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**Mediator in spatial regional development**

The European territory is constructed of a network of cities which no longer can be treated as unrelated entities. The cities are forced into a new organizing logic on regional scale to enhance their competences and competitiveness on the global market. This new organizing logic can range from networks of two neighboring cities to mega-regional development transcending the national borders. The consequence is that the spatial development mismatches the administrative borders leaving the scale of development without governmental representation. The regional scale is therefore not clearly defined by a territory or an authority. It is proposed that the scale should be determined by the various dynamics centered on a specific theme(s) and constructed by key-actors, which makes it flexible and adjustable to different needs. The key-actors can be classified as representatives of the business, government and civic society organized in various forms of governance.

The flexibility of actor-alliances, the themes they center around and therefore also the scale is as both an advantage and a disadvantage for spatial development. On one hand it allows and even encourages surprise and synergetic networks while on the other hand a wide range of sometimes conflicting interests can hinder and/or block the projects in progress. Thus the traditional (hierarchical and straight-forward) planning strategies for the city do not meet the needs of the regional scale.

One of the proposals is to reverse the process of planning from inside-out to outside-in and let it be guided by a mediator. Turning the process outside-in means that spatial plans are constructed after the qualities of the region and needs of the key-actors are analyzed. Contrary to that traditional way of planning often includes planning without precise intention to meet the needs of key-actors.

A new way of planning could include a mediator which would indicate the possibilities of a certain scale. In other words the mediator would define the theme which has the potentials to unite different interests of the key-actors including government representatives from the cities and/or nation-state. Besides that a mediator could coach, encourage, and inspire the parties to give shape to synergetic and durable coalitions.

**Shift of paradigms**

Technical innovations of the *Industrial Revolution* made it possible for the regional scale to be regarded as an optional urban planning scale. The invention of the modern transportation on highways and railways made it possible to separate the functional areas beyond walkable distances. For the first time in human history it was possible to commute between living and working areas on daily basis. One of the first attempts to colonize cities' hinterland was the Garden City idea published in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898) by the British urban designer

Ebenezer Howard. His notion was to construct a new settlement in the countryside after a town reached a certain size in population. He named the polycentric structure of well connected settlements on the regional scale the *Social City*<sup>1</sup>. The idea was grounded on improvement of the social conditions in the highly industrialized cities in the western world whose capitalistic policy at the time resulted in overcrowded and unhygienic slums as the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer<sup>2</sup>. As Karl Polanyi put it the redistribution of the goods by the ruling aristocracy or bureaucrats was an instrument to increase their power<sup>3</sup>.

Across the Atlantic and some decades later the idea was adopted by an organization called Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA). One of the prominent protagonists for regional planning and founder of the RPAA was Clarence Stein, a New York architect and planner. In 1923 he and his fellow architects, writers and planners organized themselves into RPAA to explore and promote the regional planning in New York. The strength of the RPAA does not lie in accomplished projects but in their philosophy, ideas, articles, books and the organizing logic of the association. The diverse talents, and next to specializations also broad orientations of the association's core members explain the high creativity, quality, and ability to concretize the concepts<sup>4</sup>. Through their influence as well-acknowledged critics, writers, and architects, they were able to mobilize various stakeholders from government to banks and accomplish an effective type of governance. Most interesting is that the RPAA used the scale of the region as an umbrella covering wide range of interests to motivate different stakeholders to accomplish the projects like housing project Radburn in New York. Their organization analyzed the social, cultural, economic and spatial situation of the region engaging the stakeholders and promoting the spatial design and planning on that scale. One of their main arguments was that planning on regional scale would guarantee a healthy balance of population and resources in combination with metropolitan advantages. The combination of the preservation of the integrity of the rural hinterland and the reconstruction of the metropolitan centers shows a theory regarding the region as a whole entity. As such the RPAA's goal was not to provide a new container as Geddes' Garden city idea but use it as an orientation to a new urban structure providing desired social and community relationship on biological human scale<sup>5</sup>. The ideas of RPAA spread enormously through the US and Europe and as such influenced many plans on regional scale.

Nowadays, the way the contemporary European continent is becoming urbanized results in new spatial constellations reaching far beyond the usual discussion of preserving the hinterland or letting it get colonized by enlargement of the old compact city. A substantially different polycentric urban constellation is recognizable on the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter HALL, *Urban & Regional planning*, (Pelican Books, 1975)

<sup>2</sup> Lewis MUMFORD, *The City in History, Its origins, its transformations, and its prospects* (Mariner Books, 1968)

<sup>3</sup> Karl POLANYI, *The great transformation, The political and Economic origins of our time*, (Boston Beacon Press, 2001)

<sup>4</sup> Kermit Carlyle PARSONS, "Collaborative genius: The regional planning association of America" in *Journal of the American Planning Association* 4 (1994): 462–82

<sup>5</sup> Roy LUBOVE, *Community planning in the 1920's: The Contribution of the Regional Planning Association of America* (University of Pittsburg University Press, 1963)

regional scale in which new complementary links are being developed between cities, giving them a new coherence at a regional level<sup>6</sup>. The more abstract labeling of the regional scale is the 'meso scale'. It fits in between the well defined and known mega and local scales of the nation-state and the city whose territories, authorities and rights have been specifically defined through the centuries<sup>7</sup>. Regionalization has even reached a level where regions on a certain scale in terms of economical prosperity can compete with nation-states. That is next to the mega-scale of a nation state Richard Florida discovered a scale of development transcending the borders of the nation state. He defined this appearance of high urbanized areas across the world as the rise of the mega-region. As such the definition of mega-regions is strongly linked to economic prosperity (BNP), urban density and population. Linking it only to population could provide misleading results as the most densely populated area in the world are also the poorest urban constellations. Florida *et.al.* define the mega-region intuitively as "a very large area across which one could walk, carrying only money, without getting hungry"<sup>8</sup>.



Fig. 2 Night picture Europe by NASA

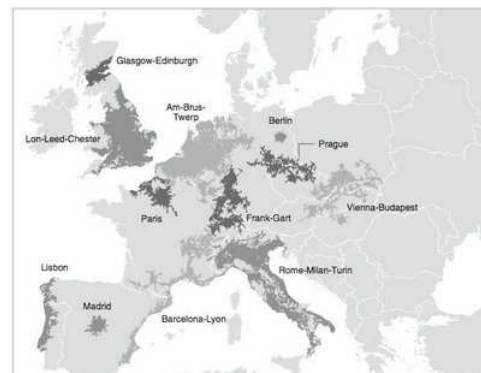


Fig. 1 Europe`s mega-regions defined by R. Florida

According to Sassen, the concept of a region as a functional object of networked cities has been determined even before the nation-state and as such could have acquired the significance of a defined object<sup>9</sup>. Contrary to that, contemporary urbanization on the meso-scale seems to be a process of territory defining dynamics with vague and flexible borders, not always following the borders of the traditional regions like for example the Dutch provinces. Besides that, the etymological origins of 'region' stem from the Latin word for "to rule" (regere) and the definition has close relation with borders and direction. The new spatial constellation does not follow this

<sup>6</sup> Frank ECKARDT; Dieter HASSENPFUG (ed.), *The City and the Region, European City in Transition* (Peter Long Publishing, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> Saskia SASSEN, *Territory, Authority, Rights, From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton University Press, 2008)

<sup>8</sup> Richard FLORIDA, Tim GULDEN, Charlotta MELLANDER, *The Rise of the Mega Region*, Paper, October 2007, The Martin Prosperity Institute at the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

<sup>9</sup> Footnote 7

literal meaning. Its borders are not clearly defined and are highly flexible. Beside that, there is no official government on this scale to rule a clearly defined territory. The challenge of the studies on the meso-scale seems to be the lack of a precise definition. The different names given by various scholars as the knowledge region, economic region, city network, daily urban system and other reveal different perspectives and shifting scales proofing the lack of a clear and universal definition. The question is up to which level the precise definition is desirable and not restraining. This vague but provable links between the cities and actors perhaps should be regarded with a certain amount of fuzzy logic to keep the concept flexible and open for various directions. One of the proposals is to let the theme define the scale as the various collaborations on different fields are shown in fig. 1. In this case the collaborations are based on public services which all have their own functional scale as education, social services, transportation, etc. Igno Pröpper, PhD in Public Administration, calculated that in 2005 a Dutch municipality was involved in an average of 27 collaborations with other municipalities. Nowadays the amount of the collaborations and networks has increased<sup>10</sup>.

These political, social, cultural and economic developments resulting into spatial and their hinterlands. In 1992 Corboz labeled the new urban territory the “territorial city”. Guided by his observations of the old compact city spreading out and urbanizing its hinterland, he concluded that completely new urbanized spatial networks are becoming our reality. He also concluded that cities and their peripheries should be regarded as one, regarding planning, design and development<sup>11</sup>. Stefan Boeri described, seventeen years later, the same European spatial network of cities as an archipelago of urbanized territories. He distinguished three different perspectives to understand urbanization processes; a bird (mega scale), a helicopter view (meso scale), and a frog (local scale) view. From the helicopter view the archipelago of the urbanized territories becomes visible.<sup>12</sup>

The appearance of the urbanized archipelagos in Europe and their spatial development, functional markets, politics and cultural dynamics transcending the city scale and forming new constellations on the meso-scale are often ascribed to

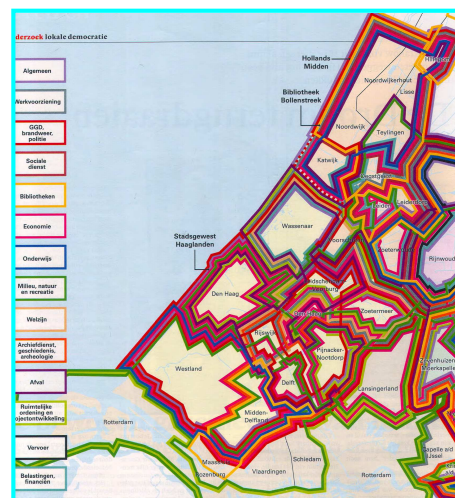


Fig. 3 Collaboration of various public services on the meso-scale in The Netherlands (published in NRC Weekend, 18 February 2010, footnote 8)

<sup>10</sup> Jaco ALBERTS, Wubby LUYENDIJK, *De gemeente bestaat niet*, NRC Weekend, 18 February 2010

<sup>11</sup> André CORBOZ, *De stedenbouw van de 20ste eeuw: een profiel*, Archis, 1992

<sup>12</sup> Stefano BOERI, “Europe is increasingly moving towards a polyarchic society” in *Archilab Europe – Strategic Architecture 8th International Meeting of Architecture in Orleans* (HYX Publisher, 2008)

globalization and denationalization of the nation-state. Global economy entering through the global cities forces the nation state to a new organizing logic and decentralization. The latest financial crisis and the comeback of the nation-state as, so far, the only actor possessing the instruments to take measures and try and give it a contra spin-off, indicates that the nation-state cannot be dismissed. Sassen also advocates in her latest book "*Territory, Authority, Rights*" that it is not necessary for one system to disappear in order to make another possible. Contrary to that, it is impossible for a system to appear without conditions created and implemented by its predecessor(s). So through history the city was at first a central place for the economy, followed by a node on the regional scale, ending as a subservient to a territorial state power. The systems, from city till nation-state and relative lately the system of globalization exist next to - and integrated into each other. The systems of nation-state, city and globalization provide conditions for new organizing logics and territories among which are the urban constellations on the meso scale. Sassen explains the transformation of the systems using three elements (territory, authority, and rights) which indicate the existence of a defined organizing logic. In the case of a transition to the meso scale of the organization of society there is a territorial setting visible where spatial development is transcending the city level and its administrative borders<sup>13</sup>. On one hand authority is granted by the notion of partially decentralizing state and its necessity to hand over parts of its authority to smaller units (urban networks), while on the other hand the local authorities are aware of the need to collaborate with neighbors and various stakeholders to be able to provide the facilities needed in a complex society. Even the goals of the European Union are to increase its growth potential and its productivity placing the main emphasis on economy followed by social and territorial cohesion. The European Union has encountered a policy which is aiming to conceive the goals by strengthening the European regions<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Footnote 7

<sup>14</sup> [www.eurostad.com](http://www.eurostad.com)

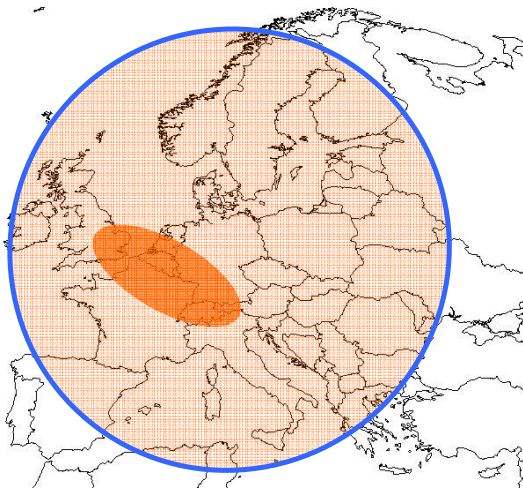


fig. 4: core-periphery Europe

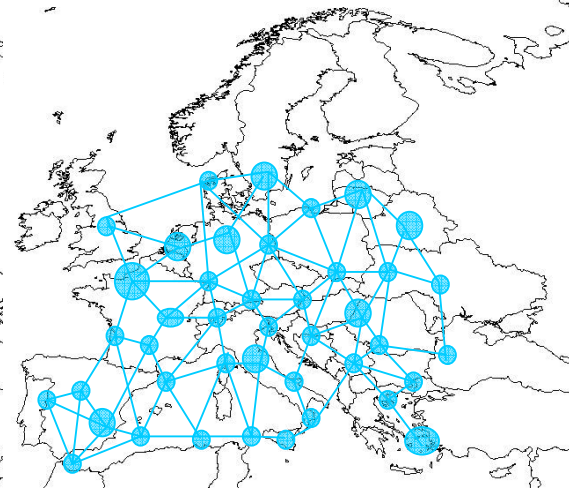


fig 5: scheme network of European urban territories

The regionalization of the European territory is aimed at strengthening and reducing the differences in the level of development among regions and the member states. The goal is the shift from the image of core-periphery Europe (fig.4) to a strong network of urban territories on the meso-scale (fig.5)

As such the networks on the meso-scale are, next to the decentralizing state and self-organization from the bottom-up also empowered by the European Union and have direct access to its facilities in the form of for example international networks and subsidies. Most of these networks on the meso scale came into being by informal decision making and are not formalized legally. The mismatch in development and administrative borders is often bridged by a more informal organization of the stakeholders into governance. These networks are also referred to as social networks as part of the social capital which leads to spatial, economic, cultural and social development based on trust<sup>15</sup>. An objection to such networks on the meso scale is that they are almost never democratically chosen but do have informal power to influence the daily politics and policies in a nation-state or city<sup>16</sup>.

The appearance of urban constellations and governance on the meso scale is often prescribed to global economy. Globalizing forces are enforcing the economy to decentralize on the global scale while the same decentralized forces are centralizing on the meso scale forming more or less specialized territorialities<sup>17</sup>. The regional city has been proposed as the building block of globalization based on the argument that global economy operates most effectively on the meso-scale. Despite of the boom in the ICT-sector and advanced telecommunication the prediction that one could do his job from the top of the mountain did not come true. Proximity and personal contacts

<sup>15</sup> Schram, A., J. Brouwer, et al., Eds. *“De grenzeloze regio, Praktijkboek regionale strategien”*, (Sdu Uitgevers 2007)

<sup>16</sup> Paul Rupp, 2003-2009 delegate at the province Noord-Brabant, the Netherlands. Interview in march 2010

<sup>17</sup> Saskia SASSEN, *“Why cities matter” in Changes of Paradigms in the basic understanding of architectural research*, Anne Katrine Gelting, Ebbe Harder (ed.) (Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, 2008)

still matter enormously. The meso-scale seems to be small enough to maintain the personal contact and on the other hand big enough to offer a variety in pools of labor market, ideas and services which are needed to handle the complexity of the system<sup>18</sup>.

The wish to take advantage of the global dynamics and gain wealth defines many initiatives on the meso-scale, which are undertaken to provide a better competition on the global scale. Developments on the meso-scale seem to be aimed in order to attract business and creating conditions for the globalization to take place or enforce it at certain locations.

### **Spatial development**

Plans and initiatives on regional scale encounter many difficulties due to the complex network of key actors and the absence of authorized governmental power to implement obligatory measures. The city and the region are experiencing a major revival due to globalization and are becoming the building blocs of the globalizing world. The importance of regionalization is even embedded in the official policy of the European Union. As such the region is becoming one of the playfields of the society. Despite all of this, spatial plans on this scale encounter difficulties in becoming reality due to the complexity and interaction of the networks.

One of the reasons is that the urban discipline has lacked the ability to encounter the border-crossing dynamics due to its established territorial and juridical playfield. The discipline is namely practiced by governmental organs and within its administrative borders. One of the proposals for the urban and planning discipline to cope with the complex society demands and encounter the flow of economic, cultural and political dynamics is the *actor-relational approach* to urban planning. This approach places the demands and needs of the society or the actors on the first place reassembling them "*in such way they would become more innovative, enforceable and associative*"<sup>19</sup>. Analyzing the territorial setting on the meso-scale and turning it outside-in searching for unique characteristics and potentials reminds strongly of the famous Geddes' concept "*survey before plan*". Interesting of the *actor-relational approach* is that it does not encounter only social, economic and political networks and dynamics into planning but allows also the physical and geographical characteristics to be considered or even to play a leading role in spatial development. Actors can be human or otherwise entities that emerge in relations. These emerging phenomena are not given but are defined by existing actors in relation to each other. The aim of this approach is to define unique selling points of the observed territory which would trigger innovation and synergetic development. These unique selling points and coalitions determined by thoroughly analysis and round-tables would lead to an urban design on the meso-scale facilitating, synergizing and integrating the local and global needs. Taking the needs into account and letting the stakeholders participate in strategy defining before planning would give the spatial plans to come

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<sup>18</sup> Peter CALTHORPE; William FULTON, *The regional city, Planning for the end of sprawl* (Island Press, 2001)

<sup>19</sup> Luuk BOELEN, *The Urban Connection, An actor-relational approach to urban planning* (010 Publishers, 2009), p. 189-190

more chance to succeed and would also create durable coalitions among the actors for further development<sup>20</sup>. The approach is strongly based on actor-network associations developed in Anglo-Saxon countries and comparing it to traditional European way of governmental regulating and planning it is an alternative route to bring about spatial development. Besides that, the proposed theory seems to place the urban design and planning discipline in a position to influence or even determine the political agendas and policies putting the urban designer in a very (pro)active role.

The question is who should engage this process on the meso-scale and what are its instruments to come to these surprising coalitions and plans given the fact that the meso-scale there is no authoritative structure with obliged responsibility<sup>21</sup>. It is proposed that a *mediator* could engage the process of analyzing, engaging the stakeholders and designing and planning<sup>22</sup>. Although they never called themselves one the RPAA can be considered as a mediator for the Regional City of that time. Concluding from their engagement in various political and social networks and coalitions aiming to promote and put the meso-scale on the agendas of the stakeholders their role can be interpreted as mediatory. In the case of RPAA, the motive to act as a mediator for the Regional City was the core-members` fascination for the meso-scale and belief in its potential to accommodate a better society. Concluding from the way that RPAA accomplished its projects engaging various stakeholders; it is assumable that the role of a mediator is not introduced for the first time. It can be regarded as a logic answer to a complex problem.

The fact that the organization of the society on the meso-scale is proofed to be diffuse without clear hierarchy and territorial borders has a tremendous impact on the spatial planning on that scale. In the case of hierarchy it means that the paradigm of government is shifting to governance and networks while the paradigm of clear scale and defined borders between core and hinterland is shifting to urban constellations. Sassen calls the appearance of new non-territorial constructions and structures the appearance of assemblages<sup>23</sup>. Appointing these urban constellations as urban assemblages could give it a new dimension pointing out the complementary, synergetic collection of artifacts, actors and phenomena. The dynamics and development seem to follow a diagonal and sectional line through society in stead of a vertical hierarchical line from a central point (the government).

Planning and urban design disciplines are coping with a lack of instruments to deal with the shift of paradigms. While there is much literature about the consequences of globalization on the society there seems to be a gap between theory and practice. It shows how rigid and inflexible the traditional way of planning is while the contemporary diffuse territorial and governmental situation asks for flexibility and insight into complex networks and territorial constellations or in Sassen`s words: the urban assemblages.

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<sup>20</sup> Footnote 19

<sup>21</sup> Joks Janssen, Strategic Policy Advisor (Spatial Planning) at Provincie Noord-Brabant, Interview in March 2010

<sup>22</sup> Footnote 18

<sup>23</sup> Footnote 7