
Successful launch of the new Erasmus Mundus Masters programme PLANET EUROPE

On 20 September 2012 the conference “Europe Matters: European Spatial Planning, Environmental Policies and Regional Development” was held in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. This one-day conference celebrated the successful completion of the ‘EURECA’ Curriculum Development project (funded by the EU Lifelong Learning programme). It also marked the start of the new Erasmus Mundus Master programme ‘PLANET Europe’.

PLANET Europe is a two-year (120 ECs) integrated Erasmus Mundus Masters programme on European spatial planning, environmental policies and regional development. It is offered by a consortium of Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands), Blekinge Institute of Technology (Sweden), and Cardiff University (United Kingdom). In 2011, PLANET Europe was awarded the EU’s Erasmus Mundus (EMMC) label for high-quality international education programmes, which allows to offer prestigious scholarships for talented students from all over the world. Of more than ninety applicants for the first year of the PLANET Europe Masters programme, eighteen talented students from all over the world were selected to commence their studies in September 2012. Over the coming two years of their study, PLANET Europe students will gain an advanced understanding of the European dimension of spatial planning, spatial and environmental policy and regional economic development in the EU; acquire a theoretical grounding in multi-level governance, institutional perspectives and comparative analysis; and prepare for a career in planning practice or academic post-graduate research in spatial planning.

The conference on 20 September set the scene for the launch of this exciting new programme, and offered room for discussion between around 130 international participants, including practitioners and academics in the field and Masters students on current developments in Europe’s spatial and environmental policies and the prospects for future development and cooperation.
The event consisted of a plenary morning program, and two rounds of (various) workshop sessions in the afternoon. The conference was opened by a panel of high-level representatives from the three universities. Professor Dr. Kortmann, Rector Magnificus of Radboud University Nijmegen; Dr. Andrew Flynn, Director of Graduate Studies of the School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University; and Dr. Anders Hederstierna, Pro Vice Chancellor of Blekinge Institute of Technology, congratulated the new European Masters programme for being a flagship of internationalisation in their respective universities. The plenary session concluded with a presentation by Dr. Stefanie Dühr, leader of the EURECA project and academic coordinator of PLANET Europe, on the process of developing the new programme, its content and organisation, and the expectations for future research cooperation and the preparation of graduates for an increasingly international labour market.

After the official opening of the conference, the program commenced with two keynote presentations by Maarten Hajer, professor of Public Policy at the University of Amsterdam and Director of the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, and Fiona Wishlade, Director of the European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde (UK).

Prof. dr. Maarten Hajer’s speech on the topic 'Big problems, big government? Rethinking environmental governance' set out a challenging agenda for European and international environmental policy and governance. He explained how, from the 1950s onwards, human society has been struggling to gain a global perspective on environmental problems, relying greatly on science to analyse trends and explain resulting policy responses. However, such strategies, with their startling but often unpalatable language of 'environmental limits' and 'planetary tipping points' too often failed to translate into robust action. What is more persuasive, Maarten Hajer argued, was the emergence of engaging discourses around low carbon development and green growth. The presentation stimulated an interesting discussion on whether 'storytelling' and convincing narratives were indeed sufficiently effective in achieving more sustainable development, or whether not also better coordination (for example by the EU) is crucial for achieving policy change and corresponding action.

Fiona Wishlade focused on 'Recent developments and dilemmas in EU cohesion policy'. She explained the shift in geographical scope and the changing objectives of EU Cohesion Policy over the past decades, and presented current discussions on the reformulation of the policy in the context of the current economic crisis. These include a shift from uniform and ‘space-neutral’ policy objectives towards a more place-based approach which builds on the potentials of regions and places. This stimulated a discussion on whether one might expect place-based strategies and action to stimulate new forms of societal engagement in environmental governance and local and regional economic development at a time when national public authorities seem less inclined to intervene.

The second part of the day consisted of two rounds of four parallel workshops on key issues of relevance to European spatial planning, environmental policy and regional development. Short summaries of the eight workshops are given further below.
The conference ended with a plenary discussion about the importance of international planning education for European spatial planning, and a reflection on the issues discussed throughout the day. The event proved an inspirational platform for issues that will be addressed in the new Masters programme. The motivation and active involvement of all participants made it a successful and memorable experience.
Report on the workshops:

Workshop 1.1. River basin management in Europe and transboundary cooperation
Workshop convenor: Dr. Mark Wiering, Radboud University Nijmegen

In this workshop, convened by dr. Mark Wiering, guestspeakers Leo Santbergen, Thomas Hartmann and Aline te Linde discussed River basin management and the Water Framework Directive in the context of cross-border cooperation as well as Europe’s influence regarding this topic.

River basin management is an important policy concept in European policies, as manifested in particular by the Water Framework Directive. Through this concept and directive, the EU seeks to stimulate and ‘govern’ transboundary coperation. The workshop paid attention in particular to the influence of ‘Europe’ of transboundary cooperation and new modes of governance.

Leo Santbergen, waterboard Brabantse Delta and PhD candidate at Radboud University Nijmegen, spoke about River basin management and the EU Water Framework Directive in relation to the transboundary dimension of River basin management in water quality management in the Netherlands and Flanders. Leo Santbergen showed that cross-border cooperation is essential and EU-guidelines provide the perfect setting for investigating it. The success of the cross-border cooperation between the Netherlands and Flanders is mainly due to investment in personal relations, acknowledgement of similarities and differences, focus on commons and not on borders, participation in each other’s structures, joint experiments, excursions, workshops.

After Leo Santbergen’s presentation, Thomas Hartmann from Utrecht University discussed ‘clumsy flood plain management’. He focused on differences and similarities of flood plain management and related planning in the Netherlands and Germany. In Germany, water management agencies aim at owning and controlling the land, while in the Netherlands they have a more wholesome approach - they are balancing the issues between spatial planning and water management. Hartman emphasized the importance and benefits for professionals in Germany to take a broader approach and combine water management and spatial planning. In order to do so, Thomas Hartmann proposes finding and applying new modes of governance. This new mode of governance is achieved by orienting water management in Germany towards formulating more definitive legislations which set the frame or aim for actions and leave the scope for administration consistent, “rational” decisions, instead of using conditional legislation which determines precisely the outcome of the decisions of water managers.

The last presentation was given by Aline te Linde from the Free University Amsterdam and Deltares. Aline te Linde discussed Flood risk management in the Rhine River basins against the backdrop of adaptation to climate change. A big issue in relation to transboundary flood management is the big difference in legislation of countries. Aline te Linde explained that the Netherlands, even though Germany has a good flood risk management, still tries to reach higher standards of its flood risk management, like creating longer lasting dikes and enough room for the river to expand during a flood. Important questions relating to flood risk management are: when will the flood happen and what will be the damage? Because different countries take care of different parts of the river basin these questions are answered differently. Within the national context of climate adaptation it seems logical that countries do not focus too much on each other and execute a national flood risk management. However, cooperation with other countries still should be stimulated since it would achieve better protection for the whole area, its cities and inhabitants.
Workshop 1.2. Planning and regional transition  
Workshop convenor: Prof. dr. Jan-Evert Nilsson, Blekinge Institute of Technology

Workshop 1.2 was organised and convened by prof. dr. Jan-Evert Nilsson. The theme of planning and regional transition is interesting to discuss in relation to the existing global economy. The global economy has speeded up the regional process of transformation while a growing number of researchers stress that regional development is path dependent. Future development of regions is strongly connected to the history of a region. As a result, many regions are locked into their industrial specialisation in mature industries, struggling to find ways and incentives towards economic transformation. EU cohesion policy, aiming at strengthening the competitiveness of the region, supports these efforts. Therefore this workshop discussed the possibilities and limitations of policy and planning as a tool to create regional transformation.

By highlighting two case-studies in Sweden, prof. dr. Jan-Evert Nilsson, Ana Mafalda Madureira and Alina Lidén exemplified different approaches that can be used in planning when discussing regional transition (reactive, active and pro-active). The reactive approach concerns solving existing problems. The active approach on the other hand is also about upgrading existing structures. The pro-active approach, goes further and aims to build new structures.

Alina Liden illustrated an example of the active approach, the building of a cluster in the Region Skåne and the development of innovation platforms. The project emerged after a decline in the number of students and its associated regional consequences. The action implemented was based on the Triple Helix method (Region, Municipality, University, businesses).

Mafalda Madureira illustrated the pro-active approach with the case of the city of Malmö, which related to the crisis in the 70s. The pro-active approach mainly had to address the problem of mobilizing more taxes and more families back to Malmö. Action started with the organization of the Housing exhibition to create “the city of tomorrow”. Other projects flourished in parallel like the Öresund bridge. The exhibition encouraged new initiatives and led to the development of new, attractive neighbourhoods, and eventually reshaping of the city. However, this decision was not exempt from negative impacts like segregation in the city between the blue collar and white collar and the unemployment for immigrants in the eastern part. The case of the city of Malmö has shown the potential of the pro-active approach.

Workshop 1.3. The search for ‘Landscape governance’ bridging environmental protection and local development  
Workshop convenor: Prof. dr. Lars Emmelin, Blekinge Institute of Technology

Prof. dr. Lars Emmelin, Eric Markus and Stefan Larson and their audience descended into the world of landscape governance and environmental protection. Planning on the local and regional level is an arena for competition between development-oriented planning and preservation-oriented environmental management. Spatial planning and environmental management in, for example, the Nordic countries have different historical roots, administrative and professional cultures and thought styles or “paradigms” and more or less separate legislation. With relatively loose frame-work
legislation the framing of problems and issues become important for implementation. EU directives and policies furthermore seem to strengthen the natural science, rationalist position of the environmentalists. Workshop 1.3. presented and discussed both the research basis and the implications for "landscape governance". Presentations were given by workshop convenor dr. Lars Emmelin, Eric Markus and Stefan Larsson.

Concluded could be that two dimensions of governance compete with each other. The ‘Environmentalist’ paradigm and the ‘Plan’ paradigm. The Environmentalist paradigm deals with legitimate decision based on science and preservation as the leading figure of thought. The Plan paradigm advocates the opposite, the Plan paradigm sees legitimate decision-taking, taking place based on consensus. Leading figures of thought regarding this paradigm are ‘change’ or ‘development’. Both paradigms approach ‘sustainability’ therefore differently. The Plan paradigm sees sustainability as a process of continuous weighing and negotiation, while sustainability is being seen as ‘state to achieve’ by the environmentalist paradigm. These paradigm struggles can be observed in initiatives such as Natura 2000.

Eric Markus showed some case studies of how the Environmental Impact Assessments changed from pure land use concern to a planning process, which included environmental considerations to environmental acceptability with associated planning concepts.

Stefan Larsson presented a few dilemmas regarding power hierarchies and knowledge types in the development of wind power and 3G infrastructure in Sweden. Dilemmas arise in finding a balance between central decision and local implementation and which rationality is guiding this decision.

Workshop 1.4. Networks, power and environmental planning
Workshop convenor: Dr. Andrew Flynn, Cardiff University

In workshop 1.4. convenors Andrew Flynn and Nick Hacking discussed the importance of local politics and local planning, approaches to planning and power, network formation and a case study about how the participation of local communities influence the planning process. The purpose of the session was to take forward critical perspectives on planning theory and practice. From an environmental planning perspective, infrastructure projects bring together contested technological choices and societal ambitions through what are called ‘actor networks’. It is particularly important to understand how these networks enroll actors and deploy resources to support their perspective and pursue particular strategies. The workshop focused, in particular, on the role of power relations within network settings.

The discussion during the workshop led to the conclusion that awareness about our democratic rights is rising, but people usually do not trust local authorities. Furthermore could be concluded that planners do not define public interests, but they should negotiate between the different public interests as well as facilitating discussions and debates. Agreed is that it is important to understand the rules of the game and to have an arena for expressing interests. After the discussions a case study was presented about waste recovery and incineration in Crymlyn Burrows. In this case the dynamic nature of network relations was illustrated.
Workshop 2.1. European pioneers in environmental policy and sustainability
Workshop convenors: Dr. Duncan Liefferink and Dr. Mark Wiering, Radboud University Nijmegen

Workshop 2.1. discussed the role of ‘Sustainability Pioneers’ in Europe at different scales, both local/regional and national. Europe’s environmental policies show a marked pattern of leaders and laggards. While some countries, regions and cities are keen pioneers in environmental policy and sustainability, others are slow to adapt. Patterns of leaders and laggards, moreover, change over time. During the workshop governance strategies of regional actors, comparative research in pioneering regions and the role of nation-states as pioneers in environmental policy were discussed. What lessons can be learnt regarding the role of regions and nation states, and for the EU as a whole? This workshop, organized by Duncan Liefferink and Mark Wiering, focused on the need for differentiation and the bringing together of different experiences from across the Union.

In this workshop Thomas Hoppe presented a research project in which the degree of sustainability among Dutch municipalities was measured by the co-called Local Sustainability Meter (LSM). The main conclusion from the research was that a certain amount of competitiveness occurred among top performers. Over the years, some pioneers did not respond anymore to the LSM questionnaire, as they had developed their own performance measures because of political reasons. One of the positive outcomes of the LSM case was the adoption of tools measuring environmental policy and sustainability by subnational governments in Netherland.

Pieter Zwaan discussed the issue of ‘Struggling with Europe: Pioneering with horizontal forms of governance’. His presentation focused on the development of so-called Agri-Environmental Services (AES) – also referred to as Green Services – by farmers, local communities and provinces, in this particular case the Province of Gelderland. Under the programme, financial assistance could be granted to farmers as a compensation for additional labour and foregone income and had to be approved by the Commission. However, meeting the state aid requirements became a hurdle to implementing the Green Services. It could be concluded that innovation at sub-national level may be seriously frustrated by the EU.

The last presentation by Duncan Liefferink aimed at broadening the pioneers concept in EU environmental policy. In earlier research, focusing on the role of Member States as environmental pioneers in the EU context, four types of environmental pioneers were distinguished: pusher-by-example (direct and purposeful), constructive pusher, defensive forerunner and opt-outer. Currently, however, several of the former pioneer states, such as the Netherlands, Germany and the Nordic countries suffer domestic changes (right wing governments, populist parties, implementation problems, etc.). By updating the approach, also other types of actors may be conceptualized as pioneers, e.g. sub-national governments or private actors. Such pioneers may employ three different types of mechanisms: regulatory processes, market mechanisms and communication & learning. These may involve several policy levels.
Workshop 2.2. Europeanisation of planning education and the planning profession  
Workshop convenors: Dr. Andrea Frank, Cardiff University, and Eric Markus, Blekinge Institute of Technology

The aim of this workshop was to explore the Europeanisation of planning, planning education and the planning profession. Andrea Frank (Cardiff University) started by examining the term “Europeanisation”, which is usefully defined as an incremental process that causes changes at domestic level when EU member states are adopting or actively influencing EU-wide legislation and policy. The process is also known as downloading from the EU level to the domestic level or uploading from the national level to the EU level, respectively. The impact of such European integration processes on planning, planning education and the profession was then further explored in the subsequent contributions. Eric Markus’ (Blekinge Institute) survey among non-European and European students studying a European masters investigated whether students perceive an added value from a European spatial planning degree. Results indicate that studying planning in Europe was perceived as useful by students because it provided them with new perspectives and a better understanding of the complexity of the EU. In how far students recognise a European identity in respect to planning practice could not be decisively determined and needs further study. Francois-Oliver Seys, professor at University of Lille, argued that integrating courses on European spatial planning in degree programs will help prepare students for future jobs in transnational (i.e. cross-border) planning. Finally, Hendrik van der Kamp reported on a study of options for the mutual recognition of planning qualification across EU member states. Instead of the Common Platform (adopted by Architects), he advocated the Europass approach, which is based on voluntary mutual recognition agreements amongst national planning professional bodies for the planning profession. This will take time as there is presently no standard core curriculum for planning across Europe and core competencies will need to be negotiated amongst professional bodies. Ultimately, the Europass should remove current administrative barriers and improve the ability of planners to work in any EU country.

Workshop 2.3. European spatial planning and territorial cooperation in times of economic crisis  
Workshop convenors: Dr. Stefanie Dühr, Radboud University Nijmegen and Dr. Magdalena Belof, Wroclaw University of Technology

Within the context of the EU proposals for the future of territorial cooperation in the 2014-2020 programming period, the workshop discussed questions in relation to the role and objectives of strategic spatial planning in and for Europe. In the current economic situation, the value of integrated spatial development perspectives is increasingly questioned in many EU countries. National and regional spatial planning is being reformed or even abolished, as in England, as a consequence of changes to sub-national government structures. Also at EU and transnational levels, the enthusiasm of the 1990s to prepare integrated spatial visions seems to have waned, or is presented under different labels. On the other hand, the question of coordinating actors and spatially-relevant policies continues to be high on EU agendas, as the recent examples of macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube corridor demonstrate. Also within member states, e.g. at city-region level and at cross-border level the need to address functional relationships across political and administrative borders remains an important issue. So there are many open questions about the current and future role for strategic spatial planning at EU and transnational levels in the currently changing context, which were addressed by four invited experts.

Géza Salamin (Ministry for National Economy, Department for Territorial Development Planning, Hungary) explained that strategic spatial planning in Hungary is pursued with considerable...
enthusiasm at national and transnational levels, albeit with different levels of political commitment and with varying results in terms of the application of the strategies. What seems to matter, especially in transnational activities, is a common understanding of what spatial planning seeks to achieve at this level of scale, and the commitment of political actors to ensure that the strategies are used in decision-making and action programmes. Especially at European level, there is a danger for the discourse on spatial or territorial development to become too abstract to be able to engage actors from different levels and sectors.

Prof. Vincent Nadin (Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands) argued that in many countries “planning is not very popular” at the moment. Yet the need for spatial coordination remains important for the European Union, but according to Nadin is hindered by a number key factors, including: (1) a jargony language and a mystification of the subject (‘territorial cohesion’ instead of ‘spatial planning’); (2) the question over an EU competence for spatial planning which has been decided in favour of the member states (resulting in weak capacity for spatial planning at EU level and varying political support given to spatial planning in the member states); (3) a continuing lack of understanding of the differences of approaches to spatial planning in the EU member states, which EU programmes such as ESPON have not helped to clarify; and (4) shifting arguments over the role and purpose of spatial planning for the EU and from an EU perspective, which has not succeeded in building on earlier achievements such as the ‘European Spatial Development Perspective’.

Dr. Kai Böhme (Spatial Foresight GmbH, Luxembourg) highlighted the need for planners to reconcile spatial planning, economics and politics in order to ensure that spatial planning aims can be achieved. In EU policy in particular, the spatial dimension needs to be made explicit and the costs of non-coordination of spatially-relevant sector policies should be discussed openly. In order to ensure that strategic spatial planning plays a more prominent role, vision and leadership are important, clearer goals need to be expressed for European spatial development, a longer-term perspective needs to be provided and a more radical approach be considered than is currently the case in spatial planning where “visions” are merely “fuzzy consensus documents” of the EU member states.

Prof. Andreas Faludi (Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands) argued that territorial cohesion is not the fuzzy policy goal as which it is often criticised but rather consists of four clearly identifiable storylines (a “balanced”, “competitive”, “sustainable” and “coherent” Europe). The key question is how these storylines of the territorial cohesion objective can and will be achieved in the European Union. Faludi argued that we need to think “big” when we talk about policy integration and that planners continue to be held back by traditional ideas of planning for local communities. Instead of our continued focus on bounded territories, planners need to consider (and plan for) functional spaces, such as macro-regions and cross-border spaces.

In the discussion following the panel presentation, questions of whether a new definition of, and approach to, spatial planning in Europe may be needed and how stronger political commitment for such spatial visions could be achieved.
**Workshop 2.4. Regional policy under the spell of Smart Specialisation**

**Workshop convenor: Dr. Arnuord Lagendijk, Radboud University Nijmegen**

Workshop 2.4. discussed the concept of “Smart specialisation”. Smart specialisation is a new policy concept propagated, in particular, by the EU through the so-called S3 platform. It can be seen as a new chapter in cluster policy and management. For regional policy development in an EU context, adopting smart specialisation has become mandatory. It is now tied in Structural Funds applications as well as other policy processes.

Smart specialisation roughly presents a response to two developments. First, the way global value chains are becoming more articulated or unbundled, where each aspect of the chain itself is manifesting global forms of organisation: production, knowledge, capital, people, etc. Even the most ‘classical’ clusters show this kind of trends, such as the cut flower industry in Holland or the textiles districts in Mid-Italy. A key topic in ‘smart specialisation’ is that regions should not just strive to be competitive in a specific market/sector, but that should they aim for a competitive niche position in a particular value chain, by being strategically embedded in chains of knowledge, capital and people. So it is not just ‘Health Valley’ - but a specific position in certain global health ‘chains’. For ‘non-core’ areas, this requires specific strategies of intelligence of, and engagement with, ‘core’ actors (both organisational - firms and other - and spatial - liaising with core clusters).

Smart specialisation requires both focus and flexibility. Even more than in the past, regions are challenged to think how local strengths can be nurtured and employed to foster a range of competitive positions. Preferably such positions should be in different value chains to sustain a certain level of diversity and resilience against economic shocks. The role of talented labour has become more prominent, notably in the form of a ‘human capital’ track. However, how we nurture, attract and retain talent in view of ‘smart specialisation’ remains a vexed question. A first question is where do we start? Should we invest in particular strands of education and training, building the human capital that, in turn, shapes a region’s ‘smart specialisation’; or should we start with ‘smart specialisation’ strategies, observing which kind of demand for labour they generate, and adapting educational investments accordingly?

The debate during the workshop was infused by two introductions. Dieter Rehfeld from the Institute Work & Technology, Gelsenkirchen and Prof. Ben Dankbaar from Radboud University. The introductions reviewed recent international developments in regional development and policy, focusing on the move from clustering to smart specialisation, and then zoomed in onto the significance of these moves for the province of Gelderland and the city-region of Arnhem-Nijmegen in particular. The main conclusion of the workshop was that transfer of technology and knowledge is most basically a question of transferring people. However, some regions that have no economic/technological basis for application of the newest technological insights, will do better in diversification and developing activities apart from the far way advanced knowledge. These regions are originally at the centre of regional policy and not supported along the lines of smart specialisation. Another observation was that smart specialisation comes with its own problematique, partly caused by some non-realistic implication. There is a danger the concept will become increasingly fuzzy. So while it forces us to rethink and renew regional innovation strategies, the concept is still in need of further assessment and clarification. In practical terms, a key suggestion was to deal with smart specialisation in a pragmatic way, make use of the good ideas to rethink your innovation strategy. For more peripheral regions, the approach may offer only limited prospects for improving regional-economic conditions.