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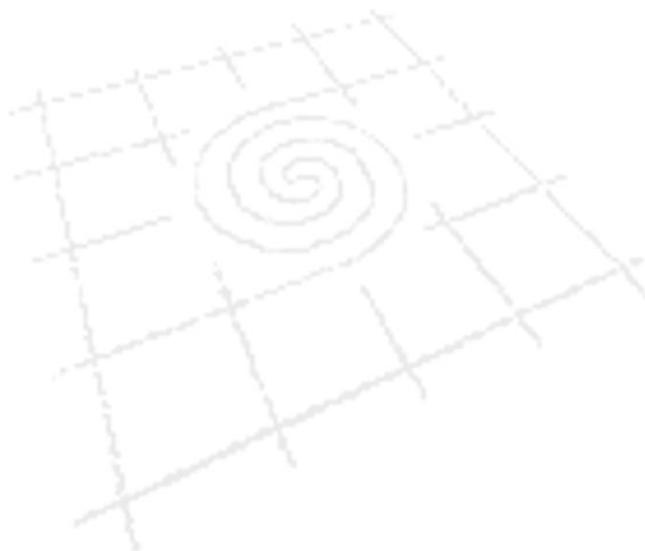
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## Strategic Spatial Planning in European City-Regions: Parallel Processes or Divergent Trajectories?

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## Strategic Spatial Planning in European City-Regions: Parallel Processes or Divergent Trajectories?

### *Abstract*

*Drawing on recent experiences of strategic spatial planning in two city-regions in Europe, the paper seeks to challenge dominant narratives of the emergence of strategic spatial planning as a uni-dimensional process of policy convergence. Recognising a need for fine-grained analysis of practices of spatial planning in diverse territorial and institutional contexts, the paper presents a framework for contextualised comparative analysis, identifying multiple levels of differentiation. The application of this comparative framework is subsequently illustrated with reference to the two city-regions of Dublin and Erfurt. The paper concludes with an outline of an agenda for further research.*

**Key words:** *Strategic spatial planning, city-regions, comparative analysis, territorial and institutional context*

### **1. Introduction**

Practices of spatial planning in Europe have borne witness to considerable challenges in recent decades as a consequence of changing policy priorities, heightened expectations and increased socio-economic and demographic disparities (Albrechts, 2004; Nadin, 2007; Schmidt, 2009). Recent decades have, however,

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also witnessed the emergence of new strategic approaches to spatial planning at local, regional, national and transnational scales, which have sought to broaden the scope and enhance the governance capacity of spatial planning in practice (Healey et al., 1997; Albrechts et al., 2003). For Faludi (2000) the purpose of strategic planning is to inform decision-making in practice, rather than to directly influence material outcomes (i.e. the object of *project* plans). From this perspective, strategic (spatial) planning is viewed as a continuous process, which provides a frame of reference for subsequent decisions and actors (Faludi, 2000, 303). Hopkins (2001) similarly provides a decision-centred instrumental rationale for strategic planning. He argues that planning may usefully inform future decision-making where decisions are interdependent, indivisible and irreversible and knowledge of the future is partial or incomplete (Hopkins, 2001, 5). The concept of strategic spatial planning places emphasis on the development of coordinated or integrated perspectives that transcend traditional sectoral policy divisions through a specific focus on the spatial impacts of sectoral policies (Albrechts et al., 2003; Salet et al. 2003a; Adams et al., 2006a).

Challenging an instrumentalist view of planning, a number of authors have stressed the role of values in strategic spatial planning. For Healey (1997) the concept of strategic spatial planning places particular emphasis on the development of approaches to policy-making where objectives and values relating to future sociospatial development within a territory or functional space are shaped, framed and negotiated as part of the strategy-making process. Albrechts (2004) similarly defines strategic spatial planning as a:

‘public-sector-led sociospatial process through which a vision, actions and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become’.

He argues that a concern for value rationality or substantive rationality is necessary to counteract an instrumentality approach where the future is extrapolated through an analysis of current trends (Albrechts, 2004, 750). From this perspective, strategic spatial planning, influenced by communicative planning theory, is identified as distinct from previous or traditional practice in regional and supra-local planning, particularly the rational comprehensive model (see also Adams, 2008; Davoudi and Strange, 2009).

Strategic spatial planning is, however, recognised as a highly ambiguous concept in planning theory and practice, ascribed different meanings and interpretations in different contexts (Sartorio, 2005).

The concept of a re-emergence or revival of strategic spatial planning in Europe since the 1990s is more specifically associated with the development of spatial planning policy and perspectives at the European scale. In particular the publication of a European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (Committee on Spatial Development, 1999) and the more recent adoption of the principle of territorial cohesion policy have served to highlight the significance of territorially differentiated perspectives on processes of social and economic development in the context of the European Union (CEC, 2008; Faludi, 2007a, b, and 2010). The emergence of European spatial planning and territorial cohesion policy has also served to highlight the need for the territorial integration of European sectoral policies, in light of increased evidence and concern regarding the differentiated and at times contradictory impact of European Union sectoral policies and directives in different territorial contexts (Schout and Jordan, 2007).

This paper further explores the concept of strategic spatial planning and its associated practices in different institutional, cultural and territorial contexts. In particular the paper examines the extent to which recent developments in spatial planning policy and practice characterised by a shift towards strategic thinking and communicative modes of practice, reflect parallel processes or divergent trajectories of change. Section 2 below reviews the existing literature on the role of institutional, cultural and territorial context on spatial planning in Europe. Two case studies of strategic spatial planning in practice are subsequently presented in Section 3. The case studies serve to illustrate contrasting experiences of spatial strategy-making and planning policy reform in two European city-regions (Dublin, Ireland and Erfurt, Germany). Drawing on the case studies and review of the literature a framework for contextualised comparative analysis of spatial planning in European city-regions is presented in Section 4. Section 5 closes the paper with general conclusions and the outline of an agenda for further research.

## 2. Spatial Planning in Comparative Perspective

A process of *Europeanisation* has been identified as principles of spatial planning with a long tradition in a number of central European countries, including the Netherlands, France and Germany have become institutionalised and adopted in European regional and territorial policy discourse largely through European Union projects and initiatives (Faludi, 2004; Jensen and Richardson, 2004; Kunzmann, 2006). Within this context ‘European spatial planning’ is viewed as a hybrid model of spatial planning, borrowing extensively from particular aspects of German *Raumplanung*, French *le aménagement du territoire* and Dutch *ruimtelijke ordening* (Faludi, 2004). For Böhme and Waterhout (2008) the Europeanisation of spatial planning may be viewed as a three-fold process encompassing:

1. The emergence of ‘planning for Europe’ through the preparation of the ESDP and the ongoing institutionalisation of territorial cohesion and spatial development policy;
2. The influence of ‘planning for Europe’ on spatial planning systems, policies and practices within EU member states – ‘planning in Europe’;
3. The influence of European sectoral policies and European integration on ‘planning in Europe’.

(Source: adapted from Böhme and Waterhout, 2008, 243; Dühr et al., 2010, 360).

It is significant to note that the ‘reorientation’ of national spatial development policies was explicitly recognised as a core component of the application of the ESDP, while the need for a ‘Europeanisation of state, regional and urban planning’ was seen to be increasingly evident (CEC, 1999, 45; in: Sykes, 2008, 538).

Lloyd and Peel (2005, 313) note, however, that the interpretation and translation of European spatial planning in different contexts has strongly ‘national’ characteristics, reflecting a diversity of traditions,

policy trajectories, institutional arrangements and political concerns. Drawing extensively on comparative planning, policy science and European integration literatures, Sykes (2008) further stresses the importance of context in research on spatial planning in Europe and more specifically on the application of the ESDP in national and sub-national territorial contexts. He notes that a contextual and comparative approach reflects both a long-standing emphasis in comparative planning studies on the significance of historical, cultural and planning contexts and a more recent focus on 'contextualism' in post-positivist and in particular social constructivist approaches to policy analysis (2008, 552).

The *Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* published by the European Commission (CEC, 1997) made explicit reference to the diversity of planning traditions in Europe, arising from 'historical and cultural conditions, geographical and land-use patterns, the constitutional, administrative and legal framework, levels of urban and economic development, and political and ideological aspirations' (CEC, 1997, 34). It was further noted that the 'use and meaning' of particular concepts and terminology employed in different contexts may reflect territorially specific 'legal, socio-economic, political and cultural forces' (CEC, 1997, 23; see also Fabbro and Haselsberger, 2009). The typology of 'ideal-types' produced by the *Compendium*, however, is framed in terms of an anticipated process of policy convergence. In particular, the planning systems of the UK and Ireland are identified as moving away from the land-use regulation ideal-type towards the comprehensive-integrated model of spatial planning, most strongly associated with the planning systems of Germany and the Netherlands. It may be argued, however, that the capacity and potential of strategic spatial planning initiatives in countries such as the UK and Ireland differ significantly from the ideal of comprehensive integrated planning or its practical manifestations in the Netherlands, Germany or elsewhere. In this context, Albrechts et al. (2003) have specifically argued for the need for national and sub-national case studies to assess the power of strategic planning initiatives to substantively shape regulatory practices, budget allocations, project proposals and spatial development trajectories in practice.

More recently the concept of 'planning culture' has been employed to refer to the 'norms, values and principles that underlie planning practice' (Dühr et al., 2010, 375). For Friedmann (2005, 184) planning culture refers specifically to variations in the practice and interpretation of spatial planning in particular contexts: 'the ways, both formal and informal, that spatial planning in a given multi-national, region, country or city is conceived, institutionalised and enacted'. Knieling and Othengrafen (2009, xxiv) introducing their recent comparative study of planning cultures in Europe place particular stress on beliefs, values and concepts of justice in addition to political and legal systems and structures of governance as defining characteristics of distinct planning cultures.

A number of studies have, furthermore pointed to a diversity of factors behind recent shifts in spatial planning policy and practice, challenging an exclusive focus on the influence of European Union policy and the application of the ESDP. Albrechts (2004) has indentified an increased recognition of the shortcomings of traditional approaches and increased environmental awareness as critical drivers leading to shifts in spatial planning practice in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe. Nadin (2007) identifies pragmatic concerns regarding the performance and transparency of the existing planning system as significant in providing support for the concept of the 'new spatial planning' in the UK. Harris and Hooper (2004) point to concerns regarding the coordination of the spatial impacts of a range of sectoral policies as one of the key drivers behind a shift to spatial strategy-making in the context of the Wales Spatial Plan.

In more general terms, a number of authors have associated the recent emergence or revival of strategic approaches to spatial planning in Europe to shifts in the broader institutional and governance landscape. In particular, a renewed focus on spatial planning as a strategic policy instrument is attributed to an increased need for consensus-based policy coordination in the context of institutional fragmentation and increasingly complex intergovernmental relationships (Healey et al., 2002; Salet and Faludi, 2000; Salet et al., 2003). Although the diversity of state-society relations and political-administrative structures and traditions in Europe is explicitly acknowledged, it is argued that a number of key trends associated with

the decline of national welfare states since the 1980s have led to a profound ‘institutional transformation’ common to all European cities. In particular, economic globalisation and liberalisation and a restructuring of intergovernmental relationships are identified as critical drivers of institutional and governance transformation at the metropolitan or regional scale. It is evident that variations in the pace, scale and intensity of institutional shifts associated with market liberalisation and globalisation on the one hand and changing intergovernmental relationships on the other may have a very significant influence on emergent policy discourses and practices of spatial planning in different territorial contexts across Europe. The particular character of the ‘new spatial planning’ in the UK for example has been strongly influenced both by ‘New Labour’ political priorities and a rescaling of territorial governance relations through political and administrative devolution in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2006; Haughton et al., 2009).

It is further evident that recent innovations and developments in spatial planning have also been strongly influenced and shaped by changing socio-economic development patterns and trends. The recent development and ongoing revision and updating of a comprehensive ‘evidence base’ on European spatial development patterns and future potentials through the ESPON programmes and related research initiatives has served to provide insights into the principal challenges and opportunities facing the European territory (ESPON, 2010; Faludi, 2008; Dühr et al., 2010). Perhaps more significantly, however, this European-wide research provides substantive, empirical support for the concept of ‘territorial diversity’ as articulated in Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and related European policy documents (CEC, 2008). The systematic analysis of indicators, processes and scenarios of change across European cities and regions, while undoubtedly part of a process of codification and social construction of the European space in accordance with particular political and policy agendas (see Jensen and Richardson, 2004; Dabinett and Richardson, 2005) also highlights the extent to which spatial development patterns and prospects differ across Europe and the extent to which these differences shape the parameters for action in terms of spatial planning and territorial cohesion policy.

The emergent practices of spatial planning in the Eastern European member states of the EU face significant challenges associated with post-socialist transformation including increased socio-spatial disparities between cities and regions at a range of geographical scales (Adams, 2008). Many cities in Germany and neighbouring states have furthermore faced considerable challenges in responding to population and economic decline, requiring a fundamental rethink of the role of spatial planning in the context of zero or negative growth (Wiechmann, 2008). In contrast, recent developments in spatial planning policy in the Republic of Ireland and Spain in particular have occurred against the background of a very rapid pace of development and population expansion, providing a very real test of the capacity of the planning system to effectively steer or control the spatial distribution, scale and intensity of development (Convery et al., 2006; Kitchin et al., 2010; Catalan et al., 2008; Maldonado, 2003; European Environment Agency, 2006).

The case studies below of strategic spatial planning in the Dublin and Erfurt city-regions illustrate the relationship between innovation and reform in spatial planning policy and practices and socio-spatial context in the form of the economic and demographic challenges and opportunities. Whereas the experience of spatial planning in the Dublin city-region has been one of significant policy reform in the face of dynamic market-led development conditions, strategic approaches to spatial planning in the Erfurt city-region have emerged in response to the lack of capacity of the existing statutory systems to effectively respond to current challenges of economic decline and demographic aging. The case studies are thus characterised by significant contrasts and consequently serve to illustrate the diversity of experience of city-regional spatial planning practice in Europe.

### **3. Spatial Planning in Two European City-Regions**

The following Sections 3.1 and 3.2 focus on the illustration and analysis of spatial planning practices in both case studies, Dublin and Erfurt city-regions. In Section 3.3, a critical discussion of both cases is delivered from both a national and European comparative perspective.

#### **3.1 Dublin City-Region Case Study**

##### **Introduction**

Recent developments in planning policy in Ireland may be characterised in terms of a shift towards a more strategic approach to spatial planning. Legislative and policy initiatives introduced since the mid-1990s have broadened the scope of planning policy from a narrow focus on land-use regulation and associated economic development objectives to embrace concerns of sustainable development and balanced regional development in a strategic manner (Bannon, 2004). A national sustainable development strategy published in 1997 first outlined this new strategic role for planning policy, recognising the potential for spatial planning strategies to provide mechanisms for policy coordination in a spatial and environmental context (Government of Ireland, 1997; Walsh, J., 2009). The concept of sustainable development thus provided the rationale for the introduction of a spatial planning hierarchy, whereby local interests and development objectives would need to be balanced against national and regional spatial development objectives. New primary legislation, governing all aspects of planning policy, introduced in 2000<sup>3</sup>, subsequently made provision for the introduction of a hierarchy of spatial plans including Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), and statutory Development Plans and Local Area Plans at the sub-regional and local scales. Subsequently in 2002 a National Spatial Strategy (NSS, DELG 2002) was published,

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<sup>3</sup> Planning and Development Act, 2000.

informed by key concepts of balanced spatial development and polycentric urban development derived from European initiatives in strategic spatial planning (Walsh, J., 2009; Davoudi and Wishardt, 2005). Although the status of County/City Development Plans as the principal statement of planning policy, informing development control decisions at the Local Authority level has not diminished, the NSS and RPGs have provided a strategic framework for planning policy at national and regional scales. The NSS, in particular, as a national statement of spatial development objectives with a twenty year time horizon, has effectively provided a spatial dimension to other government policies, informing the regional allocation of public investment programmes through the National Development Plan process (Walsh, J., 2009).

### **Socio-economic context**

The Dublin city-region has experienced rapid economic growth and demographic expansion from the mid – 1990s until 2007. High in-migration and natural increase of population, together with trends of declining household size contributed to a very high demand for residential, commercial and infrastructural development within the Dublin city-region (see for example Breathnach, 1998; Ellis and Kim, 2001; Convery et al., 2006). Official statistics indicate that over one third of the existing national housing stock was built in the 1998-2008 period (DEHLG, 2009). The onset of economic recession and the collapse of the property market within the Dublin city-region since 2007 have led to a sharp slowdown in rates of urban development and may lead to a shift to net out-migration over time. Official population projections however, point to continued high rates of population increase, however, with a projected increase of 17.1% for the Greater Dublin Area over the period 2010-2022 (DRA and MERA, 2010). The Greater Dublin Area (GDA) comprises two NUTS III Regions and seven Local Authority areas (counties) and corresponds approximately to the functional area of the Dublin city-region. The population of the GDA in 2006 was almost 1.2 million following an increase of 18% between 1996 and 2006 (Walsh, C., 2009). The total area of the GDA is approximately 7,810 sq. km. Artificial surfaces in the GDA (urbanised areas)

expanded from approximately 479 square kilometres in 1990 to 710 sq. km in 2006, an increase of 48.1% (McInerney and Walsh, 2009).

A number of previous studies have examined the spatial implications of the Celtic Tiger period of accelerated economic growth, specifically in relation to the Dublin city-region. Williams and Shiels (1998, 2000, 2002) identify an increased concentration of development and economic growth in the Dublin and Mid-East Regions since the mid-1990s, associated with a sectoral shift towards high technology and high-skill industries (see also Breathnach, 1998). The spatial expansion of the functional labour market area of the Dublin city-region is further characterised in terms of the emergence of ‘Outer Leinster’<sup>4</sup> as a location for residential development marketed towards people employed in Dublin. It is argued that residential development has ‘leap-frogged’ established dormitory towns in the Greater Dublin Area due to a shortage of housing supply within the Dublin Region in particular and significant house-price differentials between the GDA and other regions (Williams and Shiels, 2002; Williams et al., 2007).

For Scott et al (2006) ‘urban sprawl and dispersed patterns of settlement growth with long-distance commuting’ are established as the characteristic features of settlement structure within the GDA (see also Williams and Sheils, 2002). A European Environment Agency study published in 2006 found Dublin to be a worst-case scenario of urban sprawl in Europe (EEA, 2006)<sup>5</sup>. The EEA study, however, examined patterns of land-use change only and did not explicitly examine the demographic drivers of urban growth or the functional relationships between areas of settlement growth and traditional urban areas within a city-region.

### **A Regional Scale Spatial Planning Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area**

Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (SPGs) were prepared in 1999, on behalf of the constituent local and Regional Authorities of the GDA and in conjunction with the central government

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Outer Leinster’ is understood as the eight counties surrounding the Greater Dublin Area, within the traditional province of Leinster.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the published European Environment Agency does not in fact, include reference to Dublin as a worst case scenario. This characterisation emerged from a media interview with the lead author at time of publication (McDonald, 2006).

Department of the Environment and Local Government (Brady Shipman Martin, 1999). The Guidelines preceded the legislative provisions of the 2000 Planning and Development Act and relied significantly on the initiative and collaborative efforts of the managers (chief executive officers) of the Local Authorities within the region.

They sought to provide firstly a strategic policy framework for spatial coordination between the Local Authorities within the city-region in matters of spatial planning and secondly a mechanism for integration between transport and land-use planning at the regional scale. The Guidelines specifically sought to plan for a period of projected rapid growth and development with a twelve year time horizon. The settlement strategy of the SPGs sought to reduce ‘urban sprawl’ and contain demand for private transport in particular. The strategy proposed to consolidate urban development within a designated Dublin Metropolitan Area and a number of specified development centres within the surrounding the Hinterland Area (see Figure 1). The objectives of the SPGs thus focussed on the concentration of future growth within designated development areas. Specifically the SPGs provided distinct spatial development strategies for the built up area of Dublin and its immediate environs (termed the Metropolitan Area) and the remaining ‘Hinterland Area’ (SPGs 1999, 84). Nine existing urban settlements were designated as primary and secondary development centres within the Hinterland Area. The strategy sought to concentrate future population growth and urban development within the Metropolitan Area and the designated development centres in the Hinterland Area.

The SPGs envisaged that the designated development centres within the Hinterland Area would expand to achieve a certain level of critical mass to become self-sufficient in the long-term with minimal commuting to the Metropolitan Area. It was recognised, however, that significant levels of commuting would occur from these urban centres to the Metropolitan Area in the short and medium-term. As a consequence the importance of public transport links to Dublin city was stressed. The Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area were prepared as an informal strategy, responding to a recognised need for a metropolitan or city-regional perspective to guide and coordinate the actions of Local

Authorities and infrastructure and service providers within the city-region.

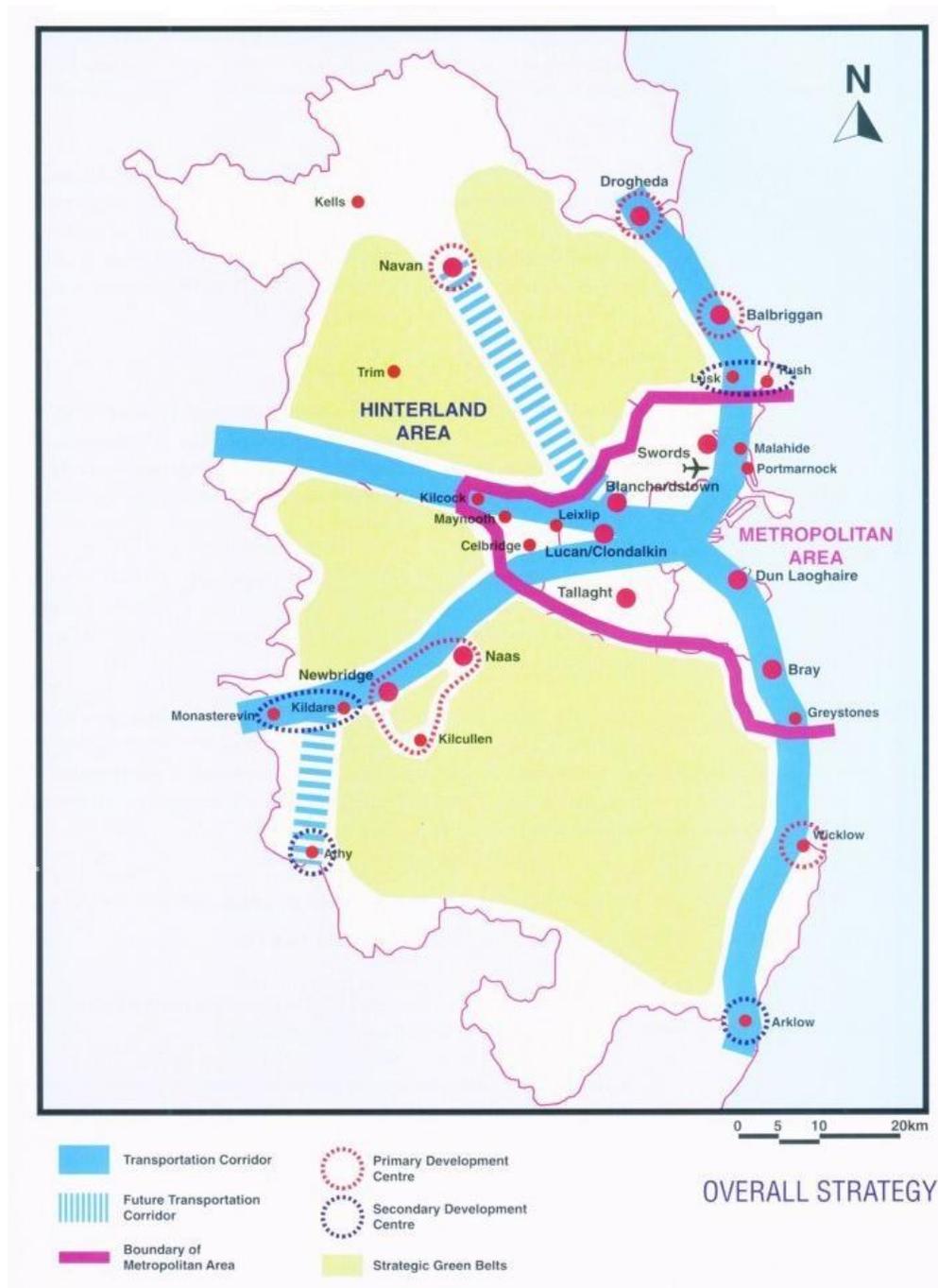


Fig.1: Strategic Planning Guidelines Settlement Strategy (Source: Brady, Shipman Martin et al., 1999, ix).

During the preparation of the SPGs, a considerable emphasis was placed on consultation and negotiation among the Local Authorities within both the Dublin and Mid-East Regions. Senior management of each Local Authority were represented on the steering committee governing the strategy preparation process while a technical committee comprising planning officials and engineers from each Local Authority ensured the policy principles and spatial development perspective adopted by the SPGs reflected the thinking and practice of the professional staff of the Local Authorities. The adoption of the SPGs subsequently, required engagement with the elected members of the local and Regional Authorities. The consultants commissioned to draft the strategy were the lead authors of the final document and facilitated the process of strategy-making and consultation. The informal or non-statutory status of the SPGs ensured that the process of strategy-making centred on the development of institutional and political support for a strategy that was perceived to reflect the collective spatial development priorities and objectives of the constituent Local Authorities within the Greater Dublin Area. In practice, experience with previous regional planning initiatives may have led some Local Authority officials and elected members to have low expectations in relation to the extent to which such an informal strategy would influence Local Authority decision-making at the local scale and spatial development practice. In this context, it is possible that some local councillors in particular, may not have engaged fully with the content and potential implications of the proposed spatial strategy at the time of preparation.

The Strategic Planning Guidelines, subsequently, however, became part of the statutory planning system with introduction of revised primary legislation in 2000 (Planning and Development Act, 2000). More significantly the spatial strategy adopted by the SPGs served to inform the preparation and policy direction of the National Spatial Strategy published in 2002 (DELG, 2002) and became the model for the preparation of statutory Regional Planning Guidelines adopted by each of the eight Regions in the state in 2004. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (RPGs, Dublin Regional Authority and Mid-East Regional Authority, 2004) endorsed the spatial development strategy of the SPGs with minor revisions to the boundary of the Metropolitan Area and classification of development centres. A

statutory review of the Regional Planning Guidelines to be completed in 2010 indicates continued institutional and political support for the spatial strategy of the RPGs, notwithstanding considerable evidence of divergence between the spatial development patterns and the strategic objectives of the regional planning strategy (Dublin Regional Authority and Mid-East Regional Authority, 2010). The institutional embedding and periodic official reaffirmation of the core spatial development strategy of the SPGs through the RPGs process points to the significant ‘regenerative capacity’ of the original 1999 strategy, to employ the terminology of Mastop and Faludi (1997). It may be argued that the spatial strategy of the SPGs has become part of the ‘planning doctrine’ for the Greater Dublin Area (Faludi, 2000).

Despite the continuity of key concepts, the source of legitimating authority for the regional-scale spatial strategies has altered significantly over time. Whereas the SPGs derived their authority and governance capacity through a process of consultation among the constituent Local Authorities, the preparation of the Regional Planning Guidelines was framed within the context of the implementing national policy and the National Spatial Strategy in particular. The embedding of the regional planning process within the statutory planning system thus facilitated a rescaling of planning policy formulation and governance from the local to the national scale. In practice Local Authorities are required to have regard for the RPGS in the preparation of statutory spatial plans at the local level (City and County Development Plans). There is no requirement, however, for Local Authority spatial plans to be consistent with the RPGs.

The capacity of the planning system to steer the spatial distribution of development at the regional scale towards the Metropolitan Area and growth centres, designated in the S/RPGs has been relatively weak however (Convery et al., 2006; Scott et al., 2006; Williams and Shiels, 2002). In practice, planning policy decisions at the local scale have largely facilitated market-led development informed by a competitive politics of place promoted by political decision-makers, representing individual localities rather than the strategic governance priorities set out in the Strategic/Regional Planning Guidelines. In legislative terms the local planning authorities, with primary responsibility for spatial planning must ‘have regard to’ the

S/RPGs in the making of their Development Plans but these sub-regional plans are not required to be consistent with the settlement strategy of the S/RPGs.

Williams and Shiels (2002) point to an 'absence of serious funding commitments or proposals for implementation and identify a number of planning proposals by Local Authorities which were inconsistent with the SPGs. Williams (2006) further notes that the spatial form of recent development does not conform to settlement strategy of the RPGs. Convery et al. (2006) contend that the 'largely voluntary' nature of the Regional Planning Guidelines and National Spatial Strategy may hinder prospects for effective implementation and suggest the potential for strengthening the regional tier of governance. These studies have identified a significant divergence between the settlement strategy of the S/RPGs and development patterns over the years following the publication of the SPGs and subsequently RPGs. It may be argued that the governance capacity of the Strategic Planning Guidelines has been constrained by a legacy of past planning policy decisions, including a tendency towards zoning significantly more land than required for development, reducing the capacity of spatial plans to provide a reliable indicator of future development trends at the sub-regional scale.

### **3.2 Erfurt City-Region Case Study**

#### **Introduction**

Within the last two decades, both international and European environmental and spatial policy developments have impacted significantly on the overall planning policy framework in Germany. Examples for these policy developments are the establishment of the common principle of sustainable (urban/spatial) development, and various European regulations and the corresponding need for implementing directives in fields such as Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental

Assessment, and access to environmental information.<sup>6</sup> Thus, a series of significant amendments have been incorporated in the German federal planning legislation framework, namely the amendments in 1998 (> incorporation of principle of sustainable development), 2004 (> implementation of SEA Directive) and in 2007 (> introduction of new kind of local land use plans for innercity developments).

The new regulatory requirements have an impact on existing procedural, instrumental and institutional frameworks of spatial planning in Germany: regional and local planning bodies face the need for further promoting strategic approaches and for establishing inter-institutional partnerships and associations in order to implement strategic spatial development goals at the (city-) regional scale.

Similar to the above-described situation in Ireland, the German federal government published a national sustainable development strategy in 2002. This strategy is meant to shape various sorts of regional and local policies and highlights, for example, the role of regional and land use planning to achieve the goal of reducing the use of previously undeveloped (greenfield) land. In particular, the strategy aims at promoting more sustainable land use policies in the context of future residential developments (The Federal Government, 2002). Thus, regional and local planning bodies are especially required to develop sustainable responses to ongoing structural demographic shifts and (socio-economic) shrinking processes in many German regions. The overall goal is a significant reduction of the daily use of greenfield land for residential and transport purposes (> 129 hectares per day in 2000; aim for 2020 is 30 hectares per day only). However, the progress report on the national sustainability strategy (The Federal Government, 2008) states that the achievement of the so-called ‘30 ha goal’ is at major risk. Between 1992 and 2006, the increase in use of greenfield land for housing and transport amounted to 120 hectares per day. Between 2003 and 2006, 113 hectares of greenfield sites were used. Consequently, a lot more effort is still needed in order to reverse this trend.

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<sup>6</sup> For Environmental Impact Assessment see EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), amended by Directives 97/11/EC, 2003/35/EC, and 2009/31/EC; for Strategic Environmental Assessment see SEA Directive 2001/42/EC; for Public Access to Environmental Information see Directive 2003/4/EC ([http://ec.europa.eu/legislation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/legislation/index_en.htm), accessed 24/06/2010).

Related recommendations focus on the development of more effective measurements and instruments in order to implement national policy goals at all spatial scales. Furthermore, strategies for an effective reduction of greenfield developments, especially in rural areas adjacent to large urban areas are required. In this context, an important amendment was incorporated in the federal planning code in 2007: The emphasis here is on the use of brownfield sites for urban development through the introduction of a new planning instrument: A special type of local land use plans (see § 13a BauGB) is targeted to provide an effective planning basis for inner-city developments (p. 145). In addition, further promotion of applied urban development and land use research activities and networks such as the ‘Research for the Reduction of Land Consumption and for Sustainable Land Management’ (REFINA, released in 2004) can be highlighted. These initiatives emphasise cross-sectoral approaches, knowledge transfer, innovative information and communication strategies, and the general promotion of public awareness of the topic of land use for urban development. Overall, it can be concluded that continuous federal effort is needed to achieve the ‘30 ha goal’. In particular, the German Länder, regions and municipalities play a crucial role in its further promotion through the development of sustainable land use planning and management policies.

At the federal level, a number of new concepts and policy approaches to spatial development in Germany have been issued by the ‘Standing Conference of Federal and State Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning’ (German acronym: *MKRO*) in 2006 (see BBR/BMVBS, 2006). Related documents provide a federal policy framework for spatial development and replace the former ‘Spatial Planning Policy Guidelines and Spatial Planning Policy Framework for Action’ (1992/1993). The new approaches address important socio-economic challenges by means of the development of (rather pragmatic) policy strategies. The three new central concepts are

- ‘Growth and Innovation’, which refers to the definition of so-called ‘European Metropolitan Regions’ as identified in the European Union’s Lisbon Strategy in 2000,

- ‘Maintaining Essential Services’, also described as safeguarding of services of public interest such health care and education infrastructure, and
- ‘Saving Resources, Designing Cultural Landscapes’, which broadly refers to the context of conservation of natural resources, and future shaping of cultural landscapes.

However, Staats (2006, 11f.) argues that further effort is needed to achieve a better integration of sectoral policies such as transport, infrastructure and landscape planning. In addition, he demands a more effective involvement of social groups, stakeholders and agencies. Thus, a stronger consensus about priorities and goals of spatial development and better integration of different spatial planning instruments at various scales is necessary. Figure 2 provides an overview of the current German system of spatial planning from the federal/national scale to the local scale.

**SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEM**



Fig. 2: German System of Spatial Planning – An Overview (Source: BBR/BMVBS, 2006, 7).

The above described developments in planning legislation and corresponding changes to the overall planning policy framework in Germany impact significantly on regional and local planning contexts. For

example, Erfurt city-region is one of the regions in Eastern Germany that has experienced the consequences of dramatic spatial and socio-economic shifts and now faces huge pressures on regional and local planning bodies and agencies. The latter are urged to provide robust governance capacity and structures by the development of effective development strategies and sound planning policies that meet the new regulatory requirements as well as those derived from very practical tasks on site.

### **Socio-economic context**

The City of Erfurt represents the centre of the planning region ‘Mid-Thuringia’, and it also marks the administrative centre and capital of the Free State of Thuringia. The sixteen German federal states define so-called planning regions within their territory. These planning regions are responsible for the preparation of regional plans and development strategies for their sub-territories.<sup>7</sup> The Free State of Thuringia, for example, consists of four independent planning regions, i.e. North, Mid, East and Southwest Thuringia (TMBLM, 2009a). The State Development Plan (approved and published in 2004) provides overall planning guidance in terms of objectives and principles of spatial structure, settlement and ‘central places’, and transportation network for the territory of the Federal State and, thus, it covers all four planning regions (see Figure 3).

‘Mid-Thuringia’ has a total area of approx. 3,740 km<sup>2</sup> and its approximately 685,000 inhabitants represent 30% of the population of the Free State as a whole (dated 31 December 2007 (TMBLM, 2009a)).<sup>8</sup> The current formal regional plan (approved in 1999) is the core instrument of regional planning and refines the principles and goals of the state development programme. It is intended to provide a link between spatial planning at the state scale and the subsequent local scale. The regional plan focuses on issues such as the promotion of sustainable economic development, the provision of adequate educational, cultural and

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<sup>7</sup> In Germany, a traditional and long-established system of formal regional and local planning procedures and instruments is in place. At the level of the ‘Bundesländer’ (= Federal States), there exists a two-tier system of regional planning: With regard to planning for the territory of a federal state as a whole, the so-called ‘Landesentwicklungsplan’ or ‘Landesentwicklungsprogramm’ (= state development plan or programme) provides guidance for the spatial structure of the state in general. At the level of the so-called Planning Regions, the state development programme is specified by means of regional plans and regional development strategies (Pahl-Weber and Henckel, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See also Ministry of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure (= ‘Thüringer Innenministerium’) (ed.), ‘Regionaler Raumordnungsplan Mittelthüringen’. Thüringer Staatsanzeiger, Beilage zu Nr. 40/1999. 9. Jahrgang. *In German*.

transport infrastructure, and the further development of sustainable tourism in the historic cities and towns of the regions.

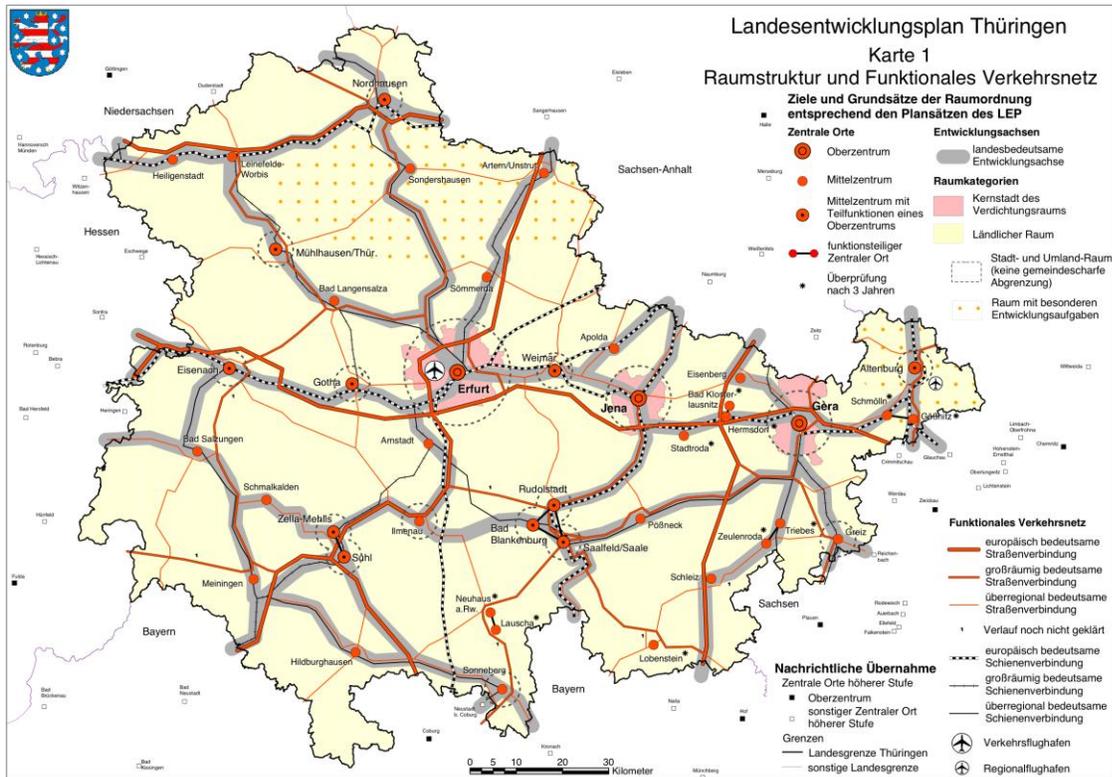


Fig. 3: State Development Plan Thuringia (Source: Thüringer Minister für Bau, Landesentwicklung und Verkehr, <http://www.thueringen.de/de/tmblv/rolp/plaene/content.html>, accessed 03/09/2010).

The City of Erfurt itself has experienced a significant population decline between 1990 and 2002 (from 224,073 inhabitants in 1990 to 196,517 inhabitants in 2002 (Erfurt, 2007)). Both economic migrations towards Western Germany and exceptionally low birth rates after 1990 are the main reasons for this development (Allin, 2001). Between 2002 and 2006, Erfurt's population was recovering and, in 2006, more than 202,000 people were living in Erfurt (TLS, 2007). However, recent population projections for the planning region 'Mid-Thuringia' indicate a further population decline of 6-8% until 2020 (RPGMT, 2010). This development is accompanied by the trend of a significantly aging population (TLS, 2007). With regard to economic development trends in the city-region, a moderate growth of the so-called BIP

(‘Bruttoinlandsprodukt’ = Gross Domestic Income, equivalent to GDP) with annual growth rates between 0.5% and 4.1% between 1998 and 2008 were recorded at the federal state level (TLS, 2009). However, a constantly high unemployment rate of about 14% represents one of the major (social and economic) challenges within Erfurt city-region (Erfurt, 2008). Thus, present socio-economic development trends within the city-region require urgent action and integrated spatial planning and cross-sectoral policy approaches to cope with the corresponding challenges and general conditions of shrinking.

### **A Regional Scale Spatial Planning Vision/Strategy for the Erfurt City-Region**

In the region of ‘Mid-Thuringia’ (as in most German planning regions), the traditional formal regional plan is accompanied by a series of informal regional development and regional management strategies. Related initiatives and policies aim at an improved coordination and implementation of regional development goals. To this end, they engage a wide range of regional and local stakeholders across departments, organisations, and social backgrounds (TMBLM, 2009c). Generally, these informal structures are based on the joint agreement to implement an integrated Regional Development Concept (in German: ‘Regionale Entwicklungskonzepte’ (REK)). These concepts again highlight the particular development potentials of a region, emphasise synergistic effects and, in addition, outline a number of specific regional and sub-regional development projects and corresponding action plans with a short and/or medium term perspective (TMBLM, 2009c).

Currently, a total of 41 Regional Development Concepts exist all across Thuringia. They are managed by an inter-ministerial task force supervising their general consistency with the formal Regional Development Plans (TMBLM, 2009b). For example, Erfurt City Council collaborates with the villages of Alperstedt and Nöda (both situated towards the north of Erfurt) to develop a regional development concept called ‘Erfurter Seen’ (= Lakes of Erfurt). The concept focuses on a bundle of actions and projects aiming at the promotion of regional recreation and tourism infrastructure in combination with the

implementation of sustainable economic development strategies (AG Erfurter Seen, 2009). The overall ‘Leitbild’ of the concept emphasises the regeneration and development of the region from a former heavily industrialised one to a ‘landscape park’ with outstanding recreation facilities and amenities providing a high quality of life for both residents and visitors.

Further to this, planning and coordination of spatial development at the sub-regional level in Thuringia is supported by so-called strategic ‘Städtekooperationen’ (= City Networks). They can be characterised as voluntary city-to-city cooperations in order to enhance sustainable economic competitiveness by bundling of resources and strategic task sharing (TMBLM, 2009d).

In addition to this, another interesting approach to the development of more effective and sustainable regional development and regeneration strategies is the project-based concept of so-called ‘Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung (MORO)’ (in English: Best Practice Examples of Regional Spatial Development). In Thuringia, corresponding initiatives that integrate both regional and local planning authorities focus on the further promotion of innovative land use planning and management policies. They aim at high quality housing developments within the overall context of regional shrinking processes. These developments are required to be integrated in an overall framework of regional regeneration policies and partnerships. The goal is to develop coordinated strategies that are accepted by all involved stakeholders. In addition, the strategies provide appropriate instruments for implementation that can also serve as a basis for revision and future amendments of (oftentimes outdated and, thus, rather ineffective) formal regional planning policies. For example, the formal regional plan – as most of its kind – is still based on the traditional concept of ‘Central Place Theory’. Although meanwhile strongly criticised by both planning theorists and practitioners, this theory still represents the core rationale and, thus, one of the main fundamental principles of most regional plans and corresponding policies across Germany.

### 3.3 Discussion of Case Studies

In the *Dublin city-region*, a significant divergence is evident between the strategic policy objectives of the S/RPGs and spatial development patterns over the period since their initial adoption in 1999. This lack of conformance reflects the limited capacity of statutory spatial plans in the Irish planning system to reduce uncertainty in relation to the spatial distribution of development. It may be argued, however, that the capacity to guide the spatial distribution of development in the Dublin city-region was particularly limited in the dynamic market-led development context of the Celtic Tiger period of rapid economic growth and property development. Recent policy and institutional developments point to the emergence of an increasingly ‘plan-led’ system, where Local Authority spatial plans are prepared within the context of strategic planning policies and guidelines produced at national and regional scales. The capacity for strategic spatial planning in practice, however, continues to be constrained by a legacy of excessive zoning of land for residential development and a dominant governance culture characterised by institutional fragmentation and competition between Local Authorities for commercial investment and large-scale developments. In institutional terms, however, the introduction of the regional-scale spatial planning strategies may be viewed as part of a longer-term process of institutional change, involving the application of strategic spatial planning principles and requiring a shift in the established paradigms, procedures and the prevailing expectations of policy-makers, professional planners and political decision-makers.

Although the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area have become part of the statutory planning system, they constitute non-binding statements of strategy which seek to inform spatial development decision-making by Local Authorities, other public sector actors and private development interests. The RPGs are framed in the context of implementing the National Spatial Strategy but their application in practice continues to depend on the capacity of the regional planning process to provide a framework for coordination and consensus-building among local scale actors with statutory responsibility for development control and the regulation of land-use in practice. From this perspective the formal or

informal status of the regional planning strategies may be viewed as less important than the capacity of the strategic planning process to provide a framework for the institutional capacity building, coordination and collaboration among actors in spatial development at the local, regional and national scales of governance. The performance of such spatial planning strategies in practice, may, however, depend significantly on their capacity to inform and direct decision making on the allocation of public sector resources and reduce incentives for territorial competition among Local Authorities.

Spatial planning in the *city-region of Erfurt* is confronted with the need for more flexible, innovative and integrative mechanisms in the face of criticism regarding the overly rigid and inflexible nature of traditional planning hierarchies and principles and corresponding formal plans at the (city-)regional level. However, the latter still represent the ultimate basis and rationale for most decision and policy making in the context of spatial planning and development. The development of more strategic approaches to land use planning and related policy development as well as the simultaneous establishment of efficient partnerships to implement these policies are thus two of the most important current and future challenges. This especially holds true for the overall context of socio-economic shrinking at both the regional and the city level.

Concluding, in the context of potentials for further general development of the German planning system it is to increase the flexibility and responsiveness of planning policies while maintaining a reasonable level of certainty. The latter is at least understood as one of the core benefits of the traditional planning culture and existing planning system in Germany. So, and again similar to the situation in the Dublin city-region, the recently formed informal networks of regional actors and their more strategic (but non-binding) approaches to spatial planning and development in the Erfurt city-region need to prove that they are complementary to the system of formal planning and that they are also able to contribute to and, thus, to provide a framework for institutional capacity building, coordination and collaboration at respective scales of governance. In face of the rather disillusioning achievements regarding a more sustainable regional development and use of land to date, such a highly integrative framework will have to

incorporate both formal and informal initiatives and aspects as long-term and sound basis of policy development.

#### **4. A Framework for Comparative Analysis of Spatial Planning in European Cities and Regions**

The review of the literature on spatial planning in comparative perspective in section 2 and the case studies in section 3 indicate the multiple dimensions across which similarities and differences and convergent and divergent trajectories may be found in spatial planning practices in Europe. In this section, a framework for comparative analysis is presented and subsequently applied to the Dublin and Erfurt case studies. The framework seeks to move beyond classifications of *planning systems* which focus almost exclusively on formal administrative and instrumental aspects to the neglect of aspects of governance culture, institutional and socio-economic context which characterise and differentiate *planning practice*. On this basis five levels of differentiation are identified:

- Legal and administrative frameworks;
- Planning instruments;
- Institutional context and governance cultures;
- Political objectives and policy priorities.
- Spatial development and socio-economic challenges.

The legal and administrative dimension relates to the formal statutory and regulatory framework within which national planning systems have evolved. Comparative studies of planning systems in Europe have highlighted key differences between Anglo-Saxon and Napoleonic legal traditions and discretionary and binding systems of land-use regulation (Newman & Thornley 1996; CEC, 1997). The dimension of planning instruments relates to the range of instruments, mechanisms and tools, available within particular planning systems which may include binding land-use plans, informal spatial strategies and financial mechanisms. The extent to which planning instruments have the capacity to regulate, shape or

construct markets is a central determinant of the overall governance capacity of planning systems and practices (Adams & Tiesdell, 2010).

As discussed in section 2, a substantive body of literature has explored the influence of institutional context and governance and planning cultures on spatial planning practice in different territorial contexts. Institutional capacity building and the development of collaborative governance cultures have been identified as core aspects of the process of strategic spatial planning (Healey, 1997, 1998; Healey et al., 2002). More recent studies of planning cultures have emphasised the significance of different interpretations of the role of the planning discipline and profession in different contexts (e.g. Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009). Studies of strategic spatial planning in the UK have identified the need for ‘culture change’ among the planning profession as a principal element in the delivery of planning reform (Shaw and Lord, 2007, Morphet, 2011).

Changing political objectives and policy priorities also have a significant influence on the parameters and scope of spatial planning over time as is evident in a perceived shift in emphasis from territorial cohesion to economic competitiveness in European spatial development policy (Doucet, 2006; Vanolo, 2010) and the influence of the ‘New Labour’ in the UK (Tewdwr-Jones 2004; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2009). Lastly, the diverse spatial development and socio-economic challenges facing cities and regions in Europe may have a very significant influence on spatial planning in practice as the Dublin and Erfurt case studies in section 3 serve to illustrate.

This framework is not intended to be definitive, nor are the dimensions of differentiation necessarily mutually exclusive. It is presented here as an aid to facilitate a systematic multidimensional comparison of case studies. An initial application of the analytical framework is presented in Table 1, drawing on the case studies outlined in section 3 and existing literature on spatial planning in Ireland and Germany.

<b>Levels of Differentiation</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Erfurt</b>
<i>Legal and administrative frameworks</i>	Discretionary system of land-use regulation located within highly centralised policy and governance framework	Strong tradition of spatial planning at all levels of government including binding local land-use plans. Significant emphasis placed on coordination and negotiation across levels of government.
<i>Planning Instruments</i>	Strong reliance on development control instruments. Introduction of strategic plans at national and regional levels since late 1990s increasing scope for spatial planning to influence other policy sectors	Traditional reliance on formal statutory plans that provide a high level of certainty but are found to be inflexible in the face of contemporary spatial development challenges. Recent use of informal strategies in parallel to statutory plans
<i>Institutional context and governance cultures</i>	Predominantly sectoral institutional framework and locally-orientated governance culture. Institutional and capacity building and a shift in governance cultures are identified as necessary elements to effect a transition to a 'plan-led' system	Integrated territorial approach to policy-making is comparatively well developed. Recent strategic initiatives have sought to engage a wider range of stakeholders in policy-making to increase the capacity to respond to contemporary challenges
<i>Spatial development and socio-economic challenges</i>	Rapid market-led growth over 'Celtic Tiger' period (c. 1994 – 2007) followed by sharp collapse in property markets and economic recession	Ongoing structural demographic shifts and (socio-economic) shrinking processes with far-ranging spatial consequences since German reunification in 1990
<i>Political objectives and policy imperatives</i>	Increased emphasis on sustainable development since 1997. Traditional tendency to equate spatial development with economic development leading to laissez faire planning system, increased emphasis on economic competitiveness in recent years.	Strong emphasis on sustainable land-use development objectives since 2002. Increasingly pragmatic orientation to federal policy since 2006. Focus on economic competitiveness tempered by sustainable development concerns

Table 1: Framework for Comparative Analysis Applied to the Dublin and Erfurt Case Studies

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has identified the need for a contextualised approach to the study of spatial planning practices in European cities and regions. It presents a framework for comparative analysis and demonstrates its application in relation to two illustrative case studies focussed on contrasting recent experience of city-regional spatial planning. Although significant commonalities are found, it is evident that there is no single narrative of a shift to strategic spatial planning in Europe. The diversity of spatial development challenges, legal and administrative systems, institutional contexts, governance cultures and planning instruments in Europe makes it difficult to talk of policy convergence. Parallel, diverging or converging trajectories of change may be found across the different dimensions of analysis.

Looking to the future, strategic spatial planning at the city-regional scale in Germany may be expected to be characterised by a focus on a number of distinct procedural aspects including the development of integrative and collaborative spatial policies at the city-regional level and an emphasis on innovation and transfer of good practice. In addition a number of substantive elements may be identified including further promotion of the 'European City', further consideration of environmental and social sustainability in the context of demographic shrinking and aging and the preferential development of brownfield sites. Current trends in the Dublin-city region and in Ireland more widely point to a further embedding of strategic spatial planning within a statutory planning system characterised by an increasingly strict hierarchy of spatial and land-use plans. In the context of the current recession and collapse in housing market, it is likely that the potential role of spatial planning in market regulation will be critically reassessed. At the same time city-regional scale spatial strategies are likely to place an enhanced emphasis on questions of economic competitiveness, leading to further challenges with respect to European and national policy goals of territorial cohesion and balanced regional development. Spatial planning strategies may increasingly serve to provide a focus for cross-sectoral policy coordination although this will depend significantly on institutional support and targeted allocation of public sector resources (see also Haughton et al 2010, 248).

In addition, the paper has pointed to the significance of the critical juncture between strategic policy making and formal regulatory and legal aspects of spatial planning. Thus, the integrated and complementary use of formal and informal instruments and mechanisms seems to be one possible and also very promising way to develop more 'resilient' plans and planning policy frameworks in terms of evolving problems and challenges in both the Dublin and Erfurt city-region.

The framework for comparative analysis of spatial planning practices in Europe presented in this paper provides a point of departure for an enhanced comparative understanding of the 'governance capacity' of spatial planning systems, policies and strategies within diverse territorial contexts. In the context of a review of early 'innovative exemplars' of regional-scale strategic spatial planning initiatives in Europe, Albrechts et al. (2003, 115) asked:

'What is their power to shape project proposals, budget allocations, and regulatory practices across a whole array of actors... Do they have the persuasive power to shift territorial development trajectories...?'

This critical questioning continues to be as relevant and necessary in the current context, although a significant body of literature on European spatial planning has emerged and developed in the intervening period. As an analytical concept, governance capacity may be understood both in terms of the capacity to guide the spatial distribution of development and the capacity to act as a framework for the coordination of the spatial impacts of sectoral policies in light of the wider policy coordination ambitions associated with more recent spatial strategies. The two case studies presented in this paper highlight the extent to which the governance capacity of spatial strategies may in practice be highly contingent on the specificities of context within which the strategy is produced (whether it is one of dynamic, market-led development, or socio-economic shrinking and demographic aging).

It is evident, however that further contextual comparative analysis of spatial planning in Europe will require the development of an interactive dialogue among academic researchers, policymakers and planning practitioners. Such a dialogue would enable a fuller understanding of the specificity or generality of contemporary spatial development trends and ongoing processes of change within different

territorial contexts and facilitate knowledge transfer that is constructive and informative for all stakeholders. An interactive dialogue on this basis, may further serve to create a bridge between the abstract theoretical focus on process and procedural aspects in the planning theory literature and the grounded empirical focus on territorial diversity and spatial development challenges characteristic of ESPON and similar policy-orientated research initiatives.

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