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Territorial development, cohesion and spatial planning. Knowledge and policy development in an enlarged EU, edited by Neil Adams, Giancarlo Cotella, and Richard Nunes

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BOOK REVIEWS

Territorial development, cohesion and spatial planning. Knowledge and policy development in an enlarged EU, edited by Neil Adams, Giancarlo Cotella, and Richard Nunes, New York and London, Routledge, 2010, 488 pp., £105.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-55194-6

This book examines some of the challenges faced by spatial planning in Europe in the last decade, in particular those related to the eastward shift of the European Union's (EU) geographical and political barycentre after the EU enlargement.

It focuses on three key issues combined in a coherent analytical framework: European spatial planning (ESP) as a proper disciplinary field, which has been challenged by the new changes of the last decade; the reforms that have been taking place in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries after their EU membership and the new issues that they have posed to the ESP debates; and the role of the so-called epistemic communities as driving forces in steering the dynamic changes in both the EU agenda and the member states in terms of territorial development policies. The mere attempt to debate these three spheres of knowledge is valuable per se and this makes this book worth reading.

Concerning ESP, it has become a proper disciplinary field in the last two decades, despite not formally existing, with some important achievements reflecting the increasing attention to territorial issues by the EU. These developments are well summed up in the introduction to this book. Apart from some formal institutional recognition, and above all the inclusion of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy's aim in the Lisbon Treaty, the disciplinary field has produced academic research and publications as well as several EU policy documents that have strengthened the profile of the specific scientific context in which this book is embedded.

However, among the international community as well as in some national arenas, some sceptical voices have voiced criticisms of the EU spatial development approach. While the potentialities of the EU perspective are generally understood, there is a sense of lack of actual capacity to provide added value to regional and local agendas. Moreover, some over-ambitious policy aims, as for instance the Lisbon–Gothenburg and the new EU2020 strategies, have given support to those voices pointing to the distance between discourses and regional realities. At the same time, over-technocratic and bureaucratic ways of action, the unbalanced emphasis on the market economy in comparison with the approach of the EU social dimension and the predominance of western European culture are some of the most recurrent Euro-sceptic and critical comments.

In the context of this pessimistic overview, this book represents something of a declaration of faith rather than an evidence-based counterargument on the role of the EU in providing a meaningful policy framework. Nevertheless, it succeeds in highlighting the importance of an EU spatial planning dimension. The different parts of this book are able to

show how ESP goes beyond policy documents and abstract debates about macroprinciples, as for instance cohesion and competitiveness. It provides evidence on how the technocratic dimension of the expenditure of structural funds is turning towards a more place-based approach and also provides insights on their potentialities. It also shows how the EU's role is bringing about institutional changes and large-scale administrative reforms, albeit with virtues and drawbacks.

Moreover, and complementary to the ESP debate, the authors inform the readers of two critical aspects of the EU spatial policy.

First, they highlight the role of a new set of countries which have the potential capacity to influence the EU territorial policies and multilevel governance processes, the outcome of which is still largely unknown. The already existing scattered picture in which the starting condition of ex-Soviet countries has been developed according to the interaction between the EU main agenda and socioeconomic, institutional, political and cultural factors rooted in the different regional and national realities will increase its variety in the next decades. Through the structure of this book, the reader is encouraged to think of ways of conceiving territorial challenges (Part I), the multilevel governance processes (Part II), the ways of addressing disparities and inequalities between regions (Part III) and the role of the border regions outside the EU (Part IV). These developments will follow specific, diverse and partially unpredictable directions in the future.

In this scenario, the EU will exert an important influencing role and, at the same time, its agenda will be influenced by the challenges that the CEE countries will add to the general picture, in which the macrodisparity between the western and eastern blocks will be blurred in a scattered picture with different regional development trajectories and characterizations. From this perspective this book makes an important attempt of drawing out early developments of such processes, which will show their effects only in the next decades.

Second, the authors state that the overall aim of this book is to explore the interplay between knowledge and policy development in the evolving landscape of spatial planning in Europe. They recognize the presence of a system of variegated but coherent epistemic communities which strategically advocate planning reform and policy and orient the spatial research agenda. On the one hand, this book recognizes how such scientific communities have played a role in spreading practices and discourses and in shaping institutional changes in the different national and regional contexts with an EU perspective. On the other hand, these communities have the EU perspective as a common framework and they contribute to, and support, changes at the EU level in terms of both governance processes and the policy agenda. In particular, in the Eastern countries, these communities are growing as well in their awareness of being able to play a role in the EU policy arena.

From this perspective, there is also a growing interaction between the national/regional epistemic communities and the ones advocating an ESP perspective, of which this book is an interesting example. This book is part of the outcomes of an epistemic community providing discourses on ESP that in this case are providing ideas and raising issues of scientific interest on the hypothesis of the presence of epistemic communities in the CEE countries acting as advocacy networks both at the national and regional scales and at the EU level.

To what extent this book provides evidence of the role of epistemic communities in shaping macrodirections of changes in the CEE countries and, at the same time, how far it poses itself as an epistemic agent fostering the recognition of such communities and their role in actively spreading knowledge and advocating changes and policies are for the reader

to decide. Nevertheless, it is a candidate for an important reference point in any subsequent analysis of the evolution of the EU spatial development policy and of the CEE countries' reform processes in the fascinating domain of the ESP debate and research agenda.

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The recreation of the European city: governance, territory and polycentricity, edited by Rob Atkinson and Cristiana Rossignolo, Amsterdam, Techne Press, 2008, 272 pp., €47.50 (paperback), ISBN 978-90-8594-022-7

This book investigates the relationship between the European policies and the implementation of spatial and urban development/planning within the European city regions. Presenting a collection of views on the experience of cities and regions at different scales within (and sometimes outside) the European Union (EU), this book debates on the actual influence of the EU on the priorities and ambitions of the European cities today.

The first part of this book provides an overview of the European urban policy and investigates how the European priorities such as territoriality and polycentricity are reinterpreted in the specific circumstances in different countries, cities, regions and districts. The second part of this book considers a wider range of urban development experiences, using comparisons within and outside Europe, to place the European notion of 'good' urban development in context.

Collectively, these articles suggest that the European states demonstrate certain commonalities in their approach towards the development of their city regions, such as adopting an 'integrated approach' to territorial development (Atkinson and Rossignolo) and growing emphasis on strategic planning (Servillo and Larsen) and governance. Similarities also exist between the development ambitions and ideals of the European cities and regions, for example, cities are more aware of the consequences of urban sprawl and often desire higher-density, polycentric urban structures. Nielsen and Harder investigate trends in interactions between the European cities and their surroundings to find a 'backbone structure' of national interaction with a functional core in each country. However, the picture painted here is that this convergence can only be partially attributed to the trickling down of the European policy to the local levels.

Retter and Farthing highlight that the EU policy has evolved by adopting current best practice from within Europe and is therefore not completely new to the nation states that contributed to this. In addition, the formation of the EU provides ample opportunities for learning and communication between cities and states, resulting in shared debates around approaches to development. However, inspiration might be easily drawn from beyond the EU: Engel and Claessens suggest lessons learned from the historical development of Randstad Holland, while Lloyd draws parallel with the Vancouver model. This implies that, in an age of globalization, cross-border learning could have happened in the absence of the European platform for knowledge sharing or the EU guidance.