

# **The adoption of EU's spatial planning discourse in the Southern Mediterranean Countries: An opportunity for renewing central governments control over national and regional territories?**

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With the new millennium, Southern Mediterranean Countries separately undertook a series of measures in order to reform or renew their respective planning frameworks, both at national and regional levels. Almost simultaneously, Tunisia in 1998, Morocco in 2001, Lebanon (2002), Jordan (2004) and Algeria (2005), launched their own national or regional masterplans. The timing of this “revival” could be seen as an indicator of the tremendous pressures, both external (globalization) and internal (call for decentralization) these countries are under. Especially that it came after the failure of a series of macro-economical or sectoral policies recommended in the previous decades by the International Organizations. The rationale and orientations of this revival share many characteristics with similar attempts in Europe at national (Portugal, Greece), regional (France, Spain, Italy) or supranational levels (ESDP) to implement new spatial planning policies. In that regard, it is striking that countries on both sides of the Mediterranean use the same discourse and keywords: i.e. *cohesion, competitiveness, metropolization, regionalization, polycentrism, accessibility*, etc. In addition, the reference to the Euro-Mediterranean region and the need to integrate larger regional and territorial entities in order to confront globalization is also mentioned in many southern documents.

Our paper first proposes to focus on these similarities highlighting the influence of European spatial planning discourse on neighbouring non-European countries. More specifically, we analyze the role of French planning agencies and firms and at a lesser extent those of other European countries, in the circulation of ideas from one side of the Mediterranean to the other. A further investigation shows that those shared orientations come from the fact that most of the southern countries were assisted in their efforts by French agencies, mainly the DIACT (formerly the DATAR), IAURIF and offshoots of the former (*Groupe 8*). This influence of French expertise in the south of the Mediterranean stems from a long tradition of technical cooperation between France and its former colonies (Algeria) or countries under protection (Morocco, Tunisia) and mandate (Lebanon, Syria).

However, a further investigation shows that although the European – and French – influence on the content and orientations of the revival of spatial planning in the south is obvious, we argue that the meaning and signification of such keywords and concepts are deeply transformed in the context of southern Mediterranean countries. Mainly, we show that this discourse is reinterpreted by contending national and local forces according to their own priorities and perceptions. Eventually, whereas in the European cases, the revival of spatial planning aims to reinforce the role of the regional and local levels, in southern Mediterranean countries it is still mostly conceived according to a top-down approach similar to the previous generation of

comprehensive planning (i.e. *Aménagement du territoire*). Its final goal is to strengthen the role of central agencies at the expense of regional and local levels.

In the last section of our paper, the analysis of two southern Mediterranean examples (Lebanon and Morocco) brings us to question the relevance and appropriateness of such efforts and to conclude in reference to Faludi (2004) that – in the case of southern Mediterranean countries – the “old (French) wine in new bottles” tastes rather sour.

### ***The emergence of common issues and discourse***

The comparison of spatial planning documents of different Mediterranean countries reveals a similarity of issues and concerns. It also shows that a dominant discourse is emerging characterized by the use of similar keywords and concepts. Most of these documents justify the choice of spatial planning as a way to bring coherence and rationality to public policies and to harmonize sectoral policies. They also raise the need to give a territorial dimension to development in order to bring consistency and efficiency to the various public or private initiatives. Spatial planning is also praised for its ability to coordinate vertically different levels of decision-making, i.e. national, regional, local and even transnational.

As for the concepts and keywords, most of the masterplans subscribe to the three pillars of sustainable development (economic development, social cohesion and protection of the environment. The documents show a unanimous acceptance of the environmental agenda mostly thanks to the awareness campaigns raised by International Organizations (UNEP-MAP), and – where available and authorized by central governments – to local NGOs. The EU itself played an important part in the implementation of bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal areas (waste management and waste water treatment plants, fight against desertification, etc.).

These central government-formulated planning policies also call for the strengthening of urban areas as drivers of economical growth and innovation; hence the recognition of the importance of the metropolitan scale and the importance of strengthening existing urban centres in order to enhance competitiveness in the current globalized world. Interestingly such discourse has even been adopted by countries (Algeria, Egypt) that have resisted for many decades the liberalization of their economy and its opening up to the global market. On the other hand urban areas are also recognized for their contribution to social cohesion and their capacity to ensure balanced distribution of activities and people in the territory either through the concept of polycentrism (EU and Member States) or *métropoles d'équilibre* (Lebanon) or urban systems (Morocco). This new factor is highly significant in southern Mediterranean countries, and is a clear departure from previous policies that favored rural areas through heavy subsidies to agriculture at the expense of urban centers.

The emergence of the notion of governance, as opposed to government, is also noticeable in some of those documents, which show a focus on competence issues and the need to answer local calls for further autonomy and the right for sub-national levels to possess power over their own affairs. The central governments proposals vary from decentralization, regionalization or simply administrative de-concentration in response to such sub-national demands.

Another dimension also present in most of those documents is the transnational (or macro-regional) dimension. The emergence of this dimension is understandable in EU Member Countries because of the important impact of the EU, and its institutions, on national territories and societies and transitively on planning policies. However it is a novelty in the case of southern Mediterranean countries. For Morocco and Algeria, the need to integrate a larger euro-Mediterranean space is mentioned in many parts of the documents, in reference to the market economy, energy, environment and infrastructure. Other countries such as Lebanon and Turkey are equally attracted to many transnational spaces: Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Black Sea for Turkey; the Mediterranean and the Middle East for Lebanon. These alternatives are reflected in the strategic choices proposed by the by their respective masterplans.

These conceptual and discursive similarities are revealing of the growing interdependence of such countries and of the flow of ideas and expertise around the Mediterranean (North-South but also South-South). They also indicate the growing influence of international organizations, of which the EU, on national planning cultures that have become more sensitive to governance and sustainable development issues. But in no case should this be considered as a homogenization of planning cultures around the Mediterranean, as most of the planning traditions are still highly context sensitive and can only be understood in reference to national and sub-national contexts.

### **A content analysis of various masterplans**

Figure 1 is the result of a textual data analysis of (spatial) planning documents produced by different Mediterranean countries. The goal of such analysis is to quantify a text or a corpus of texts so as to extract its most significant structures. The results obtained show the most significant words and sentences of the corpus constituted by those planning documents.

This illustration compares, through a cross data analysis, the strategic chapters taken out of Lebanese, Algerian, Moroccan masterplans with those of Greece and Portugal, two of the few UE Member States where planning policies are still formulated at central level. We also added the strategy chapter of the SDRIF (*Schéma d'Aménagement de la Région-Ile-de-France*) of 1994 because it is an interesting snapshot of the transformation of the French tradition of *aménagement du territoire* in the mid 90's. For further reference, we also added the strategy chapters of the ESDP and the 9<sup>TH</sup> and latest development plan of Turkey, an EU candidate country that also shares some characteristics – and history – with the other southern Mediterranean countries (see also table 1).

As a reference point the ESDP and its specific discourse can help locating the relative position of each strategy document. The figure shows that most of the documents share common issues, represented by the density of points very close to the origin of the graph. These common issues and keywords are mostly related to the environmental agenda, the protection and preservation of cultural heritage and rural areas (i.e. the two categories of sentences in green and yellow). However, only the variables ESDP, Greece and Portugal (in grey) are located in the blue category that represents sentences related to accessibility, infrastructure and cohesion. This clearly shows the influence of the ESDP on the national planning policies of Portugal and Greece, and their adoption of some of its key objectives, at least on a discursive level. This confirms previous observations by Giannakourou (2005, p. 326) according to whom,

“the shift towards strategic planning in the majority of the Mediterranean European countries is strictly related to the influence of the EU spatial planning process. Along the path from the demise of traditional domestic planning agendas to their alignment to transnational and European-wide perspectives, the reframing of southern spatial planning policies seems to pass via the initialization or the deepening of the strategic horizons of planning”.

On the other hand, the variables France, Morocco and Algeria are the closest to one another and are located in the cyan and red categories. The cyan category represents sentences related to the attractiveness of metropolitan areas and prospective scenarios of urban growth. The red category is constituted by sentences related to governance and decentralization issues. The magenta category is exclusively associated to the variable Lebanon and is constituted by sentences related to reconstruction (civil+, war) and port activity and logistics. Turkey is also on a track of its own characterized by the violet category, revolving mostly on objectives of competitiveness and technological innovation, in tune with EU objectives following the Lisbon Strategy.

These oppositions show the importance that each country - or level – gives to certain priorities, i.e. Lebanon to post-war reconstruction, Turkey to competitiveness, etc. They also show the affiliation of some countries to specific planning traditions, i.e. Algeria, Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon to the French tradition of *aménagement du territoire*. It also highlights Portugal and Greece’s adoption of EU’s planning discourse.

The relative position of certain variables in relation to one another can also be explained by the chronological factor. The fact that the French document (SDRIF) precedes the ESDP explains the distance between the two variables in the graph as the former could not have been influenced by the latter.

The figure also shows differences between spatial and non-spatial approaches to planning. For example, Turkey’s 9<sup>th</sup> development plan, the only non-spatial plan of the corpus, is dominated by sectoral and macro-economical objectives whereas all the others tackle environmental and land use objectives. In that regard the Lebanese masterplan is peculiar as it addresses both macro-economical and spatial issues.



|      |                      |          |          |   |                             |
|------|----------------------|----------|----------|---|-----------------------------|
| 2004 | SDATL                | Lebanon  | National | <i>Schéma d'Aménagement du Territoire Libanais</i>                | National spatial masterplan |
| 2006 | PNPOT                | Portugal | National | <i>Programa Nacional da Política de Ordenamento do Território</i> | National spatial masterplan |
| 2006 | 9TH Development Plan | Turkey   | National | 9TH Development Plan  | National Plan               |
| 2006 | SNAT                 | Algeria  | National | <i>Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire</i>                | National spatial masterplan |

### Limits to discourse analysis

This exercise has its limitations as it only takes into consideration the discursive dimension of planning policies. However it is obvious that a wide gap exists between planning discourse and action. Since planning is still dominantly a central government-formulated policy it is not merely a technical process. It is fundamentally a political arena besieged by power relations and contending national agendas. Planning is a contentious topic that touches deep national interests. It is no coincidence that it has remained a very sensitive issue between the EU Commission and member-states who were reluctant to transfer their competency over such matters. On the opposite side of the Mediterranean, planning issues are even more deeply connected to State identities because they interfere with matters of territorial integrity and sovereignty. As Del Sarto explains:

“most states in the southern Mediterranean are facing domestic problems related to their political identity and core values that characterize the state (...) In addition, most states in the Mediterranean must deal with the problem of ethnic and religious minorities, while they are also affected by processes of economic and cultural globalization” (Del Sarto, 2006, p. 2).

Moreover most of these conflicts have a territorial expression, i.e. border issues, irredentism, sub-national claims, etc. Hence it would be naïve to limit the spatial planning debate in the Mediterranean to technical issues such as the protection of the environment or the control of urban development. To understand such processes one must pay closer

“Attention to the fine grain of the policy process. [Where] the focus is turned towards how commonly used techniques of analysis construct particular forms of knowledge, providing legitimacy for particular spatial strategies whilst marginalizing other ways of understanding policy problems.” (Jensen & Richardson, 2004, p. 44)

In our following section and based on Jensen and Richardson’s suggestion to pay more attention to “everyday planning activities”, we propose to further investigate two cases of state-centric planning policies: the Moroccan SNAT and Lebanon’s SDATL. Morocco and Lebanon cannot be considered as unique representatives of southern Mediterranean countries, as each country

has a specific planning history and political background. Morocco is a Monarchy of 30 million inhabitants located in the Maghreb. Lebanon is a parliamentary regime of less than 4 million inhabitants. However some analogies could be made between the two countries as both their political systems could be described as of “limited pluralism”. Hence political decisions are not exclusively limited to a certain political elite but are negotiated with other political or ethnic groups. Also both countries have a tradition of socio-economic liberalism rooted in powerful urban contexts: Beirut, the Lebanese capital and Casablanca, the economical centre of Morocco, are two influential cities that have played a major role in the development of the national territory and its connection to the world.

## ***The case of Morocco***

### **Two coexisting and contradictory systems**

According to Lacroix (2005, pp. 137-139), the Moroccan political landscape is constituted by intertwined logics, actors and institutions. It is simultaneously territorial and reticular, i.e. shaped by social networks; with both systems converging towards the king:

“Morocco’s king became the central figure in a complex patronage system, which attaches groups and individuals to the Palace through the granting of favors, prestige, and power. Within this system the king also cultivates the role of an arbiter who stands above private interests. Of course this is more a fairy tale.” (Del Sarto, 2006, p. 181)

Political space is tributary of the country’s history. First under the sultanate, it was based on the dichotomy between the controlled territories (*Makhzen*) and the untamed and tribal periphery (*Siba*). Then, under the French Protectorate it was governed by another duality, the *useful* and *useless* Morocco (*le Maroc utile et inutile*) that differentiated the strategic and productive parts of the territory (Casablanca and its periphery) from the unproductive ones (the rest of Morocco). These contradictions still remain today as Morocco has maintained its ancient *Makhzen/Siba* dichotomy on which it superimposed a modernist – yet incomplete – state apparatus. The political landscape became even more complex with the rise of a local elite formed by migrants returning to their homeland after decades of exile in Europe and the West.

Instead of repressing such contradictions, the Moroccan monarchy has used them expertly in order to control their political consequences. Hence this unstable structure of the Moroccan state, both territorial and reticular, serves the interests of the central authorities – the king – and weakens local groups influence.

For decades planning has been an instrument of control over the territory. According to a French expert interviewed in Morocco<sup>1</sup>, the directorate of *aménagement du territoire* was practically a territorial police. Its task was limited to administrative divisions for statistical and security purposes on

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewed in Rabat, April 2008

behalf of the Ministry of Interior. Planning was even more marginalized in the 1980's when

“facing economic difficulties and an astronomic external debt in the early 1980s, Morocco started an economic reform process following the prescriptions of the IMF and the World Bank (...) [e]ntailing the erosion of the providential (and legitimizing) basis of the *makhzan* [the Monarchy]” (Del Sarto, 2006, p. 185).

### **Paving the way for a new leadership**

In the late 1990s certain banned political parties were officially recognized and opponents to the regime returned from exile or were released from jail. According to Del Sarto, this reform process aimed also to prepare the succession of the ruling and very ill king Hassan II by his son Mohammed VI. Hence, when the latter ascended the throne in 1999, his image as a reformist was well shaped. Very soon he supported the emergence of a new generation of public officials formed abroad in western universities, mainly in France. The previous year, the socialists had formed the government, after being for years in the opposition.

These changes gave a new momentum to the Moroccan administration and some improvements were made, of which the creation of a Ministry of environment and spatial planning and the reinforcement of the directorate of *aménagement du territoire*. The new director general, a scholar with strong ties with the French planning milieu, launched a series of initiatives in line with the resurging debate on strategic planning in France. The fact that the socialists were in power in France as well was in favor of the reinforcement of cooperation between the Directorate of *aménagement du territoire* and its counterpart, the very influential DATAR. At the same time the DATAR was also active on the European front under the UE presidency of Jacques Delors (Cichowalcz, 2005).

### **Gaining legitimacy through spatial planning**

This frenzy resulted in the launching of the Moroccan spatial Masterplan (SNAT). The same procedures required in France for the elaboration of regional masterplans, the *débat-charte-schéma* process, were followed in Morocco. The first phase, the debate, consisted of a series of brainstorming sessions between various concerned administrations and regional public officials. In the second phase, the charter, a common vision statement was drafted highlighting the major orientations of the masterplan. The third phase, the masterplan, was assigned to a Franco-Tunisian grouping, Dirasset-Groupe 8. *Groupe 8*, is a French consultancy group close to the DATAR and operating in developing countries, specifically in Africa. Incidentally, the same grouping had previously contributed to the Tunisian spatial masterplan in 1996.

The SNAT is conceived as an indicative plan. In the introduction of the synthesis document, the document acknowledged the delicate situation of spatial planning in Morocco:

It is useless to waste time on projections, scenarios and models. We must be modest and accept early from the start the idea that contradictions are so extreme that we must forget about ideal solutions and long term quantifiable objectives. It can only be a difficult path, based on a compromise between different constraints and especially between stakeholders” (MATEE & Groupe Huit - sud, 2003, p. 7)

The document also cuts short any speculation on the nature of the proposed regionalization process:

Morocco is a unique model in terms of the unity of the state and territory. The regional dimension that we conceive does not entail matters of autonomy, but strictly a decentralization/de-concentration approach, in other words a modernization of state practices and stakeholders participation. This is not the result of a political choice; it is simply the product of national history. (MATEE & Groupe Huit - sud, 2003, p. 54)

Hence the Moroccan understanding of “territorial cohesion” is dictated by the “supremacy” of national unity on all other matters. It is a subtle but unequivocal shift from the original concept formulated in France and Europe where it is mostly conceived in terms of solidarity between wealthy cores and peripheral regions.

As for the general orientations of the SNAT, they are divided according in three steps:

- (1) The fundamental options, i.e. sustainable development, equity and efficiency,
- (2) Their spatial expression, i.e. development of urban areas and poverty reduction in rural areas.
- (3) Their sectoral conditions, i.e. the adoption of the territorial dimension by sectoral policies.

### **The drive towards competitiveness**

Regarding the opposition between cohesion and competitiveness, the SNAT had put more emphasis on the former based on the national unity principle. In reality, the concept competitiveness as such is absent from the document as it was still referred to in terms of economic development. But in recent years, competitiveness gained more ground within the Moroccan administration in connection to its increased importance in France and the EU. Soon after the SNAT, the directorate of spatial planning assigned another French team, Ingérop, to prepare a study on territorial competitiveness (MATEE & Ingérop, 2003). The study itself clearly refers to the European definition of competitiveness:

“The concern for territorial competitiveness is at the centre of the cohesion policy implemented by the UE. It implies considerable funding, the largest part of the Commission’s budget if we take also into consideration the direct impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy on the territory”(MATEE & Ingérop, 2003, p. 10)

Ingérop's study is in keeping with the general recommendations of the SNAT, but things would soon take another dramatic turn. Following the 2007 parliamentary elections, the socialists lost the government's top seat and the ministry of environment and spatial planning was disbanded. The directorate of environment and water were affiliated to the ministry of energy and the directorate of spatial planning to the ministry of habitat. Moreover, the directorate of *aménagement du territoire* was renamed directorate du *développement de l'espace* (spatial development) a clear indicator of a reversal of priorities<sup>2</sup>

According to a local expert:

“There is a difference between the ambition of the SNAT and the sectoral policies that followed. The SNAT was supposed to give consistency to all other policies but the people who prepared these sectoral plans did not have a look at the SNAT (...) the question that should be asked is whether the SNAT was the appropriate tool from the start and if it made sense to everybody?”<sup>3</sup>

These changes would not have been possible without the endorsement of the Palace. Initially, the cohesion objective was a good opportunity for the new king to distance himself from his father's authoritarian image. The cohesion concept was, at the same time, a hand extended to Moroccan peripheral regions that had suffered neglect under the previous monarch, and an implicit way to reassert the new king's leadership. But with rising investment opportunities in the kingdom and the astonishing success of the new port of Tangier that completely transformed Morocco's Mediterranean façade (tourist activities, free zones, industrial delocalization, etc.), the authorities seem more and more attracted to neoliberal ideals; a fact underlined by a French expert in Morocco:

What they are telling you is nothing but pure rhetoric. I am very critical about it but Morocco is caught in surrealistic real-estate frenzy, we are surfing on unprecedented waves and we don't know where we're going. I can assure you that everything that is being done today is anything but spatial planning<sup>4</sup>.

These concerns are echoed by others as well. The following comment is from an EU official in Morocco:

For me, the only true regional development model is still the *Maroc utile* [Casablanca and the Atlantic coast of Morocco] and the rest – it is hard to say it – is almost profit and loss. The rest of the country is managed, its misery and poverty are managed (...) meanwhile we get by with a bit of sacredness of power, a bit of carrots and a bit of sticks. But I don't really see a determination to develop the country<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Incidentally this measure came when the DATAR was renamed DIACT (*Délégation interministérielle à l'Aménagement et à la Compétitivité des Territoires*) and the removal of any reference to the *aménagement du territoire*

<sup>3</sup> Interview at the INAU (*Institut National d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme*), Rabat, April 2008

<sup>4</sup> Interview in Rabat, April 2008

<sup>5</sup> Interview at the EC delegation in Morocco, Rabat, April 2008

## ***The case of Lebanon***

### **The need for consensus**

Lebanon's case is even more peculiar compared to other Arab states. Lebanon's modern history has witnessed failed attempts to implement full national sovereignty on its territory. Lebanon is ruled according to a consociated political system that divides power and higher state functions between the various confessional groups (Catusse & Karam, 2008). Theoretically no party is capable of imposing its will on the others and the few times that certain groups had such ambitions it had dramatic results<sup>6</sup>. The need for consensus governs the relation between the central government and the political and religious groups and reinforces the rentier structure of the Lebanese state and the peripheral regions dependence on subsidies transferred by the central level. However, these political and religious groups are not established according to a clear regional pattern – at least not based on the European definition of a region. The political landscape is rather a patchwork composed of an aggregation of micro-territories. This specific territorial structure, shaped by centuries of struggles, migrations and massive displacement of populations makes it very difficult to identify a distinctive regional level.

### **Previous experiences in spatial planning**

It would be excessive to talk about a planning tradition in Lebanon as all decisions are incremental and must be met with general consensus. However, in the 1960's, under the presidency of a reformist, Gen. Fouad Chehab, an attempt was made to implement the *aménagement du territoire* policy in Lebanon. For that purpose a French team, IRFED, led by a Dominican father Louis-Joseph Lebret, was appointed to draft a preliminary study for a national spatial masterplan. Lebret, who developed a particular approach to regional development under the concept of *développement harmonisé* or harmonized development, was close to the influential economist François Perroux, the inspiration behind the French concept of *aménagement du territoire*. The IRFED mission undertook a deep and unprecedented survey of the Lebanese territory. Its conclusions gave an alarming picture of the socio-economic inequalities between different parts of the Lebanese territory, most importantly between Beirut and the rest of the country.

Lebret advocated for the reduction of disparities and a more balanced regional development. For that purpose, he proposed a polarization grid that distributes equipments and services proportionally on the whole territory. However Lebret's proposals were welcomed with a lot of wariness by the Lebanese establishment and IRFED's mission was interrupted before the approval of the masterplan, as soon as Fouad Chehab's term in office ended. But as Verdeil (2003, p. 18) highlights :

”this does not mean that IRFED's work left no impact; it remains until today a major planning reference for many public officials who began their careers at

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<sup>6</sup> The most notable episode being the latest Lebanese civil war that spanned from 1975 and 1990.

the time. The polarization grid also served more or less as a direction for public investment up until the war”.

IRFED's snapshot of the Lebanese territory in the 1960's altered for the decades to come the perception that the Lebanese political class and elite had of the country. Calling for harmonized development became a catchphrase repeated by many political parties in need of a political program. Harmonized development eventually became one of the main principles that were listed in the peace agreements that put an end to the Civil War, another principle being decentralization. But in practice harmonized development actually meant a constant renegotiation of the amount of subsidies granted to each local group without necessarily reconsidering the central authorities' role in managing and channeling such funds. Decentralization was only conceived in administrative terms and it was never intended to grant additional autonomy to local authorities under the pretext that it might put the frail national unity at risk.

### **The impact of war and reconstruction**

During the war and in the early phases of the reconstruction that followed, many nostalgic of IRFED's interrupted work, pushed for the implementation of a new Lebanese national masterplan. For some Lebanese experts and planners the only way to go ahead with reconstruction was through a comprehensive planning approach. This conviction grew stronger in the aftermath of a devastating war that led to the disintegration of the Lebanese state and the implosion of the national territory into small confessional micro-territories. Many were strong believers in the healing power of comprehensive, centrally-lead planning, in a country torn by centrifugal forces.

But when the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, the prevailing paradigm considered the state, and state-driven planning as obsolete. International organizations and funding agencies promoted the bypassing of central agencies, the adoption of private management techniques and structures and greater reliance on sectoral policies. Hence the Lebanese Reconstruction was undertaken under such premises and the calls to adopt a more comprehensive approach were momentarily ignored.

As a result, great impetus was given to large infrastructure projects mostly situated in and around Beirut. Such projects were also accompanied by the modernization of the Beirut port and Airport in an attempt to reconnect the Lebanese capital to the region and world and to regain some of the old regional role that made Beirut a thriving city in the 50's and 60's. In return of the development of Beirut, the central government proposed to redistribute wealth to the peripheral regions in accordance with the harmonized development principle. But during the reconstruction phase, harmonized development was understood as the replication of Beirut and its infrastructure in the other parts of the territory, regardless of specificity (rural vs. urban, major cities vs secondary cities, etc.) and identity of the different regions. As a result, and based on an egalitarian and non-spatial grid, all infrastructure amenities and projects were to be generalized to the rest of the territory.

By the middle of the 90's, and with the failure of the Israeli-Arab peace process, the pace of the reconstruction slowed down. The Lebanese economy suffered from a major recession due mostly to the financial set-up on which the reconstruction was based upon. In spite of some successes, the reconstruction had a devastating impact on the Lebanese territory. The resulting urban development endangered strategic natural and agricultural areas. Quarries and large construction sites disfigured parts of the Lebanese landscape. It also became apparent that many investments made in the regions were oversized or redundant as they did not take into consideration spatial criteria (complementarities between regions, differentiation, etc.). The central government was under serious scrutiny and was prompted to rationalize its expenditures. Additional external pressures were exerted by international funding agencies asking the Lebanese authorities for a clearer vision and plan in order to make sure that their grants were being spent suitably.

### **The reconsideration of spatial planning**

These calls, coupled with the discontent of local groups and the lobbying of planning advocates, compelled the central authorities to seriously reconsider its attitude towards a comprehensive planning approach. It is in such circumstances that – once again – French expertise played a decisive role in convincing public officials in endorsing spatial planning. During the 70's and 80's French agencies continued to develop a privileged relation with their Lebanese counterparts. Among those agencies, the IAURIF rapidly established itself as the main – if not unique – consultant for the Lebanese administration in many important planning studies, i.e. the Metropolitan region of Beirut Masterplan in 1986, the transport plan of 1994, the coastal area study of 1997, the plan of the south of 2000. Even if those plans were never officially approved, mainly because of the Lebanese administration inability to confront political pressure, IAURIF's influence grew stronger within the Lebanese administration (Souami, 2005).

Ultimately, IAURIF was in a position to propose new projects and lobby, from the inside, for their approval. The Lebanese national masterplan was understandably a natural proposal coming from the IAURIF in connection to the revival of spatial planning in France starting from the mid 90's<sup>7</sup>. The project was put in the pipeline in 1998 but had to wait another four years before its official launching due mainly to power struggles within the Lebanese government<sup>8</sup>. During that time IAURIF continued its lobbying and paved the way for the project in collaboration with a local team of experts from different sides of the Lebanese political spectrum in order to reach maximum consensus from the major political factions in Lebanon. IAURIF went further and began collecting data from different Lebanese agencies in order to be

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<sup>7</sup> *Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région Ile-de-France* is the urban agency of the French capital region. IAURIF is in charge of the elaboration of the SDRIF analyzed above.

<sup>8</sup> Rafic Hariri the acting prime minister and sponsor of the masterplan was forced to leave power in 1998 and returned in 2000 after the victory of his coalition in the parliamentary elections of the same year. The inception of the Lebanese national masterplan was interrupted during his two-year absence from power.

prepared once the project was launched. This preliminary data collection process was highly important in a country where information is inexistent or, if available, is held back by rivaling central agencies. In such a context official channels and requests are inefficient in obtaining the needed data. The gathering of information requires the building of informal relations and the reliance on the local experts and their own personal connections in the Lebanese administration.

In 2002, and following a nominal call for proposal, IAURIF's team unsurprisingly won the tender and started to work officially on the project. IAURIF made sure that major political groups were aware of the evolution of the study through the participation of local experts close to different political parties.

### **The reinterpretation of harmonized development**

The final document drafted in 2004, subscribes to two of the fundamental principles of the Lebanese constitution: Mainly (1) the reinforcement of the country's unity and territorial integrity, (2) the reduction of the regional disparities through a "modern and objective" conception of harmonized development and adds another fundamental objective (3) the rationalization of the use of (natural) resources and public expenditures.

The document justifies the choice of a top-down centralized approach and the reinforcement of territorial cohesion in the name of national unity. The argumentation is utilitarian in the sense that it perceives national unity in terms of economic efficiency:

"The choice of a unitary and integrated development was preferred to another vision that would have consisted of juxtaposing different regional development projects (...) in the hope that it would better fit expectations: such a vision would not only have prevented general coherence, it would also have contributed to strengthening unequal development and reinforcing the centrifugal tendency towards the separation of regions, communities and local economies. Its impact on national economy would have been clearly less positive and its impact on public finance, far more heavier." (IAURIF & Dar El-Handassah, 2004, p. 78)

In another utilitarian reasoning, the national unity principle is called upon to justify the redefinition of harmonized development:

"When (...) equal treatment means providing the same level of basic services (water, electricity, education, health, etc.) to the entire national territory while, at the same time, encouraging the exclusivity of equipments at national level (universities, technical schools, power plants) and their localization in regional capitals, such policy reinforces the objective of national unity." (IAURIF & Dar El-Handassah, 2004, p. 80)

The objective is to broaden an outdated objective in order to embrace emerging paradigms. Hence, the SDATL tries to introduce a definition of harmonized development that allows the differentiation and specialization of regions and not the homogenization of the Lebanese territory.

Similarly, in line with other Mediterranean masterplans, the SDATL puts emphasis on urban areas that are conceived as growth generators. This preference is confirmed by one of the main architects of the SDATL in an interview:

Things are changing; cities are where wealth is produced, where culture is created and where national cohesion takes place. And we can provide for rural areas by reinforcing their urban centers. I believe that this issue is widely accepted now. When we proposed it in the framework of the SDATL, some people were shocked, but they are old school, and more and more people are aware that things are different now. The countryside is not the countryside anymore; it relies on tourism and not agriculture.

For that purpose the SDATL reinstated the old concept of *métropoles d'équilibre*, the French ancestor of polycentrism, to define the future role of secondary cities in bringing development to the rest of the territory. According to the SDATL, the economic performance of the territory depends on the strength of its cities. Transitively, economic performance – rather than competitiveness – reinforces national cohesion (IAURIF & Dar El-Handassah, 2004, p. 88). But unlike the Moroccan case, the main objective of the SDATL remains territorial cohesion, because of the consensual nature of the Lebanese politics:

“Pragmatic countries such as Morocco and Tunisia have deliberately chosen to play that card. A country of consensus like Lebanon has hesitated for a long time (...) there are parties that strongly oppose globalization in Lebanon, as current events show. There's a large amount of political forces that refuse to play that game and want to resist.”

Since the production of the SDATL in 2004, Lebanon went through a series of dramatic changes. In the absence of a serious alternative, the SDATL managed to impose itself as the only governmental study showing any sign of consistency. In addition, because it was negotiated between the major contending groups, and therefore not considered offensive by any of them, the SDATL is currently on its way to being approved by the current national union government. Moreover it has been also adopted by international donors, especially the EU, that uses it as an indicative roadmap for its bilateral cooperation with Lebanon.

### ***Insights from the Lebanese and Moroccan cases***

This brief description of the implementation of spatial planning policies in Lebanon and Morocco, show that the adoption of a similar discourse is not just the result of the global and regional interconnection of economies and societies and its effect on national planning cultures. It is rather embedded in a complex and context-sensitive history and interferes with matters of state identities and national integrity.

The Moroccan and Lebanese examples show two opposite trajectories. The Moroccan masterplan started with a strong endorsement from the monarchy and enjoyed a high national exposure only to be marginalized by sectoral policies (Tourism, etc.) and strategic choices that reinforced competitiveness

at the expense of cohesion. The Lebanese masterplan was first envisioned as a modest administrative document in the midst of a political vacuum. But with the series of dramatic changes that Lebanon went through since its drafting, the SDATL turned out to be the only rational and convincing vision the central government was able to generate during the past years. It also benefited from the endorsement from the various competing groups who also had no convincing alternative to the development of the Lebanese territory.

### **Concluding remarks**

In his paper on the roots of the emerging territorial cohesion concept in the EU, Faludi shows that it is merely an updated version of the old French policy of *aménagement du territoire*. Through a historical account of the evolution of planning approaches in Europe, Faludi seems to confirm the old saying that (in planning) “nothing is created... everything is transformed”. In keeping with Faludi, our proposal to extend the debate on territorial cohesion to southern Mediterranean countries aims to show that French roots are also highly visible in the current surge of spatial planning policies.

Ultimately our conclusion is that contested national identities are still highly influential in spatial planning contrary to what a dominant literature on the subject might imply. A better understanding of southern Mediterranean planning shows the ability of political groups, both state and non-state actors, to benefit from the reinterpretation of new-old concepts in order to constantly legitimize their influence over their territories and societies. Our account of southern Mediterranean case studies show that planning is not a sanitized field free from political interference and exclusively focused on technical and discursive issues, but rather “an arena of constant struggle over meanings and values in society, played out in day-to-day micro-level practices” (Jensen & Richardson, 2004, p. 10).

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