

# **European Debates on Spatial and Urban Development and Planning**

## **Setting the Scene**

*Rob Atkinson and Cristiana Rossignolo*

### **1 Introduction**

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to locate the contributions that follow in their wider context, in particular the debates and issues Surrounding European spatial and urban development/planning. These debates, which have their origins in the 1990s, have framed much of the subsequent academic and policy developments that are to found in the wider academic and policy communities and within the pages of this book. It is thus to these that we will turn first before going on to briefly outline the individual chapters.

### **2 The Global and European Context**

At the most general level the development of an information society, the improvement and strengthening of infrastructure networks, the development of the Global economy and European integration all constitute processes of globalization affecting our societies (Albrechts, 1994; Mazza, 1988; Sassen, 1994). Moreover, the processes of globalization have further ensured that international competitiveness has become more deeply entwined with Territorial development. Whilst all territories possess development opportunities some are better placed to exploit and enhance these than others and increasingly cities and regions have deliberately sought to identify their strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the Global economy. They have done this in order to build upon their strengths and address their weaknesses.

As a result the last two decades have witnessed an increasing focus on the role of cities and regions at global, European, national and sub-national levels - cities and regions are increasingly viewed as

“collective actors” in the process of development (Bagnasco and Le Galés, 2000; Jensen-Butler, 1997) playing a key role in Europe’s development. In fact, cities and regions have regained the position they formerly occupied prior to the emergence of modern nation states as important political, economic and social actors<sup>1</sup>. Today cities increasingly engage in ‘foreign policy’, they form alliances and compete against each others within the European Union, because the ability to act effectively within the EU has become no less important than the ability to attract, for instance, a company or an international event to their territories.

While recognising that in order to understand what is happening to our cities we need to be aware of the ‘global context’ in which they operate (see Dicken and Öberg, 1996), we also need to recognise that these forces will have a differential impact upon cities depending upon national policies and their position in the European urban hierarchy (see Hall, 1995). For instance Hall (1993, p883) identified the following factors that affect Europe's urban hierarchy:

1. Globalisation and the formation of continental trading blocs.
2. The transformation of Eastern Europe.
3. The shift to the informational economy.
4. The impact of transport technology.
5. The impact of informational technology.
6. The new role of urban promotion and boosterism.
7. The impact of demographic and social change.

Clearly many of these factors operate on a global scale, although even these are likely to be mediated by national, regional and local factors. But others may equally operate on a purely European scale, for instance the integration of Eastern European countries into the EU combined with the move of the German government to Berlin could shift the centre of gravity within the EU eastward with corresponding implications for Europe's urban hierarchy (see Lichtenberger, 1995).

The point is that distinctly European and national developments can have important Spatial impacts and implications (both positive and negative) for cities and city regions. Nevertheless, it would be churlish to deny there has been a growing recognition that the EUs sectoral policies have important impacts on urban areas and their development and that these policies should take into account their ‘Spatial impact’ and ‘Urban dimension’ (CEC, 1998b, 2007a and 2007b). However, the problem remains that there is relatively little or no consideration of the impacts of

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance one might compare today’s cities with the former Italian ‘city states’ of the fifteenth century and the cities of the Hanseatic League in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

EU sectoral policies (e.g. transport) on urban and spatial development. This of course highlights a much more general problem within the European Commission (EC) that there is a lack of joined up thinking and action across policy areas particular with regard to territorial (or spatial) impacts (see Schout and Jordan, 2007). Although we should also acknowledge that at national level much the same applies with regard to the impact of policies on urban change and development, so this is not a problem restricted to the EC.

Given this it should be no surprise that at EU level the networking capacity of cities and regions has been recognized in terms of their contribution to the Lisbon-Gothenburg Agenda (see CEC, 2005) and within nations cities and regions are seen as key drivers of European and national economic development and competitiveness. At the same time cities and regions are also thought to have a major role in territorial and social development, the furthering of Social Cohesion and addressing issues of Sustainability. Thus they have become a central focus of academic and policy debate as well as key actors in policy development and practice.

The title of this book *The Re-creation of the European City - Governance, territory and Polycentricity* reflects an emerging consensus that spatial and Urban planning and development have become increasingly intertwined and cannot, if they ever could, be considered in isolation. In the past when planning was often largely limited to land-use planning the spatial implications of urban change and development were frequently misunderstood or largely ignored. Questions of how spatial and Urban planning impacted on economic development were not seen as relevant. While the impact of these issues on territorial and Social Cohesion did not even figure on the policy agenda. Over the last 10 years this has begun to change and there has been a growing impetus to develop an 'Integrated approach' to Territorial development, which has included a growing emphasis on issues of governance both in terms of horizontal and vertical Coordination and at the territorial level. As result we have witnessed the emergence of new forms of Territorial governance particularly at the urban and city regional levels.

### **3 The Book Chapters**

The main purpose of this book is to bring together some of the rich and diverse studies and research on cities and regions: how they are thought and planned at different Scales in different European contexts. This book investigates the position of regions and cities both within Europe, and also globally, in particular the impacts of EU urban and Territorial