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# **Impact of Structural Reforms on Planning Systems and Policies: Loss of Spatial Consciousness?**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper argues that a planning system that allows its policies and practices to gradually lose spatial consciousness and spatial coordination capacities within and across different levels of planning administration is less likely to make national and regional plans and strategies matter or have a say in future spatial development processes. The reasoning behind this argument stems from the case of Denmark, where a structural reform that changed the country's geographies of inter-governmental arrangements in 2007 significantly transformed the configuration and functioning of the national planning system. Originally designed to support the principle of equal development through spatial planning policies aimed at the promotion of equal access to public and private services across the national territory, the Danish planning policy framework has increasingly evolved towards expressing a lack of explicit spatial consciousness in its current plans and strategies. At the same time, the Danish planning system seems to reveal narrower measures of spatial coherence in terms of horizontal and vertical coordination and integration of sectors and policies within and across different levels of planning administration. Based on an analysis regarding the evolution of planning policies and an examination of the current governance landscape influencing planning practices at national and regional levels, the paper attempts to generate an understanding concerning how the underlying rationale and the institutional relations of Danish spatial planning have been reoriented over time.*

**Keywords:** spatial planning; spatial consciousness; planning systems; planning policies; structural reform

## 1. Introduction

Before the turn of the century, the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) contended in its *EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* that spatial planning in Denmark held a comprehensive-integrated character, an appeal normally attributed to ‘mature’ planning systems (CEC, 1997, 1999). This assertion is essentially explained by the statement that Danish spatial planning embraced a ‘...systematic and formal hierarchy of plans from national to local level, which coordinate public sector activity across different sectors but focus more specifically on spatial coordination than economic development’ (CEC, 1997, pp. 36-37). Accordingly, the Danish planning system differed from several other planning systems in terms of its formal rationality, which depicted rather coherent conceptual orientations as well as a ‘stable’ and coordinated planning administration nested within the institutional structures of a strong multi-level state. Danish planning hence became celebrated elsewhere in Europe, not only because of its articulate and logical structure but also due to its social welfarist foundations, spatial undertakings and organisational accomplishments.

The alluded *comprehensive* appeal that qualified the Danish planning system back then should be interpreted in terms of the rational provision of a multifunctional and multisectoral spatial policy framework seeking to *integrate* aspects of economy, social life, physical development and the environment. By being *comprehensive*, spatial planning thereby sought to be coordinative, integrative and hierarchical (Alexander, 1992). Yet, in essence, spatial planning in Denmark has been gradually subjected to profound structural and functional reorientations during the past two decades, which have significantly altered its comprehensive-integrated character. Following Healey’s (2006, 2007) account regarding relational complexity in strategic spatial planning episodes, it is suggested that this loss of comprehensiveness is to be understood in terms of the lack of explicit spatial consciousness embedded in national and regional plans and strategies.

Accordingly, the alluded reorientations have primarily occurred after the implementation of a reform of local government structure that changed the geographies of inter-governmental arrangements in 2007. Amongst the many implications of such reform, the spatial consciousness and conceptual coherence of national and regional planning exercises have become significantly undermined as most physical planning tasks and responsibilities were re-scaled to the municipal level. This situation not only modified the functioning of the system but also diminished the clout exerted by planning institutions as well as the transformative potential behind the last generation of strategic spatial planning efforts, namely the spatial planning report published in 2006. In this light, it is contended that the spatial consciousness of planning in Denmark has been replaced with a pursuit of a-spatial agendas rooted in the influence of growth-oriented and sectoral policy strategies.

The differentiation of spatial planning in Denmark implies that neither its scope nor its performance can be any longer seized from the perspective of a self-contained system per se. Rather, to understand what spatial planning currently entails, there is a need to examine the rationale behind evolving policy orientations and the emerging institutional relations and capacities entrenched within the altered structures of Danish spatial planning. The fundamental objective of this paper is thus to analyse the evolution of Danish spatial planning policies and practices at national and regional levels through the inspection of spatial plans and reports, policies, strategies, and reviews prepared by national and regional planning authorities since the 1970s. Policy documents are analysed in terms of descriptive theories of political economy and through the identification of evolving spatial concepts and institutional relations. In addition, the paper is informed by semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted with key national and regional planning actors involved in policy-making processes over the past two or three decades. Altogether, the paper seeks to illustrate the context of a transformed spatial planning tradition in terms of its systemic structures, spatial conceptions, plan-making processes and substantial outcomes.

## **2. The Evolution of Planning Policies and Practices**

To a large extent, discussions concerned with the transformation of planning practices have embraced aspects of changing governance structures and processes of spatial strategy-making in the context of cities or city-regions in particular European contexts (cf. e.g. Healey et al., 1997, 2006, 2007; Salet & Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2003). More recent accounts concerning spatial planning shifts have particularly derived from the context of devolution in the UK and, therein, under the particular influence of the New Labour Party (cf. e.g. Cowell & Owens, 2006, 2010; Alden, 2006; Pearce & Ayres, 2006; Nadin, 2007; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009, 2010; Haughton et al., 2010). However, the issue of how spatial planning becomes reoriented in the context of planning systems per se has only begun to attract renewed academic interest (cf. e.g. Stead & Cotella, 2011; Nadin & Stead, 2012). In contributing to this re-emerging debate, the transformation of spatial planning systems and policies is contextualised in this paper in terms of changing planning rationales and institutional relations by using a political economy approach (Jessop, 1990, 2000; Brenner, 2004, 2006) supported by more recent accounts concerning relational geography in planning (Healey, 2006, 2007).

### ***Changing planning rationales: A political economy perspective***

From the outset, the evolving rationale of spatial planning could be contextualised by paying attention to state theory processes concerned with the overall transition from welfarist to neoliberal regimes in Western Europe. Planning systems were originally advanced in many European post-war welfare states during the 1960s and 1970s. Behind their emergence was the rise of ‘Keynesian welfarism’, which relates to the interventionist position of capitalist states to secure full employment and economic

growth through a congruent association between national economy, national state and national society (Jessop, 1990, 2000). In these contexts, planning systems and policies originated in tandem with social welfarist agendas in order to tackle the mounting socio-economic disparities between regions within national territories. In terms of territorial organization, traditional planning practices in several welfarist states adopted a spatial consciousness informed by notions of settlement hierarchies and demarcated divisions between town and country (cf. next section).

Spatial planning was comprised of plans, policies and regulations dealing with land-use allocation, urban growth management, infrastructure development, settlement improvements and sectoral policy co-ordination, amongst others (Healey et al., 1997; Tewdwr-Jones, 2001). Based on these qualities, the traditional conception of spatial planning is explicitly encapsulated in the following definition:

Spatial planning refers to the methods used largely by the public sector to influence the future distribution of activities in space. It is undertaken with the aims of creating a more rational territorial organisation of land uses and the linkages between them, to balance demands for development and to achieve social and economic objectives (CEC, 1997, p. 24).

The fall of welfarist regimes during the 1970s led to the adoption and establishment of neoliberalism, a regime that sought to promote international competitiveness and sociotechnical innovation in open economies. A main implication stemming from this paradigm shift was that social policies became significantly subdued to economic policies in allowing for greater labour market flexibility. Accordingly, by the 1980s, the traditional focus of spatial planning was readapted to support the new economic climate by replacing its welfarist policy objectives with the promotion of urban redevelopment efforts and major infrastructure projects along with a land-use regulatory focus (Healey et al., 1999; Albrechts, 2004).

Spatial planning systems and policies across Europe continued being subjected to neoliberal adaptations during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In what academics defined as a ‘strategic turn’ in spatial planning (Healey et al., 1997; Salet & Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2003), spatial planning replaced its project-led and land-use approaches with a strategic emphasis on innovative place-making activities based on relational processes for decision-making (Healey, 2007). ‘Strategic spatial planning’ thereby turned out to be conceived as ‘a socio-spatial process through which a vision, action and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become’ (Albrechts, 2004, p. 747).

This strategic focus on ‘place qualities’ meant that spatial planning policies were reframed into a new spatial vocabulary of economic positioning to promote more competitive cities and city-regions in European and global contexts (cf. e.g. Healey et al., 1999; Healey, 2004, 2006). This included the preparation of indicative policy

statements such as national spatial planning reports inspired by spatial planning concepts derived from the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (CSD, 1999; Faludi, 2004), which largely replaced traditional physical planning concepts.<sup>2</sup>

In general, the transition from welfarist to neoliberal economic regimes and particularly from land-use and physical planning to strategic spatial planning has evidently influenced the way that the planning domain has come to be conceived over time.<sup>3</sup> This is also illustrated by the multiple definitions of spatial planning that are found in the academic literature, which clearly embrace different orientations and meanings (cf. Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2010). Implicit in the polysemous character of spatial planning is not only the fact that planning policies and practices are being constantly reoriented but also that every definition seizes particular realities and agendas as occurring in different geographical contexts. While, in essence, this is partly a reflection of the above political economy transitions, it is also a result of the inherent capacity of spatial planning to adapt to different socio-political circumstances and economic climates. Based on this premise, the analysis of the Danish case described hereafter will attempt to illustrate how the conception of spatial planning is significantly reoriented as a result of changing economic and political trends affecting the national planning policy framework.

Intrinsically linked to the changing rationale of spatial planning are its shifting policy agendas in pursuit of spatial development, which are regarded here as particular modes of policy intervention aimed at providing ad hoc guidance in relation to the actual development orientations that planning policies at different territorial scales tend to align with over time (Galland, 2012a). Policy agendas lead to the adoption of ad hoc issues in spatial planning, which can be identified and explained via the identification of spatial concepts and vocabularies (cf. Healey, 2004). The identification of policy agendas not only leads to a more precise interpretation of the actual roles that national and regional planning documents may assume in catering to spatial development over time, but also sheds light on how such agendas may turn out to be interpreted by an array of different planning actors (e.g. other state agencies, economic actors, civil society organisations, and so forth) by influencing the values of actors and the realisation of projects (*ibid.*).

### ***Changing institutional relations***

Governance structures are depicted here as the diverse institutional arrangements and emerging institutional relations and capacities through which planning policies and practices are commonly formulated and implemented. Changes concerned with the institutional set-up of spatial planning are conceptualised in terms of strategic selectivity (Jessop, 1990, 2000, 2002) and state spatial selectivity and rescaling (Brenner, 2004, 2006) as far as the reworking of state powers and shifting governance structures are concerned. Such theorisations stem from socio-political changes that date from an era when planning systems were being established in European post-war welfare states. In this sense, both the genealogical character and the geographical

context embedded in these approaches are well connected with the historical developments of the Danish welfare state and the establishment and evolution of its planning system during subsequent decades.

Planning systems in different Western European nations were traditionally organised via formal and hierarchical top-down structures wherein the national level controlled lower administrative levels. Through these hierarchical arrangements, the state was meant to:

...undertake, manage and regulate development in line with a generalised and unitary conception of the ‘public interest’ [and] ... acted as a ‘provider’ of a coordinated stable framework for the making of development investment decisions, as well as a provider of serviced land and development (Healey et al., 1997, p. 11).

The state’s role as a provider should be then understood both in light of the welfarist conception of spatial planning and the emergence of classical-modernist institutions, which sought to attain ‘territorial synchrony’ during post-war decades (Hajer, 2003a). The progressive transition from welfarist to neoliberal regimes caused that the state’s planning tasks and responsibilities were transferred to an array of actors operating at different administrative levels. Consequently, there has been an upsurge of governance structures oftentimes occurring at scales different from formal administrative and territorial levels, which have replaced fixed hierarchical arrangements to a certain extent.

In this context, emphasis has been placed on the different processes by which the progressive loss of territorial synchrony and the ‘hollowing out’ of nation-states (Jessop, 2000) have been ‘filled in’ (Jones et al., 2005) through state strategic selectivities (Jessop, 2000, 2004) and ‘soft spaces’ of governance (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007; Haughton et al., 2010). Soft spaces emerge from national level policy frameworks, which are aimed at stimulating bottom-up initiatives including public and private stakeholders working across policy sectors and administrative scales (cf. Haughton & Allmendinger, 2008; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009; Haughton et al., 2010). In this sense, it is relevant to conceive soft spaces as alternative spaces of governance wherein possibilities to pursue specific place-making strategies and other regional development efforts are conceived alongside modified hierarchical governance arrangements. The development of spatial relations over time is intrinsically related with the increasing emergence of soft spaces of governance. In such contexts, as Healey (2006) suggests, the social relations that transect a part of the territory may have different spatial reaches which are not necessarily associated with defined political borders.

### **3. From Rational Comprehensive Planning to Strategic Spatial Planning**

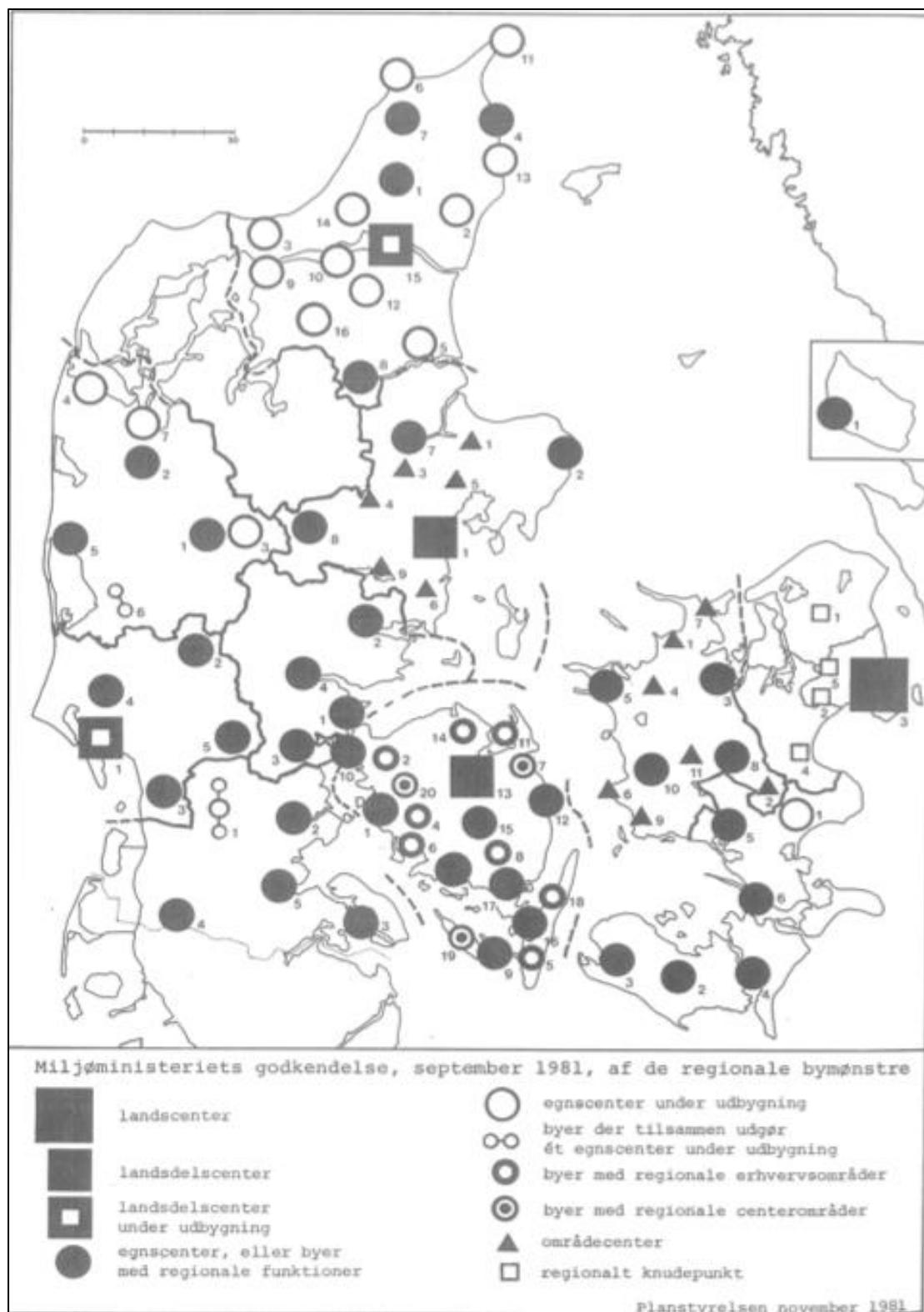
In achieving spatial coordination and territorial synchrony, the comprehensive-integrated tradition of planning systems explicitly sought to deliver a high degree of horizontal and vertical integration of policies across sectors and jurisdictions through a hierarchy of plans occurring at multiple scales (CEC, 1997).

The birth of rational comprehensive planning in Denmark should be understood as a response to a number of socio-spatial challenges that emerged as a result of the country's increasing industrial structure and rapid economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s. Urban sprawl, industry requirements for extra land, population imbalance and a general decline of living conditions of a considerable part of the population stood amongst the most significant challenges. This pressing situation called for the design of new planning capacities and schemes capable of rethinking the spatial arrangements and population dynamics of Denmark's urban centres to tackle such increasing disparities.

#### ***Rational comprehensive planning***

In the 1970s, a territorial reconfiguration of the administrative division of counties and municipalities took place through a reform of local government structure. This structural reform led to the founding of the Danish planning system based on the social democratic ideology of equality, which would be essentially attained through decentralisation in order to meet development needs throughout the entire national territory. This effort was eventually reflected in better access to public and private services throughout the whole country that would have otherwise remained in a few urban centres. The spatial consciousness behind this reform consisted of a hierarchical positioning of cities and towns, which replaced the former land demarcation that exhibited a sharp distinction between urban and rural areas (figure 1).

With the urban hierarchy as the predominant spatial concept in national planning at the time, comprehensive-integrated planning was formally institutionalised through a three-tiered hierarchy of plans prepared at different administrative scales (namely, municipalities, counties and the national level). Based on the principle of framework control, planning decisions made at lower levels in the hierarchy could not contradict decisions made at higher levels. In this sense, the consolidation of the planning system should be understood as the rational attempt to develop the institutional infrastructure by which welfarist policies would then be spatially implemented.



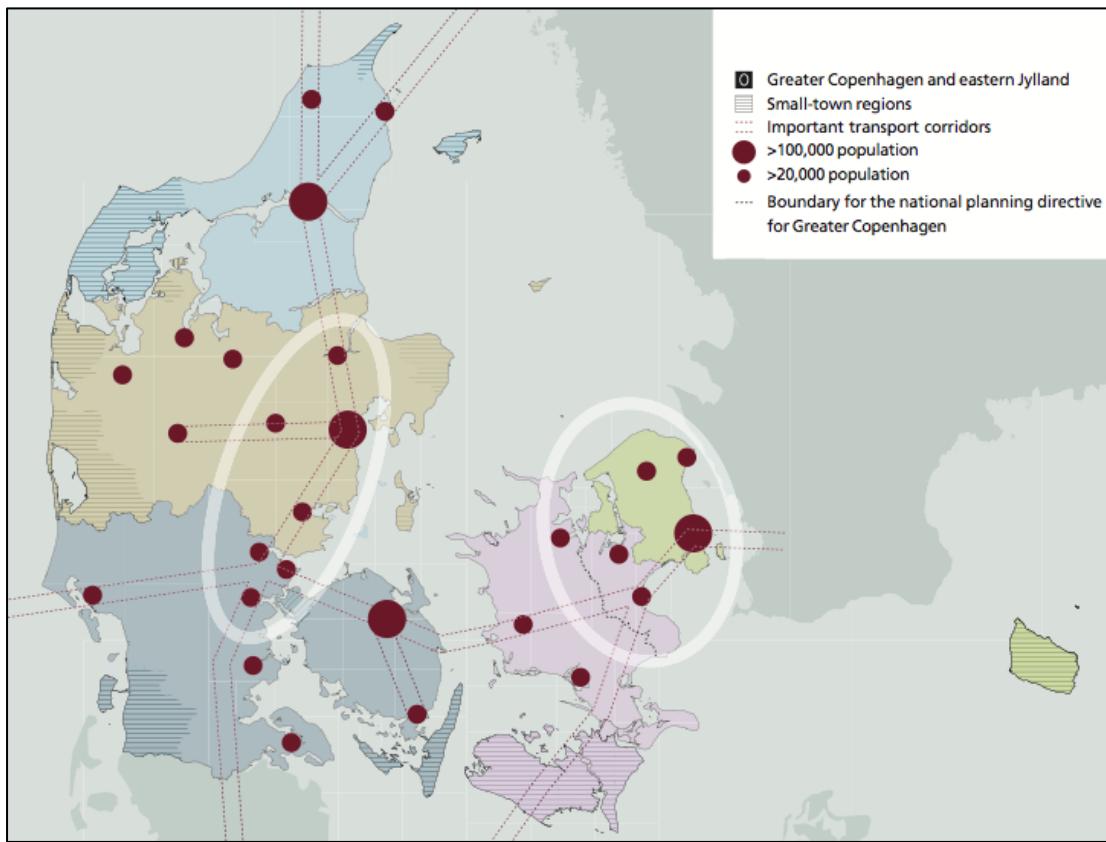
*Figure 1. The 1981 national planning report showing the traditional spatial consciousness of Danish national spatial planning based on notions of settlement hierarchy. (Source: Ministry of the Environment, 1981)*

National planning underwent a period of ambiguity during the 1980s. While this decade observed the peak of a long-term welfarist planning exercise that was carefully implemented since the 1970s, it also witnessed the rise of new policy

agendas that were highly influenced by the emerging neoliberal political climate at the time. On the one hand, the urban hierarchy pattern was still considered in national policies to secure and enable equal resource distribution throughout the whole territory. On the other, the interpretation of equal development *per se* shifted in terms of how to go about attaining it. In this respect, the centre-right government during the 1980s increasingly reframed the understanding of this principle influenced by international competitiveness agendas, which prompted national planning to turn away from the idea of equality towards the pursuit of ‘diversity’ and ‘modernisation’ by the end of the decade (Galland, 2012a). Planning practices at the national level thereby began to move away from their traditional spatial consciousness embedded in plans and strategies to address rather a-spatial policies influenced by both the growing neoliberal climate in national politics and the rise of sectoral policy development.

Regional planning instead remained confronted with the challenging task of securing the spatial coordination of numerous sectoral policies and jurisdictions. By undertaking a cross-sectoral focus emerging from the need to balance multiple interests and objectives and by delivering a comprehensive spatial planning framework for municipalities to advance their own land-use regulations, the counties continued to designate key roles to specific cities and towns as providers of services and infrastructure development. Binding regional plans thus defined urban development zones (i.e. infrastructure, traffic, business development), countryside regulations (i.e. recreational areas, nature protection, environmental resource management) and regional facility siting objectives (e.g. waste or energy facilities), amongst others.

Influenced by the sustainability momentum of the 1990s, regional plans incorporated new tools and measures to manage and safeguard environmental assets while they continued to hold on to the urban hierarchy and land-use rationale. Policy themes such as water resource management, nature protection and tourism were included in regional plans and some counties established ‘green councils’ with the aim to offer political advice as regards balancing nature protection with land-use considerations (interview, former head of regional planning in North Denmark, 2011). While regional plans became imperative as guiding instruments for the preparation of municipal plans, planning processes at the regional level evolved as conciliatory tools holding the capacity to coordinate municipalities in policy matters and issues transcending their own boundaries. For instance, conflicting municipal interests related to traffic services (such as harbours, railways and roads) or the siting of ‘undesirable’ facilities (e.g. solid-waste treatment plants, sewage disposal sites and windmill parks) became mediated by regional planners. Such processes also ensured that particular sectoral decisions were not undertaken at the expense other objectives (for instance, a transport decision impacting heavily on environmental assets). The scope of regional planning thereby enabled the possibility for a diverse array of stakeholders to engage in plan negotiations between municipalities and counties during public debates.



*Figure 2. The re-awakening of spatial consciousness in Denmark influenced by concepts adopted from the European Spatial Development Perspective. The 2006 national planning report was the last planning exercise at the national level depicting an explicit spatial consciousness. (Source: Ministry of the Environment, 2006)*

### **Strategic spatial planning**

National planning became notably reframed in terms of its objectives and contents during the 1990s. A single Planning Act came into force in 1992, which replaced the social welfarist pursuit of equal development with that of achieving *appropriate development* in the whole country (Ministry of the Environment, 1992). The contents of national planning reports became inspired by a new spatial vocabulary, which planning officials perceived as better suited to respond to emerging policy demands related with economic growth and international competitiveness (interview, former head of planning, Ministry of the Environment, 2011). In so doing, concepts such as ‘polycentric development’, ‘urban networks’, and ‘balanced spatial structure’ replaced former physical concepts of hierarchical spatial ordering (Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 1997, 2000).

Advanced as part of a new structural reform (cf. next section) that altered the geographies of inter-governmental arrangements, the 2006 national planning report stressed the need to reinvent spatial planning as a precondition to align with the demands set forth by the globalisation agenda (Ministry of the Environment, 2006).

The context of the reform made national planners depict a new map of Denmark based on a differentiated spatial consciousness influenced by the geographical discourse of centre versus periphery (interview, spatial planner, Ministry of the Environment, 2010). On the one hand, the 2006 national planning report proposed two metropolitan conurbations that transected projected administrative demarcations, namely Greater Copenhagen and the Øresund Region as one cohesive urban region, and the Eastern Jutland Region, consisting of multiple cities situated along a single urban corridor (figure 2). In so doing, spatial concepts such as ‘dynamic zone of integration’ and ‘urban corridors’ were respectively adopted to imagine these new state spaces. On the other hand, peripheral areas were portrayed along the lines of ‘small town regions’ (Ministry of the Environment, 2006).

The re-awakened spatial consciousness expressed via the adoption of strategic spatial concepts in Danish national planning policy from 1997 until 2006 was accompanied by the enactment of binding directives (e.g. coastal protection, out-of-town retail development and environmental impact assessment) over this same period. At the same time, national and regional planning policies increasingly fluctuated both in terms of their development orientations and spatial conceptualisations, although they did turn out to supplement one other in fulfilling European policy agendas concerned with environmental sustainability. Nevertheless the conflicting perception of space illustrated by the continued use of the urban hierarchy pattern in regional plans (until 2005) versus the changing spatial consciousness and the new state spaces represented by the 2006 national planning report implied that the planning domain as a whole was no longer integrating spatial policies coherently. In practice, this disparity resembled a case of policy mismatches and thereby also a clear sign of loss of territorial synchrony. This phenomenon and its implications are explored in further detail in the following sections.

#### **4. Structural Reform and the New Danish Planning System**

The Danish government implemented a new reform of local government structure in 2007, which had a significant impact on the structure and performance of the Danish planning system. The reform altered the geographies of inter-governmental arrangements in the country by merging the former 271 municipalities into 98 larger units and by abolishing the county level, which became filled in by the creation of five administrative regions. In contrast with its 1970s forerunner, this structural reform was the outcome of a process geared by economies of scale, which redistributed planning tasks and responsibilities between levels of government while breaking away with the formal hierarchy of plans. To an important extent, the reform largely overlooked territorial considerations based on geographical criteria, such as functional relationships between municipalities and conventional peripheral problems.

*Table 1. The Danish planning policy framework after the 2007 reform of local government structure*

Policy institutions			Policy instruments		
Level	Planning authority	Number of inhabitants	Type of plans	Description	Legal effect
<i>National</i>	Ministry of the Environment, Nature Agency	5.58 million	National planning reports	National visions regarding functional physical development	Advisory guidelines and recommendations
			National planning directives	Maps and legal provisions	Binding for local authorities
			Overview of national interests regarding municipal plans	National interests arising from legislation, action plans, sector plans and agreements between national authorities	Binding for local authorities
<i>Regional</i>	5 administrative regions	1 000 000 on average (wide deviations)	Regional spatial development plans (RSDP)	Advisory and visionary plans	Binding for local authorities
			Business development strategies (BDS)	Prepared by Regional Growth Fora based on the Business Development Act (2005)	RSDP prepared in accordance with BDS
<i>Local</i>	98 municipal councils	30 000 on average (wide deviations)	Municipal plans	Policies, maps and land-use regulations	Binding for local authorities
			Local plans	Maps and detailed legal land-use regulations	Binding for landowners

Source: adapted from Galland & Enemark (2013).

The 2007 structural reform could be regarded as an outcome of state strategic selectivity in the sense that the Danish government privileged municipalities by handing them over most physical planning tasks and responsibilities formerly taken care of by the counties. In an amendment to the Planning Act, regional planning provisions were repealed and municipalities were allocated the right to decide upon land-use planning considerations in urban and rural areas. This adjustment gave municipalities the autonomy to designate urban zones, locate transport facilities, and manage aspects concerned with agriculture, cultural and historical heritage, amongst policy areas (Ministry of the Environment, 2007).

The abolition of the counties also prompted the transfer of some planning controls to the national level. To ensure the implementation of national policy objectives, the Ministry of Environment created seven environment centres scattered across the country aimed at overseeing aspects concerned with nature protection, water resources management, national infrastructure projects, coastal zone management, retail trade and environmental impact assessment.<sup>4</sup> In addition, national planning became reinforced in relation with its capacity to intervene in municipal planning proposals and projects of national or regional relevance through a right of veto should municipal plans were not to comply with national interests. In this respect, the structural reform could also be regarded as a case of government recentralisation (Andersen, 2008).

In 2010, the national planning report was not positioned with respect to any particular spatial development tendency (Ministry of the Environment, 2010). In this sense, the spatial logics, visions and strategies put forward by previous national planning reports were disregarded as well as the current and potential functional relationships within the national territory and in relation to borderland areas. Such a planning approach at the national level clearly breaks away from the differentiated spatial consciousness associated with planning exercises until 2006, which suggests that national plans are less likely to have a say in future spatial development decisions. In addition, with the aim of ensuring more possibilities for local growth and development in Denmark's outlying areas, planning directives concerned with coastal protection and retail planning have been relaxed in 29 'peripheral' municipalities through amendments to the Planning Act effective September 2011. This situation evidently illustrates long-lasting intentions to minimise planning constraints.

Furthermore, in terms of organisational changes, the former Spatial Planning Agency (*Planstyrelsen*), which for years had been part of the central administration in the Ministry of the Environment, became downgraded to an office within the Nature Agency (*Naturstyrelsen*) whose ad hoc mandate on environmental quality and nature protection differs widely from the more inclusive agenda regarding spatial development *per se*. At the national level, spatial planning has gradually lost a considerable share of its former institutional clout, particularly under the rule of the liberal-conservative coalition government.

At the regional level, the new administrative regions were allocated the task of preparing regional spatial development plans (RSDPs) aimed at generating (a-spatial) growth and development initiatives, which came to substitute the former regional plans. RSDPs were formulated by the amended Planning Act as strategic development policies, carried out through bottom-up, multi-stakeholder processes facilitated by the administrative regions in close collaboration with municipalities and other actors (Ministry of the Environment, 2007). Depicted as visionary tools for the inspiration of growth and development initiatives within administrative regions, the RSDPs are to be understood as flexible and advisory policy instruments. In this sense, the RSDPs

refuse any possible ambition to cater for spatial development at the municipal level (interview, former director general of planning at the Ministry of the Environment, 2011).

Coupled with the creation of RSDPs, the administrative regions have been responsible of operating Regional Growth Fora (RGF) since 2007. With an institutional set-up consisting of private and public stakeholders, these partnership-oriented bodies have been intended to advance and implement business development strategies (BDS) with the aim to reinforce local conditions for economic growth purposes (Larsen, 2011). Aligned with the Danish Business Development Act, the BDS constitute the core of the RSDPs. The RGF's main task has been to make recommendations to the state and the regional councils on support of EU funds and regional development projects, respectively. The high decision-making capacity embedded in RGF and their regional competitiveness interests and objectives reflected in such BDS has restricted the implementation of RSDPs proposals, which can only be conditioned by their alignment with the latter. To a certain extent, the RGF's mandate coupled with their remarkable means and capabilities to implement BDS has consequently blurred the motivation of RSDPs.

Another relevant institutional shift that followed the implementation of the structural reform was the active engagement of an influential interest organisation known as Local Government Denmark (KL) in regional matters. KL established municipal contact councils (KKR) at the regional scale with the task to develop political initiatives to foster inter-municipal collaboration. With a mandate to support municipal interests at the regional scale, KKR have performed as parallel planning arenas while succeeding in building trust with core municipal actors. Having thus turned into a strong regional player, these emerging bodies have certainly undermined the reach and aspirations of RSDPs (Galland, 2012b).

At the regional level, hence, a fuzzy landscape characterised by the emergence of (uncoordinated) hard and soft spaces of governance currently entails new planning processes and outcomes. KKR could be conceived as soft spaces of governance aiming to destabilise the RSDP as a hard space in the formal planning system. In response to this scenario, the administrative regions have opted to join forces with RGF to implement business development strategies, thereby legitimating themselves at the expense of weakened RSDPs that certainly lack implementation potential. All other things being equal, this situation seems to match the objectives set forth by the liberal-conservative coalition government at the time of the reform, which foresaw the administrative regions as members of a partnership strategy aimed at supporting the national vision of portraying Denmark as a strong actor in the global economy.

## **5. Shifting Rationales, Roles and Institutions**

The reorientation of spatial planning in terms of its underlying conception has been primarily framed in this paper both from a political economy standpoint as well as in terms of the shifting spatial consciousness over time. Notwithstanding their intrinsic differences and capacities, the cases of national and regional planning in Denmark reflect how the welfarist and socio-spatial foundation of planning has been gradually overtaken by a-spatial agendas rooted in the influence of growth-oriented and sectoral policy strategies. From a state theory standpoint, the changing conception of spatial planning reflects the downfall of Keynesian welfarist ideas and the steady intensification and prevailing clout of neoliberal ideologies. This overall transformation is embedded in the reorientations of planning policies and practices at each level of planning administration.

By aligning with different development orientations, the evolution of national planning policies is illustrative of how the conception of Danish spatial planning has undergone continuous and oftentimes radical shifts since the late 1980s. The neoliberal policy adjustments introduced at the time partly influenced the alignment of spatial planning with growth-oriented and competitiveness agendas founded on diversity and geographical differentiation. This positioning along with the Planning Act's pursuit for 'appropriate' development implied the weakening of the urban hierarchy pattern and the rise of alternative spatial vocabularies influenced by discourses of Europeanisation, sustainability and competitiveness during the 1990s (Galland, 2012a). In the 2000s, former spatial concepts were gradually transformed into hybrid spatial notions aimed at creating 'functional urban regions', thereby reflecting the neoliberal demands of the coalition government at the time. As of the early 2010s, national planning mainly relates with sectoral thinking and clearly exhibits a lack of spatial consciousness. Rather than a planning crisis, this detachment from 'the spatial' could also be interpreted as the beginning of the end of a national spatial planning framework *per se*.

At the regional level, the conception of spatial planning somehow preserved its socio-spatial and welfarist heritage until recently. The establishment of the spatial urban hierarchy pattern enabled regional planning to attain socio-economic objectives until the recent reform of local government structure abolished the county level. This major shift implied that regional planning aligned with growth-oriented strategies to back up the competitiveness agenda of the newly formed administrative regions. The absence of spatial consciousness at the regional level could imply that inter-regional and intra-regional policies concerned with physical planning, environmental quality as well as other sectoral matters become significantly overlooked by individual municipal plans.

The cases of national and regional spatial planning illustrate how the Danish planning domain tends to play different roles in catering for growth and spatial development over time. Accordingly, spatial planning originally undertook a 'steering' role in

safeguarding spatial coordination and coherence through harmonising plans, policies and practices across different administrative levels. At the national level, the guidance or steering of spatial development required the establishment of planning institutions, the enactment of planning legislation, the creation of national planning reports, the decentralisation of planning tasks to counties and municipalities and the introduction of national directives. At the regional level, such steering role was exercised by the direction provided by regional plans, which integrated different sectoral policy objectives while safeguarding equal socio-economic development through inter-municipal coordination.

By increasingly aligning with either growth-oriented or environmental preservation policy agendas, spatial planning has turned out to adopt alternative roles at every administrative level in recent years. At the national level, a ‘strategic’ role surfaced when policies became aligned with Europeanisation and globalisation agendas whereby growth-oriented visions about the qualities of particular places replaced the idea of traditional land-use planning and spatial coordination. More recently, however, national-level planning has almost entirely downplayed strategic place-making visions and has instead leaned towards adoption of a ‘balancing’ role in dealing with more specific sectoral policy considerations. Simultaneously, however, the national level has adopted a ‘regulatory’ role ever since the implementation of the 2007 structural reform through the enactment of binding directives and instruments to exercise planning control at the local level. At the regional level, a ‘facilitating’ role has concurrently emerged, whereby the new administrative regions foster competitiveness through ‘soft’, growth-oriented policy strategies that should comply with the competitiveness agendas put forward by external actors and laws.

The formal and hierarchical institutional arrangements originally put forward by the Danish government to attain territorial synchrony once revealed the comprehensive-integrated nature of Danish spatial planning. Being gradually altered since the 1980s, these tiered governance structures have been paralleled by the creation of new spaces of governance. Both the ‘softening’ of the Danish planning system and the rescaling of planning responsibilities after 2007 have generated a fuzzy governance landscape within and across administrative levels. This entails that planning competences have become somewhat disputed amongst formal and informal planning actors, particularly at the regional level. In this particular context, processes of ‘filling in’ have sparked the creation of soft governance spaces that oftentimes attempt to outcompete and undermine formal planning arrangements in assuming the functions performed by the abolished counties. The same could be said about the addition of ‘sovereign’ hard spaces (i.e. Regional Growth Fora) in the formal Danish planning system. While this combination of hard and soft spaces of governance seems to reflect a crisis in the planning system, it could alternatively portray the rise of an emerging scalar consciousness, wherein the territory is not any longer perceived by sub-regional levels of government as a hard-edged container (Healey, 2006).

In summary, the structural reform implied the ‘softening’ of the principle of framework control and, to a high degree, the partial fragmentation of spatial planning in Denmark. This is illustrated by the lack of harmonisation between plans at different scales and their notable differences in thematic aspects. Currently, then, national planning mainly oversees policy aspects of environment and nature protection; regional planning lacks clout to make spatial planning decisions and thereby exclusively concentrates on fostering economic growth; and municipal planning stands as the sole actor responsible for physical and land use planning albeit controlled by national level binding instruments. In this view, the new Danish planning system could be perceived as a case displaying particular policy mismatches and a lessened degree of institutional harmonisation.

## **6. Viability Implications of a Transformed Planning System**

An assessment of the outcomes emerging from the above sections suggests that Danish spatial planning has gradually diverged from its comprehensive-integrated tradition. As a consequence of this deviation, the planning system is less likely to make national planning reports and regional development plans matter or to make them have a say in future spatial development processes. In principle, a comprehensive-integrated system ought to depict more coherent conceptual orientations as well as stable and coordinated institutional structures within and across different levels of planning administration. However, national and regional planning policies are no longer founded on spatial principles, concepts and vocabularies as their counterparts did ever since the 1970s until 2006. The lessened spatial consciousness and thematic coherence across policies put forward at national and regional levels are illustrative of a different way to conceive planning. In this respect, while national-level planning has shifted away from delivering integrated and strategic development strategies towards concentrating on specific sectoral issues and controlling municipal plans through vetoes, regional-level planning turned away from physical planning towards promoting growth-oriented sectoral strategies to facilitate regional development without taking spatial considerations into account.

From an institutional angle, Danish spatial planning also seems to have stepped aside from its comprehensive-integrated character. The institutional set-up of the Danish spatial planning system originally depicted institutional harmonisation and territorial synchrony. However, the underlying rationale of such welfarist state spatial project has been considerably disassembled after the recent rescaling of planning tasks and responsibilities.

The above policy and institutional shifts as well as the ‘softening’ of the principle of framework control thus suggest that the Danish comprehensive-integrated spatial planning tradition is somewhat worn out. The partial policy and institutional fragmentation of the Danish planning system characterised by its less connected

administrative levels implies that neither the scope nor the actual performance of spatial planning can be adequately understood from an angle of a self-contained system *per se*. Rather, to understand what spatial planning entails in terms of conceptual orientations and institutional capacities, it is necessary to zoom into every layer within the system to be able to grasp the actual scope of and rationale behind planning *per se* as well as the specific institutional relations embedded in this policy domain. While the Planning Act has been nonetheless sustained in terms of its hierarchical logic of framework control, the above disparities show that there could be a need to redefine the institutional framework and principles of Danish spatial planning.

## 7. Final Remarks

This paper has highlighted the implications concerned with the gradual loss of spatial consciousness in the policy documents, strategies and institutional relations that comprise the Danish planning system. The paper has attempted to show that, as a whole, current planning policies and practices at national and regional levels do not reflect upon a spatial vision of the country based on its current and potential physical structure and functional relationships. This lack of strategic reasoning and geographical thinking evidently reduces the possibility for spatial planning to have a say in present and future spatial decision-making processes. In contrast with the structural configuration and capacities of its predecessor, the current Danish planning system thereby yields less influence in attempting to make plans matter.

The above outcomes also suggest that Danish spatial planning has the faculty to align itself with prevailing government agendas. In this respect, spatial planning ends up reflecting the ideologies and interests of the government in place. Influenced by waves of globalisation materialised through growth and competitiveness agendas, more neoliberal-minded governments have increasingly favoured the relative strength of economic sectors and activities (e.g. finance, outsourcing of production, tourism, and so forth) that relate less with the planning domain. These governments' preferences have indirectly caused that spatial planning be regarded more as a cost than an asset, a situation that explains the remarkable loss of political clout exerted by national planning.

Denmark is currently ruled by a centre-left coalition government, which recently came into power by replacing a liberal-conservative government that ruled since 2001. This new government faces the challenge of the on-going global economic recession, implying that a continued focus in support of competitiveness and sectoral agendas is more likely to remain in place. Based on this situation, the scope of national and regional spatial planning in Denmark as conceived before the 2007 structural reform should not be viewed in light of a temporary setback. Rather, it is more likely that Danish spatial planning (except for municipal land-use planning and

regional planning in Greater Copenhagen) continues to be deprived from its former societal and distributive capabilities. In this sense, planning is also likely to remain as a flexible and multi-purpose tool designed to fill-in specific sectoral agendas with little thematic connection across scales. Without an operationally sound cross-level planning system, local land-use planning could hence be prone to face numerous inter-municipal challenges given the lack of expertise to deal with spatial coordination issues, formerly a regional competence that has been voided.

In terms of future research, the outcome of this work calls for further exploration and analyses concerning the impact of structural reforms on spatial planning systems and policies in other comparable European countries. So far, limited comparative research has been made concerning the evolution of spatial planning traditions after the alluded EU Compendium was published in the late 1990s. In this respect, it would be worth assessing the state of ‘comprehensive-integrated’ planning systems in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Ireland and Austria, amongst others, in order to develop a more thorough understanding regarding the changing conditions of spatial planning rationales and institutional relations.

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<sup>1</sup> The economic and political driving forces behind this particular shift are underscored by Healey et al. (1997) and Albrechts et al. (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Denmark was the main Nordic contributor in the realisation of the ESDP (Böhme, 2002). Several spatial planning concepts derived from this initiative were later incorporated into Danish national planning reports during the late 1990s and the 2000s (cf. Galland, 2012a).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to this general shift, the conception of spatial planning was also influenced by sustainable development agendas at both national and regional levels during the 1990s and early 2000s (Galland, 2012a, 2012b).

<sup>4</sup> In May 2012, the Danish Ministry of the Environment announced the closure of these Environmental Centers and the transfer of their former tasks and responsibilities to the Ministry itself. This decision was made in light of an internal restructuring of the Nature Agency.