community Initiative INTERREG for transnational and crossborder co-operation is the importance of international co-operation. Implementing spatial planning on the European level can not be limited to national strategies but requires bilateral or multilateral structures for co-operation. Therefore national spatial planning has to establish all necessary presuppositions for international co-operation.

▶ *Demand: Ability for international co-operation*

Indicator 3: Formulating guiding principles for spatial planning on the European level

There is a wide variety of guiding principles for spatial planning on the European level. Of importance for spatial planning are not only the Leipzig principles⁵ or the ESDP policy options, but also rules from other EU policies like e. g. environment and transport. As there is supposed to be a European consensus regarding guidelines on the European level they could serve as possible demands for national spatial planning.

▶ *Demand: Regarding guidelines of European importance for spatial planning*

Indicator 4: Elaborating spatial studies and conceptions on the European level

Elaborating studies and conceptions for spatial development of the EU territory is an important task of spatial planning on the European level. These studies are important to compare spatial development tendencies in the different national states and to find a consensus concerning development problems of European importance. Participating in these conceptual developments can be simplified for the member states, if they can rely on spatial development conceptions which already exist on the national level.

▶ *Demand: Developing national spatial development conceptions*

Additional demands arising from the participation in shaping spatial planning on the European level

With regards to the elaboration of studies on the European level as well the implementation of structural policy programmes it becomes obvious: all activities within European spatial planning can only be mastered by means of intensive co-operation processes between the member countries, partly involving local and regional

⁵ Printed in: Deutscher Bundestag 13. Wahlperiode: Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung - Bericht der Bundesregierung über die erzielten Ergebnisse und den Stand der Mitgliedstaatlichen Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Raumordnung innerhalb der Europäischen Union, Bundestagsdrucksache 13/1078 vom 6.4.1995.

authorities. The capability for international co-operation is therefore a fundamental principle of spatial planning on the European level to be provided by the member countries.

► *Demand: Ability for international co-operation*

Nevertheless it is to be born in mind that demands for national spatial planning based on spatial planning on the European level can not be an easy recipe for national spatial planning. It is more a basis that has to be completed by international and national aspects which are influencing spatial planning.⁶

These demands for national spatial planning could be arranged through a distinction in *organisational topics regarding spatial planning levels* and *spatial planning tasks and their implementation* (compare chart 1):

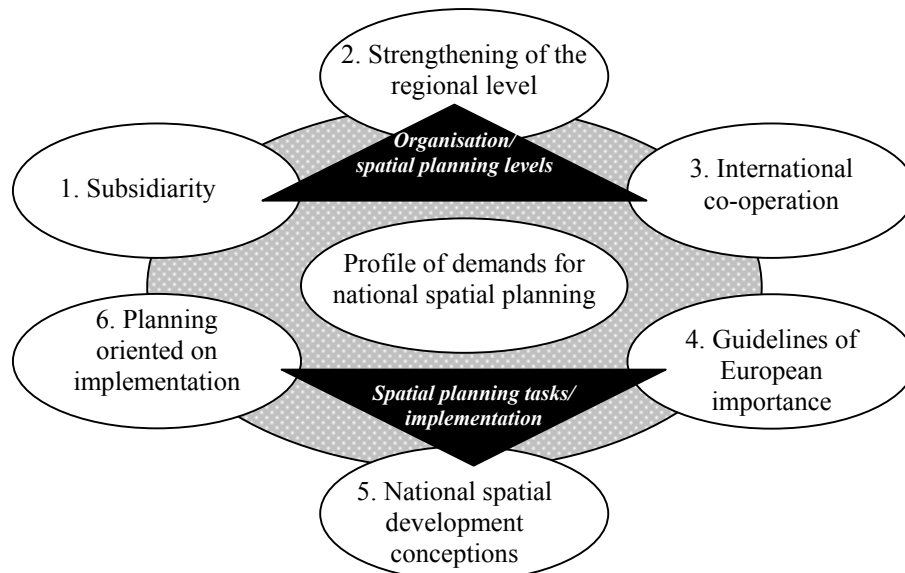
Organisational topics regarding spatial planning levels

1. *Subsidiarity*
2. *Strengthening of the regional level*
3. *Ability for international co-operation*

Spatial planning tasks and their implementation

4. *Regarding guidelines of European importance for spatial planning*
5. *Developing national spatial development conceptions*
6. *Planning oriented on implementation*

Chart 1: Profile of demands for national spatial planning based on spatial planning on the European level



Source: Developed by Pallagst 1998

⁶ Like e. g. sustainable development as an international principle.

2. Explanation of the demands for national spatial planning

Based on the previous ideas this chapter will explain the background of the demands as well as possible effects within national spatial planning. In addition to that they will be illustrated by examples from the member states during the presentation.

1. Subsidiarity

Background

Like it was already mentioned before, the principle of subsidiarity is of utmost importance on the European level. It guarantees the participation of the member countries as well as the regional and local entities in decision processes of European importance. Spatial planning on the European level is also based on the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore the levels under the supranational level, respectively the member countries, regions and communities have to be involved in the planning and discussion processes shaping the European territory. In this context the Leipzig principles characterise the principle of subsidiarity as the backbone of European spatial development conceptions.⁷

Possible effects in national spatial planning

As well as spatial development activities on the European level have to follow the principle of subsidiarity, this principle should be taken into account within national spatial planning. Spatial planning decisions should not only rely on the national level, but involve the levels underneath (such as “Länder”, regions, districts or communities) by means of a bottom up approach.

2. Strengthening of the regional level

Background

Strengthening of the regional level is based on EU structural policy which requires regional entities as a basis for funding. Furthermore in the year 1994 the Committee of the Regions was established as consulting body of regional entities at the European Commission. Strengthening the regional level is also supported by the European Charter of Regional Self Government⁸, which is including the member countries of the Council of Europe.

Possible effects in national spatial planning

Establishing administrative structures and planning entities on the regional level is an important presupposition for distributing the structural funds of the EU. For these regions it is necessary to develop planning conceptions and set national priorities of funding. Furthermore a strengthening of the regional level arises from accumulating spatial planning competencies on this level.

⁷ Cf. Deutscher Bundestag 13. Wahlperiode: Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung - Bericht der Bundesregierung über die erzielten Ergebnisse und den Stand der Mitgliedstaatlichen Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Raumordnung innerhalb der Europäischen Union, Bundestagsdrucksache 13/1078 vom 6.4.1995, p. 21.

⁸ Council of Europe: European Charter of Regional Self Government, Straßburg 1996.

In spite of this one has to take into account that there has never been a common understanding for the term “region” neither on the European level, nor between the member countries nor even within the member countries. Furthermore establishing nation-wide planning regions is in contrast to the need for flexible, problem oriented planning instruments based on collaborative structures.

3. Ability for international co-operation

Background

Crossborder co-operation and transnational co-operation are spatial planning strategies with a high emphasis on the implementation of planning and therefore of essential importance for spatial development. In this regard the need for solving common planning problems between two or more countries is growing. Crossborder co-operation as well as transnational co-operation are important spheres for testing co-operation processes and the exchange of knowledge about spatial planning between different countries. Joint projects and improved knowledge lead to a harmonisation of spatial planning systems and their instruments.

As spatial planning on the European level is based on the principle of subsidiarity the national states are responsible for its development. However the implementation is difficult because of different planning systems. Therefore a better co-ordination between the national states is necessary. The willingness to participate in European networks is an important precondition to achieve a better implementation of European spatial planning.

Possible effects

- The need for international co-operation causes a stronger perception of transnational and crossborder co-operation.
- This requires the transnational distribution of planning related information in a comparable form in order to co-ordinate spatial planning on all levels.
- Furthermore for the member states the demand arises to participate in European networks and organisations like e. g. Eurocities or the Study Programme on European Spatial Planning (SPESPAN).
- Further effects are agreements on crossborder co-operation and joint spatial planning conceptions between two or more member states.
- Hand in hand with the ability for international co-operation the consciousness for the problems and weaknesses of the national planning system rises with regards to transnational and crossborder co-operation.

4. Regarding guidelines of European importance for spatial planning

Background

The Leipzig principles as well as the policy options of the ESDP define spatial planning tasks on the European level which should be implemented within national spatial planning. Furthermore the environmental policy of the EU elaborated guidelines for national spatial planning like e. g. the FFH-guideline or the draft guideline for EIA for plans. The transport policy of the EU at the same time developed the conception of Transeuropean Networks (TEN) which are also relevant for spatial planning.

Possible effects

The topics of the Leipzig principles and the ESDP (polycentric settlement system, access to infrastructure and knowledge, management and development of the natural and cultural heritage) should be taken into account by national spatial planning policies. Furthermore the implementation of EU guidelines in national planning codes is necessary. Moreover tackling the policy of Transeuropean Networks within national spatial planning is necessary for international cohesion as well as competition.

5. Developing national spatial development conceptions

Background

Informal spatial planning conceptions on the European level are often elaborated as “building blocks” of conceptional ideas of the national states. Examples are the Trend Scenarios for Spatial Development of the European Continent and the ESDP. To facilitate the implementation of national spatial development on the European level it is necessary to already have conceptional ideas of spatial development of the national territory.

Furthermore in the frame of transnational and crossborder co-operation (e. g. by the Community Initiative INTERREG) it becomes more and more important for national states to formulate spatial development conceptions on the national level, which support the transnational exchange especially with the neighbouring countries.

The conceptional shape of the link between regional and supraregional level is also promoted by the fact that a platform of information and knowledge exchange should be provided between the national spatial planning bodies.

Possible effects

The consequence for national spatial planning is, that its significance within the planning system is strengthened. This affects the EU member states as well the central and eastern European countries that applied for a membership in the EU.

6. *Planning oriented on implementation*

Background

From a European point of view the orientation on implementation is based on the demands of EU Structural policy to support the implementation of projects and measures by financial means. Examples are the projects among the Community Initiative INTERREG for transnational and crossborder co-operation, where the possibilities for the implementation are one criterion for the approval of projects.

Possible effects

Planning oriented on implementation is shown by the movement from “plans” as results of planning processes to a planning culture oriented on projects. Within the whole planning process the implementation of the intended measures is prepared and accompanied with all relevant actors.

Once again it is to be emphasised, that the demands based on spatial planning on the European level- as explained at the beginning of the paper - on their own can not represent all the presuppositions which spatial planning on the national level has to fulfil. They can only reflect development tendencies for national spatial planning, which are influenced by spatial planning attempts on European level.

Because of the high abstraction of spatial planning on the European level, caused by the need of international consensus and the supranational measure, these demands have to be modified by national features which influence spatial planning (such as administrative conditions, legal frame, spatial and settlement structures and the existing planning system).

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