
ARTICLES

Strategic Plan-making in Europe: institutional innovation

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Introduction

Within the European Union (EU) there is increasing discussion of urban and regional futures both in terms of the differences in land-use regulations and executive application, and the disparities in territorial development within and between member states. *Europe 2000*'s (CEC, 1991a) contribution has been to suggest that the potential benefits of the single internal market are likely to be realised more fully if spatial problems, such as congestion, missing links in communication networks and 'inconsistencies', which impede the rational allocation of resources, are resolved or at least alleviated. *Europe 2000 +* (CEC, 1994) whilst taking forward these claims of uneven development, locally embedded 'restrictive' regulatory practices and inherent spatial problems, suggests a need for equitable cooperation on spatial planning to reduce these trends. *Europe 2000 +* infers that one way of achieving these aims would be a new model of competitiveness based on sustainable equitable development, recognising long-term not just short-term returns. Reliance is placed on inter-regional and transnational programmes and projects to diffuse information on development opportunities and create a "more equal possibility of establishing the various conditions necessary for improving competitiveness" (p. 21). Davies (1994) advises that private sector pressure for improved efficiency and greater responsiveness to market forces could lead to a gradual convergence in policies and practices. This pressure, he argued, would impact in a negative way on the degree of certainty about planning policies and lead to delay in their implementation.

Innovation in European Planning Systems

Most empirical studies of regulatory change in planning systems have tended to focus either on examples of specific development projects or the formalised legal procedures, rarely comparing more than two or three countries at one time. Those who have taken a more reflective perspective argue that key international differences can be explained by the legal basis of society (whether judge-made

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TABLE 1. The innovation case studies

Country	Case study	Commentator
Sweden	Marks Kommun	Khakee
Finland	Jyvaskyla	Virtanen
Netherlands	Friesland Province	Needham
Germany	New Laender	Dieterich
Switzerland	Zurich conurbation	Ringli
Italy	Grosseto Province	Vignozzi
Portugal	Lisbon	Vasconcelos
France	Lyons conurbation	Motte
England	Lancashire county	Davoudi/Healey/Hull

or statute law) and by the level (national, regional, local) at which the regulatory land-use framework is determined (Davies, 1994). Another possibility not yet well explored is that the detail of intranational variation in political and governmental structures may well explain more of the difference in urban development politics than national contextual factors (Newman, 1994). Heuristically, this suggests a research focus centred on the interaction between the structures used to organise land-use regulation rather than the formalised national regulations. Pre-existing institutional structures in a given locality affect the nature of local coalitions and networks, but more important for shaping urban development outcomes may be the management style of local political leaders and their perception of threats and opportunities. This paper draws on nine empirical case studies¹ (Table 1 and Figure 1) from across Western Europe and presents expert interpretations of institutional innovation within their own planning systems. The case studies are compared using the following categories: the institutional framework, the arenas and forums used to reach agreement, and the interrelationships between those who participated. Before these findings are presented and discussed, the next section explains the method of selecting cases, the operationalisation of key concepts and the interpretation of cases.

Methodological Framework

The empirical research is the product of a collaborative venture between 'experts' in land-use development plan practice and theory from 12 European countries from 1993. Comparable to a structured Delphi approach, significance is given to an observer-inferential orientation relying on expert perceptions to provide the descriptions, categorisations and interpretation of interaction in their native countries. Because of definitional problems in translating concepts from one cultural context to another, the 'experts' worked to reach consensus of definition and direction in three workshops over an 18-month period. This three-staged approach was, first, to develop the initial analytical framework, second to confirm ideas about innovation and focus on the case studies, and finally to review case study findings and revise ideas.

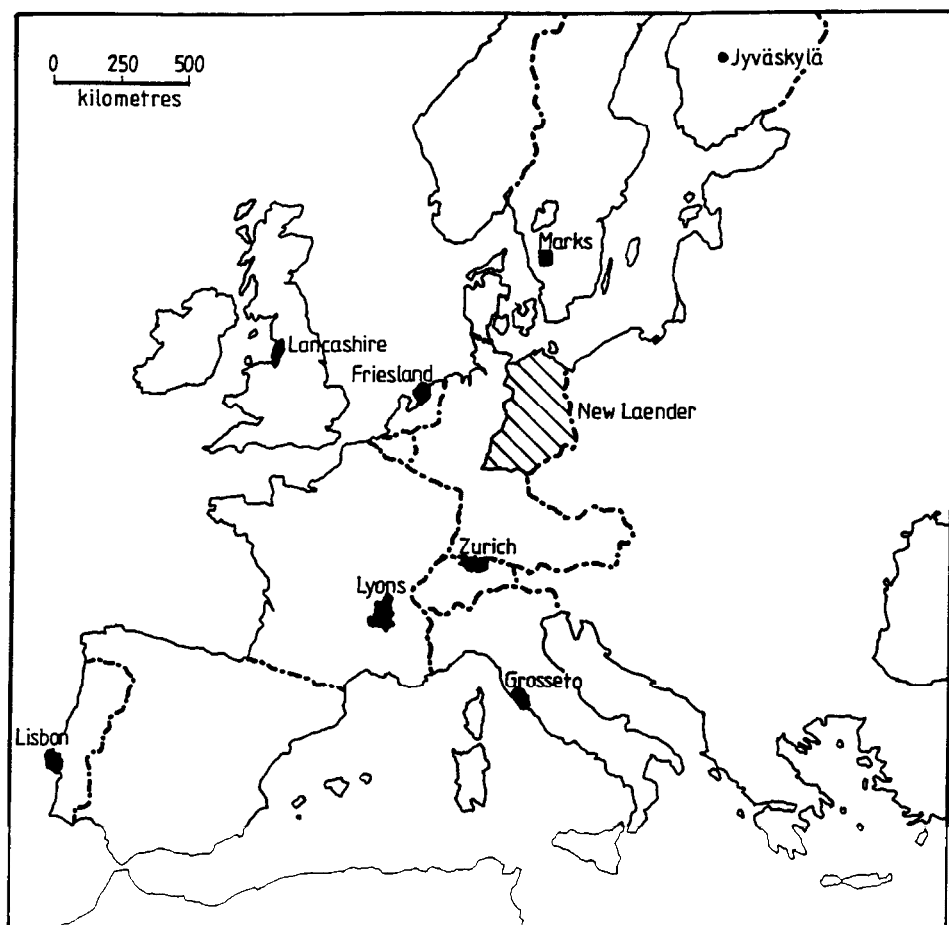


FIGURE 1. Case study location.

To encompass the different systems of reaching agreement on development permits, a ‘planning system’ was taken to mean both the legal and administrative procedures, and the institutional arrangements for guiding the location of investment and for regulating the way land is used and developed. The English equivalent of a structure plan caused some confusion in translation. It could be called a strategic guiding plan, municipal plan, development plan or a general plan, provided that one of its purposes is to guide the “deployment of the regulatory and investment functions of government with respect to the location of projects and the regulation of land use change” (Healey, 1994a, p. 2). Even within England, there is no clear separation between strategic guiding plans and action plans, as evinced by unitary development plans and county structure plans. Much of the discussion in the early workshops revolved round what could be taken as innovative, since innovation in one context is part of the established way of doing things in another. The epistemological approach was to select cases where there was a deliberate attempt to innovate or where significant change was

perceived by key actors to have happened in institutional design (processes, arenas, actors), or the policy ideas (spatial organising ideas, policy content), or the technical methods (analytical, interactive, communicative). To improve inter-rater reliability in the reporting and analysis of the cases, both the meanings of core categories and a guiding pro forma were devised collaboratively. The analysis relies on these native interpretations as well as the transnational collaborative discussions of meaning.

In interpreting institutional innovation in these nine case studies, and being very much part of the three discursive workshops, the author is implicated in this social construction of the meaning of institutional change. Our individual understanding of the regulatory practice of land use is a function of the concepts and categories that are made available to us through the cultural location we occupy. Analysis of the case studies presents a unique multivocal and multicultural account of current planning practice. In this present paper only the institutional design of the case study strategic plans (Figure 1) will be compared, looking first at the procedural framework for their design, the arenas for discussion and legitimisation, and the participating actors and their interrelationships. Second, reflections on the future place of strategic plans in planning practice are presented before finally engaging again with EU discussions on future development guidelines.

Procedural Frameworks

There was a recognition during the discussion of the cases that, with the globalisation of economic tendencies, urban problems are complex and that no one organisation can be in charge. In addition, that with the increasing fragmentation of public agencies mediating between the state and local officials, the traditional rational approach to plan making is no longer appropriate. All the native commentators point to new ways of thinking about the effectiveness and efficacy of regulatory plans in their case studies. There is an underlying recognition that, on the one hand, earlier and parallel negotiations on future change will improve the cooperation and readiness of all stakeholders to accept 'necessary' change, and on the other that there needs to be some 'built-in flexibility' in strategic plans to create as many possibilities of choice for the future whilst only removing the worst options.

How this is translated into legalistic and administrative procedures enmeshing the decision-making process in each case is culture-specific, varying with the established political and institutional contexts. Where these are considered not robust enough or deficient for the task, as in Portugal and Switzerland, new institutional powers have been created. The traditional plan-led systems have responded either by tightening regulations to ensure the smooth functioning of the market (Finland), by deregulation and simplification of the strategic plan approval process (Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany), or by a search for consensus amongst key actors (Sweden, Portugal, Italy). With differing political traditions England, Sweden and France have all witnessed decentralisation of responsibility in certain ways. Most of the case studies specifically mention the

economic crisis in the 1970s as one factor leading to innovation in plan-making procedures and rules. All appear to be making the process of decision making more transparent in some way.

The Swiss case study demonstrates the proactive approach by the Federal Office of Spatial Planning to control regional development through a cascade of guidelines and guiding plans, stitching policies into the functional network of the new Rail 2000 which will link all the major Swiss cities. This is a relatively new experiment in federal planning which, if translated into the cantonal guiding plans and binding communal plans, will clearly indicate where the authorities prefer major investments for business activities to take place (Ringli, 1994, p. 18). In Switzerland this federal vision is guiding the traditionally powerful cantons to create a polycentric compact urban form prefigured by expensive investment in the regional railway system.

In Lisbon, national legislation increasing the status of the municipal plan provided the catalyst to reorganise the whole planning process and regain "the power of intervention" over the regional and national sectoral public agencies operative at municipal level (Vasconcelos & Reis, 1994, p. 9). The means chosen to do this was through the preparation of a new plan with no legal status, the strategic plan, the establishment of a department of strategic planning, and the simultaneous preparation of the strategic plan, the municipal plan and priority project plans. The strategic plan thus served as a 'mobilising device' to establish both vertical coherence between the different plans and dialogue among the several actors involved. Institutional change, both procedural and organisational, was seen as necessary to bring about a more efficient plan permit process. Plan integration is also an explicit feature in the Swedish case study where the land-use plan-making process was meshed with the plans for other municipal programmes. Marks Kommun has developed a diagrammatic 'Planning 8' concept to portray the interlinkages between the long-term goals and financing of the structure plan and other overall plans, with the detailed action plans and operational budgets for each of the municipal responsibilities. This enables both planners and politicians to test the consistency of different plans as well as to have an overview of corporate municipal planning (Khakee, 1994, p. 19).

The Finnish case draws attention to the increasing political awareness of the factors contributing to non-implementation. This is reflected, on the one hand, in concern to ensure plans are 'more feasible' and relevant, and on the other, by the introduction of a range of new instruments to remove blockages in land supply (Virtanen, 1994b). The innovation here is the recognition that 'free markets' will not secure plan implementation, and that land markets always are more or less monopolistic.² There is strong protection of private rights over land in Finland through either market value compensation or exchange of similar land, but there is also a growing consensus of the need to set limits to these rights, embodied in the concept of "socially bound land ownership" (Virtanen, 1994a, p. 82). To facilitate plan implementation and in recognition that community needs come first, legal and financial instruments have been introduced to ensure that land zoned for development is not withheld and that some part of the plan-induced land-value increases can be recouped by the community.³

Instead of new regulations to correct the imperfections in the function-

ing of the private market, Sweden, Portugal, The Netherlands and Germany have chosen to pare down bureaucratic administrative procedures and regulations which are seen to hinder plan implementation. In Marks Kommun this stemmed from national legislation releasing the mandatory implementation of the strategic plan, enabling the case study plan to be less deterministic, more exploratory or indicative, providing a framework for more detailed negotiations over specific projects. This pushes the regulatory contract further along the development process in that crucial negotiations over development coordination take place at the more detailed 'disposition plan' or action area plan stage.

The planning team in Lisbon, similarly, made use of procedural flexibility in recent use class legislation to classify the whole municipality as 'urban space', which allowed them to define their own sub-classes. This all-encompassing class replaces the 8–10 classes traditionally used and gives greater freedom to differentiate between the flexible enforcement of rules in areas of expansion and more rigid enforcement in the 'consolidated' or built-up areas and sensitive ecological areas. In Friesland, sufficient background knowledge was deemed available, within the small planning team, to omit the research collection and public interaction phases before plan presentation (Needham, 1994). Germany has instigated a market-led approach to planning on the more difficult contaminated military sites in the new *Laender*, which shortcuts lengthy local plan procedures. Here differentiated informal strategies for site conversion are being used which include ratification of investors' plans in Gotha and intervention by Potsdam using an urban development measure to collect some of the increase in land values. This latter measure relies on careful negotiation between the municipality, the developer and the federal government selling the land to enter into an urban development contract in advance of development plan formulation (Dieterich, 1994).

Coordination of institutional actors is fundamental for effective decision making. Motte (1994) notes that consensus formation was harder to sustain in the French case study because of the lack of a simple and clear organisational framework identifying the respective role of all the administrative participants. Fairly radical decentralisation of land-use regulation in France has collapsed the previous hierarchies leaving numerous institutional players at local level. Coordination was attempted through the establishment of a coordinating committee which served as an additional negotiative forum.

Discursive Arenas

Nearly all the case studies reveal the involvement of public institutions, local organisations and members of the public during the information-collecting stages of the plan process as well as at the plan approval stage. The Friesland plan is innovatory in this respect leaving such interaction to the latter five-month plan presentation and approval stage. In Lisbon, this was seen as "pushing planning out of the office", in Jyväskylä as "polyphonic planning" and as in Marks Kommun "spontaneous territorial cooperation". The cases differ to the extent that this process was structured by experts, politicians or local organisations.

In the Zurich case a formally structured process set in motion an interactive planning process based around a workshop with advice from local, national and international experts. Headed by the mayor, all the stakeholders were represented, feeding into an 'expert'-led discussion of proposed solutions. This involved multidisciplinary teams testing out and exchanging ideas at the same time and in the same place, with the experts using the best ideas of the various teams and processing them into a strategy (Ringli, 1994, p. 18). In Grosseto the plan team sought to restore confidence in the highly prescriptive Italian plans by "extracting" the plan vision from as "many people as possible" employing an interactive topic-based exercise (Vignozzi, 1994, p. 5). Four 'informal' public meetings were held to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each of the four topics chosen, to develop a consensus about the key issues. For the consultants, the interviews with commune mayors, representatives of public bodies, corporations and private interests, which followed the open meetings, were more successful for actually developing policy ideas and influencing action "in a sensible way" (Vignozzi, 1994, p. 9).

In Lisbon, a continuous participation process that started from the early stages and involved contributions from a "considerable number of social, cultural, scientific and economic agents" set the basis for the identification of issues and "the building up of a favourable ground" for the implementation of policies (Vasconcelos & R, 1994, p. 9). In Marks Kommun, plan consultation was structured by the needs of the plan and legislation, using public meetings, the local press and special brochures to involve political parties, business interests and local associations (Khakee, 1994, p. 3). Lancashire planners have set up, with political support, the Lancashire Environmental Action Forum, a partnership between 90 local organisations. Attached onto the back of the plan process, this arena is raising environmental consciousness amongst its members and in the county through a wide process of information dissemination and action (Davoudi *et al.*, 1994).

It is clear from the case studies that there has been an opening out of existing decision networks to encourage either the participation of new actors or the involvement of existing actors in new arenas. Precisely what effect this is having on the way issues are discussed is not clear from the case studies. The influence of large public and private companies has always been exercised behind the scenes, well before public and private companies has always been exercised behind the scenes, well before public discussion begins. The case studies do hint at the disproportionate influence that actors have on outcomes, but none gives any real insights on the operation of this hidden power. The French case indicates how public arenas may be managed and chosen specifically for political ends, and the Italian case study how the twin tracking of a strategic plan embodies both a public face and secret negotiations over financing.

The strategic plan for the Lyons conurbation was "used as an electoral platform for the municipal representatives" (Motte, 1994, p. 7). Public conferences, at the start and completion of plan elaboration, served as show-cases for the presentation of political statements about the modernisation of the conurbation. Whilst the Grosseto plan vision was being framed in public

arenas, regional officials, representatives of public bodies and corporations were holding parallel meetings to negotiate on the financing and management of implementation. Each arena evolved in a different way, but it was the ease of access by officials and investors at different stages that “deeply affected process and policy content” (Vignozzi, 1994, p. 9).

Information collection seems to have widened out but coordination between plan preparers and plan implementors is, in most cases, achieved behind closed doors, to produce a vision which can then be presented to the wider public at some stage—usually at the formal consultation stage. To assist the dynamics of this vision formation and promotion, new arenas, outside the administrative nexus and linking into political and business networks, are seen as necessary. By bringing the relevant stakeholders and actors together, the anarchic patterns of urban change can be moulded to fit the vision. This recognises that the future is the product of the choices made by a multiplicity of public and private actors as reflected in market trends, and political will (Motte, 1994, p. 9). Peripheral to market dynamics, this suggests that the new arenas and the ‘democratisation’ in plan participation may well only serve as a legitimisation rather than a directive role.

Key Actors

If as the case studies suggest there is more visible networking in public arenas with the formation of new alliances for policy legitimisation and even policy formulation, to what extent are these changed practices impacting on the roles played by key actors—planning practitioners, politicians, investment and development interests, environmental groups and ordinary members of the public—in strategic land use decision-making? The close interlinkage of the plan process with the patronage of key politicians has been noted, with local political figures gambling their re-election on the outcome (Lyons) and providing political support to overcome institutional complexity (Lisbon). Planning practitioners have protected their controlling technical role by shutting out ‘discordant noises’ through the setting up of a specific team and/or the appointment of a ‘neutral’ outsider to both coordinate the team and account to political bosses.

In Marks Kommun an outside consultant was employed, who worked closely with the officer coordinating group and key politicians, allowing officers simultaneously to prepare 10 other issue-specific and action area plans. The consultant was able to “draw out the plan from the planning culture”, continually testing and exploring alternative options (Khakee, 1994, p. 23). Control over the Friesland plan was maintained by a core preparation team of three and a half officers with a support group of 15 to provide information and advice. The elite group worked behind closed doors with little direct involvement with political representatives. The establishment of a new department of strategic planning in Lisbon provided the supportive environment to progress the technical work of two plans with separate teams, both coordinated by an external consultant who played an important intermediary role. Where successful these small autonomous units can take responsibility for the coordination of the plan-making

process with little outside interaction, so as to give the technical officers more flexibility in action and avoid possible interdepartmental conflicts.

Investors and developers fighting for better locational conditions for economic growth not only have a strong influence on politicians, but increasingly have more contact with the technical officers preparing plans. The specific administrative cultural context in each case study plays a strong filtering role in response to economic pressures. On specific issues alliances have formed between politicians and developers at least in public forums. Khakee (1994) gives an example from Marks Kommun, where politicians aided by developers reclassified a national historic relic as only of local value in opposition to cultural preservation interests. In Switzerland developers "have been able to push the authorities at all planning levels to create more favourable conditions for private investment" (Ringli, 1994, p. 19). In the unique situation of encouraging investment to reuse the highly contaminated, former military sites in the new *Laender*, the private investor as 'implementor' as 'planner' is given a key role:

The private investor is playing a bigger role than before;...invited to submit [her/]his plans to the planning administration [and in the process] negotiating the possible density of construction on the site. (Dieterich, 1994, p. 10)

Institutional innovation appears to have had little impact on interaction between the key players in Italy. Vignozzi states that in the province of Grosseto the relations between planning authorities, landowners, developers and financial institutions "are dominated by a mutual lack of confidence" (1994, p. 4), yet, in Italy as a whole, there has been no significant lobbying for reform by real estate developers. Environmental and neighbourhood pressure groups have been unable to exert much influence at this strategic level of planning, often being informed too late about decisions to be taken. Dieterich (1994) puts the lack of participation by pressure groups in the conversion of surplus military estates down to the conclusion that the opportunities they provide for urban uses are just not well known. In Marks Kommun, where the plan preparation process has been more opaque, nature conservancy interests have had some small gains, acting on their own, against farming interests. They were able to form a much stronger alliance in cooperation with statutory plan consultees and other public agencies particularly over environmental issues and the failure of the local administration to apply national guidelines.

The Role of Planning

The case studies addressed two other institutional questions: how institutional innovations have impacted on, first, the distinction between legally binding plans and indicative plans, and second, the roles and the expertise required of planners. On the one hand, plan making and coverage have been strengthened (Switzerland, Portugal, and Finland in particular), but there are also examples (Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands) where the directive or regulatory status of plans has been weakened. It is in these latter cases that experiments with indicative plans, conceived through the reticulist, enabling, discursive skills of planners, are

loosening the hold of the rational technocratic planning culture. In the regional plan for Friesland, its indicative or developmental role was emphasised over previous horizontal and vertical policy coordination functions, to stimulate lower-tier municipalities to promote development opportunities in line with the plan. The plan directs housing and employment to various 'urban centres' but with no indication of quantities. In reply to the municipalities' criticisms of the 'vagueness' of the policies, the provincial executive have 'quantified' the policy by saying that they should retain their recent share of regional population growth (Needham, 1994). Responding to pressures for freedom of choice, the structure plan for Marks Kommune is 'ambivalent' in its policy guidance over the future settlement pattern, leaving this issue to be negotiated later between the commune and individual enterprises or households.

With the exception of Finland and The Netherlands where state regulation of land use is still expected (Virtanen, 1994a; Needham, 1994), the planning effort is becoming one of securing acceptable compromises from key actors around some future scenario. If the scenario is to be set by perceived market needs, there is little use for a toolbox that contains only inflexible detailed regulations. Rather, relevant up-to-date knowledge of how key actors are constructing 'market needs' has to be acquired in a short space of time requiring an interactive plan preparation process to identify these views and any potential conflicts. As acceptable compromises are difficult to reach, so consensus around a vague and ambivalent vision is often the outcome. The planning effort then becomes one of presenting and packaging the vision because it is the attractiveness of that vision that will win support, "not by showing how solid are the foundations on which that vision is based" (Needham, 1994, p. 13). This raises the question of whether these visions will endure over time, to provide a consensus for more detailed discussion when intended actions become 'firmed up'.

Conclusions

It is difficult to reach conclusions about future institutional innovation from nine case studies, chosen specifically because they embodied a different approach to the process of plan making in their country. At a simplistic level we can say there is evidence that a certain amount of flexibility is being built into the policy process and plan outcomes of these innovative strategic plans. On the one hand, this is witnessed in the reduction in policy specificity, leaving lower level plans to specify performance standards and management criteria. A consequence of this is that futures are left 'uncertain' and have to be 'constructed' at a later date, entailing additional negotiative interaction with more parochial regulators. On the other hand, there has been more flexible application of established procedures as well as innovations in the selection and management of technical teams. This has increased the control of plan preparers in response to pressures for a more coherent and efficient process. Flexibility can be explained by the reduction in land ownership by public authorities, coupled with the relative reduction in public investment available.

Planning has become more accessible. The technical expertise required for

long-term projections, trend extrapolations and detailed analysis is no longer fundamental to the plan-making process, when the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats behind city positioning in Europe can be quickly gathered from the 'gut reactions' of business and political actors. If this construction is to dominate, we can surmise that strategic plans will serve several functions. First, as a discursive process, during which national priorities are 'translated' into local specific guidelines reflecting local growth interests. Second, as a document, they will serve both as a mediating statement of this process and as a promotional or bid document to secure inward investment and national and European funds.

Strategic plan-making is therefore providing the process and a legitimised documentary tool to coordinate and organise disparate private sector development intentions within wider community goals in the least conflictual way possible. This interaction, the sharing of each other's points of view and the visionary strategy can be very powerful to the extent that secure implementation markers are set well before negotiation around the details. But from a strategic standpoint, this does raise issues of how these integrative visions will be translated into more detailed local plans, and what effect such deregulation will have on the future functioning of the urban environment and the meaning of urban planning.

Only the Swiss case demonstrated an engagement with *Europe 2000 +* guidelines, stitched into a national policy aiming to steer development between and within the cantons to reduce congestion and wasteful competition to attract inward investment. The pro-growth nature of the innovatory plans also suggests that the new model of competitiveness espoused by *Europe 2000 +*, based on a cocktail of sustainable development, equitable cooperation and long-term accounting procedures, will have to await the lever of integrated financial and spatial planning criteria in the next round of EU regional funds.

Notes

1. I am indebted to each of the case study authors for permission to quote from their papers and for their comments on a previous draft of this paper.
2. I am grateful to Professor Virtanen for pointing this out to me in a private communication.
3. One example of this is that building lots are required to be serviced with the necessary highway infrastructure.

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