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Anna Geppert

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Keynote speech for the Conference  
Putting the Territorial Agenda 2030 into practice  
Local and regional pilot activities and their supporting framework conditions  
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**Spatial planning  
in the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2030**

**Prof. dr. Hab. Anna Geppert, Sorbonne Université**

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**Abstract**

*Over the last 20 years, spatial planning has been progressively overshadowed by the EU's economic and environmental objectives: climate change, energy transition, digital economy. The EU's Territorial Agenda 2030 is a further illustration of this.*

*However, it is the national and local actors who, in the concrete choices they make, develop their territory. The pandemic should make us think. It is time to question the paradigm of happy globalisation, to invest in our cities, our countryside and our regions away from the big cities.*

*From this point of view, the proposals of the Latvian Presidency (Riga Declaration on small and medium-sized towns, 2015) and the Portuguese Presidency (for the development of rural areas, 2021) are welcome. Let's get back to spatial planning!*

**Key words**

Spatial planning; European spatial planning; Territorial Agenda of the European Union; European Spatial Development Perspective; climate change; energy transition; digital economy; small and medium-sized towns; development of rural territories.

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to the organisers of this conference for inviting me to reflect on the relationship between the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, which is already in its second revision, and its raison d'être: European spatial planning, or at least spatial planning in Europe.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. Jonas Scholtze, who addressed three very pertinent questions to me concerning the Territorial Agenda 2030 and its implementation in relation to spatial planning; I will follow their order.

The present speech, reworked, will be the subject of a later scientific publication.

**1-Will the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 strengthen spatial planning in Europe?**

To answer this question, I will start with a brief historical review - not for the sake of history, but because it helps to understand the present situation. Originally, the European Economic Community was building a common market and had no competence in spatial planning. However, from 1975 onwards, the European Economic Community set up a regional policy in order to support the regions that were suffering from the very liberal economic model that it established - in other words, the least wealthy, least developed regions. Is this spatial planning under a different name?

For a French person, the answer is yes. In its early days, French regional planning policy aimed to rebalance the national territory, reducing the disparities between industrialised and less industrialised regions, and between Paris and the rest of the country. It is therefore not surprising that it was a Frenchman, Jacques Delors, who gave a major boost to regional policy when he was President of the European Commission (1985-1995). However, in other EU member states, spatial planning is based on other traditions. Even today, there is no consensus on what spatial planning is, what its objectives are, what its instruments are or who is - and should be - involved.

At the European level, history shows the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of getting the Member States to agree on a European spatial planning policy. It took ten years of negotiations (1989-1999) to produce the ESDP. The informal Council of Ministers responsible for spatial planning adopted not a European-scale master plan, visible on a map, but a set of principles that each state could interpret and implement according to its own circumstances.

With the ESDP, the European level adopted a method that is still relevant to the territorial agenda of the European Union: governing by discourse. The last twenty years have shown the success of certain concepts disseminated by the ESDP, such as polycentrism, which has been taken up in many national and regional documents, and the rural-urban partnership. Thus, a certain convergence of vocabulary and thought has taken place between nations. Spatial planning policies have been influenced, particularly by the rules for the allocation of structural funds. Spatial planning has been strengthened, particularly in countries where it was not of great importance.

The Territorial Agenda 2020 has added a method for its implementation: this regular consultation of stakeholders, coordinated by the troikas of the states holding the EU Council Presidency. In this way, the policies implemented are better known, followed, and "peer pressure" can play a role in promoting them. However, the priorities added over the last twenty years have profoundly changed this policy - in parallel with the evolution of the EU's overall objectives.

While we are on the subject of government by discourse, let us take a look at the adjectives that qualify the vision of the European territory pursued in successive documents: in the ESDP (1999) it is *balanced and sustainable*. In the first version of the Territorial Agenda 2020 (2007), Europe becomes *competitive and sustainable*. In the 2011 update, we find an *inclusive, smart and sustainable* Europe, which is fully in line with the Europe 2020 strategy of the European Council. Along the way, the issue of regional disparities has lost its importance. In other words, economic policy has taken precedence over spatial planning.

The 2030 Territorial Agenda continues in this direction. Its subtitle, "A future for all places", is a catch-all. Its two main objectives, a Just Europe and a Green Europe, relate to sectoral policies, economic, social and environmental. They are broken down into "territorial priorities", in which the spatial dimension is finally mentioned. In this strategic framework, the spatial planning dimension itself is weak.

However, fortunately, implementation will depend on national and local actors. Research that we have carried out on integrated territorial investments (ITI) in the Île-de-France region has shown that it is in the concrete local choices that the balance between sectoral injunctions and the territorialisation of public policies takes shape. It is therefore more important than ever that nations, cities and regions take hold of their territorial development and act. Therefore, while remaining very reserved, and even critical, about the evolution of the strategic framework of the territorial agenda, I see more hope in the pilot projects carried out in concrete action, in particular in the subject of the regions lagging behind carried by our German friends.

The next question invites me to enter the debate by proposing guidelines for action.

## **2. Developing the European territory outside globalisation.**

Allow me to offer a personal reflection. Which regions are "lagging behind"? Today, they are the losers of globalisation. They are the regions far from the metropolises, where small and medium-sized towns - the bulk of European towns! - are struggling to keep up with global economic competition.

We believed that we had to connect these regions and cities to globalisation. The pandemic should make us reconsider. We do not know the cause of the virus, but we have seen its spread: Corona is a virus of globalisation. It has flourished in places where people from all over the world gather, airports, ski resorts, large demonstrations. It hit the big cities hard, those cities that are, par excellence, the places of globalisation: Milan, New York, London, Paris...

In France, with each new announcement of lockdown, we are witnessing a real urban exodus. In Île-de-France, one million people, or 10% of the population, are moving to the provinces. On the property market, medium-sized towns and suburban locations are becoming more attractive. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, but in reality the movement had already begun among the most affluent populations because, despite their performance on the world market, our megacities have become unliveable.

In the anonymity of our big cities, we no longer see people but masses, and the slogans of tolerance, justice and fraternity ring hollow. In science fiction films, faceless figures inhabit dystopian metropolises: anonymous, athletic

workers in Fritz Lang's Metropolis, policemen and criminal gangs in Gotham City, android replicants in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner. The latter is set in Los Angeles in... 2019. Have we come this far? Through artificial intelligence and eugenics, we are trying to produce androids. And our society is becoming increasingly harsh. On my daily commute in the heart of Paris, I come across people screaming in the metro, aggressive behaviour, homeless people sleeping on the pavement, rats running in the streets in broad daylight. Only five years ago, it was not like this. This is what the elites have already started to run away from.

It is time to question globalisation, to develop cities and regions that can function locally. When we talk about polycentrism, let us not forget that! Because today, even with our functional regions, our circular economy and our short circuits, we are far from it. It is time to reduce our dependence on global trade, which turns our territories into giants with feet of clay, and to renew our approach to the regional economy.

It is now time to build cities on a human scale, where people can live and work. Cities with short distances, with streets that invite you to wander, with welcoming gardens; cities free from shrill billboards, blaring loudspeakers and the Internet; cities in harmony with their hinterland; cities rich in history; cities built around a church, not a factory, a bank, a tourist attraction or a shopping centre.

This brings me to the last question: the contemporary debate.

### **3. Reconnecting with the foundations of spatial planning**

In France, the priorities of planning policies are driven by international organisations, the European Union and the United Nations: adaptation to climate change, energy transition and digitalisation. This trio carries a major internal contradiction. If the Internet were a country, it would be the third largest consumer of electricity in the world with 1500 TWH per year, behind China and the United States. In total, digital technology consumes 10 to 15% of the world's electricity. This consumption doubles every 4 years. The energy savings made in other sectors will not be sufficient to offset the disastrous effects of this headlong rush.

While our public policies are accelerating the digital transition, we are abandoning traditional sectors of regional development. In France, rail networks are in decline and regional lines are being abandoned: we have lost 30% of our lines compared to the 1950s. The road network is deteriorating due to a lack of maintenance. According to an audit conducted in 2018, without a major change in infrastructure policy in the next few years, more than 60% of roadways will be severely deteriorated by 2037, not counting engineering structures. The most disadvantaged areas will be the first victims, and being equipped with Internet will not help them.

At European level, in 2015, the Latvian Presidency promoted the Riga Declaration, which called for a policy of revitalisation of small and medium-sized towns. However, it is clear that there has been no follow-up. The Portuguese Presidency's proposal concerning support for rural areas is particularly welcome and relevant. These two aspects, small and medium-sized towns and rural areas, could be the subject of joint reflection and coordinated, even integrated, actions.

It is urgent to rethink our priorities by taking these elements into account. As on the eve of the fall of the Roman Empire, we are at a turning point. Without a deliberate planning policy, in terms of employment, infrastructure and support for services, many small and medium-sized towns will decline - and yet they still exist today. We have a unique network of towns and cities that is a territorial substratum for a harmonious development of the territory. Let us not wait until it is too late!