(preparation of Maribor conference: potentials for territorial Co-operation with W. Balkans)

**EFFECTIVE REGIONAL PLANNING
IN 10 STEPS**

1. Introduction

According to a variety of actual EU policy standpoints, Europe's development is expected to improve as a result of pursuing Sustainable Development and Territorial Cohesion.
Both policies assume large results from integrated spatial planning, more specifically on the regional level.

Although spatial planning is not (yet) a responsibility of the European Commission, the EU development policy notions *sustainable development* and *territorial cohesion*, will both albeit through Member State policies, exercise influence on developments on the local and regional levels.

Sustainable development is considered a main factor for spatial quality (quality of life, healthy environment, environmental quality, attractiveness for settling new activities, effective functioning of services and infrastructure).(Re;.. DGEnvironment;DGRegio).
Territorial cohesion focuses on synergetic development of a region by articulating its endogenous qualities, for developing region-specific future economic bases. This policy relates to the Lisbon/Gothenburg policies on innovation, sustainable development and employment, which probably will be soon replaced by the EU2020 policy.(Re:..Which, together with the Lisbon Treaty, explicitly refers to the value of integrated spatial planning)

The rather large expectations to the spatial planning community, require the preparation of spatial planners for new approaches of planning practice.
Although spatial planners are in various Member States intensively involved in the preparation of strategic regional developments, in some other countries a majority of planners concentrates still on regulative planning.
ECTP-CEU, the council of the European spatial planners, aims to support spatial planning practitioners in broadening their orientation, in order to meet future requirements.

2. Governance

Modern planning cannot be considered separately from modern governance.
The notion that public bodies are determining developments by plan making has always been only partial true. Plan making is, although important, only one of many influences on spatial developments.
In modern interpretation of democracy this influence tends to be smaller in most countries.
Individuals are taking a consumer attitude, demanding for fast satisfaction of their wishes.
Stakeholders representing valuable economic, ecologic, social, cultural interests have their own expertise which demands for being involved when considering the future. Sector stakeholders on basis of their official competences, tend to refuse co-ordination with other sectors and maintain the priorities of their sector plans.

Lay public does not easily accept plans prepared by their public authorities. People rightly want to fully understand the proposals and recognise their interests and ideas.
That requires trust in the work of experts, which is not automatically granted.

Without general agreement about basic ideas and objectives, spatial plans can hardly become effective. This is a large challenge to planning practice, since society as well as public organisations are increasingly fragmented. The result is an increasingly fragmented physical reality.
The officially adopted EU policy option of territorial cohesion (Lisbon Treaty) is supposed to provide an adequate answer to these developments, by promoting integrated planning approaches.

Therefore, effective spatial planning requires the organisation of consensus building processes. That implies at least, open interactive involvement and extended and intensive communication with all relevant stakeholders.

3. Regional spatial visions

Spatial planning processes aiming at consensus building among a large variety of stakeholders and interests, are working as good as possible towards a common spatial vision. Those visions should precede (or even make superfluous) the conventional preparation of legal plans, which remain a tool for managing the globally agreed future spatial development.
The steps towards effective spatial planning proposed here, are proposed as a way in which modern governance should address future development.

Aiming at sustainable development and territorial cohesion requires the preparation of plans beyond the local level.
Since in most member states plan preparation is a responsibility of the local level and most planning practitioners work on the local level, modern spatial policies require a shift of focus of many planning practitioners to higher scales.

The process towards a commonly supported spatial vision as presented hereunder, assumes that dedicating sufficient time and efforts in the first stages of a planning process always pays off. It is assumed that the increased probability of common understanding, ownership and support helps to overcome unnecessary barriers in later stages.
A crucial precondition is a real open attitude for interactively striving to consensus on a common vision for the region's future.

In spatial planning practice, such processes encounter several barriers. Effective process management requires approaches which address these barriers in such a way that difficulties are positive challenges for proceeding towards consensus.
Different views towards objectives, conflicting interests, competing competencies, legal restrictions, a great many difficulties are experienced as barriers for consensus building.
Those difficulties partly result from a high degree of fragmentation in actual society. Even legal obligations and responsibilities of official bodies are questioned in modern understandings of democracy.
For effective planning for spatial development, therefore next issues should be addressed:
- Who has the "right" to initiate a regional planning process?
- Which interests should be considered for future development?
- Which territory must be taken into account?

- Who are relevant stakeholders, in which phase of the process?
- How should the process be organised? Which roles and responsibilities for stakeholders?
- Which issues and problems, chances and opportunities should be addressed?
- How can the process be informed by facts and fuelled with ideas?
- How should decisions be taken, with respect to responsibilities?
- How will public involvement be secured, communication organised and support obtained?
- How will the results be monitored?
- How will the achievements be flexibly secured for long term developments?
- Etc

In next paragraphs 10 steps are proposed which address the above questions aiming at effectively working towards a common vision on the development of a territory.

4 . Effective planning in 10 steps

4.1 Starting the Process

Anybody can take the first steps to initiate the process.
The need to think about the future of a territory can arise from any person who feels that certain problems will grow, or that developments demand for rethinking the future.
It is important that such persons know the ways to connect his concerns with public and private organisations in order to create wider attention followed by well embedded action.

Preferably, public bodies responsible for decision making with regard to future developments are addressed in that early stage, because they are most appropriate and best able to start wider processes. But also other bodies can be approached which know the way.

Public servants in the spatial planning department should have an open minded attitude towards voices from society and should detect the potential spatial development implication of a request to start (re) thinking the future. If the issue of the concerns and the implications are considered important for the future, initiatives must be taken: First the political responsible persons should be convinced that the request from society deserves the start of a broad and probably expensive policy preparing process.

The exploration of the issues at stake must be started. Interviews with a broad selection of possible stakeholders will provide information and views which may lead to further actions.

4.2 Invite all relevant stakeholders

The first exploration of the implications of the concerned issues should orient on an overview of all interests which might be affected. Planners can do that.

Affected interests might be of all possible kinds: natural resources, economic activities, criminality, traffic problems, .. nothing excluded.

But a preliminary global analysis should critically assess whether all interests are equally relevant for future developments. Some interests which are symptoms of other developments might be considered of secondary order. Some interests might be very local.

In open discussion with stakeholders, a selection must be made, of stakeholders relevant in this stage. The others will remain informed during that stage and might be involved in later stages of the process.

Since every local or regional interest can be seen as part of wider related interests, the size and spread of the various relevant interests must be identified.

Natural values should be considered within the frame of ecologic networks (Natura 2000), Traffic problems must be seen in the whole of main road networks,
Economic activities within the relevant clusters of economic activities/chains of production or services.
Housing problems are part of regional housing markets
Education aspects must be regarded within the networks of schooling facilities of different levels.
Employment should be related to regional markets of workforce.

Different networks cover different territories.

Representatives of stakeholders, who are able to look beyond sector boundaries and beyond administrative boundaries, are of great value for discussing the future. They should preferably be included in the list of participants.

The list of representatives of stakeholders can only be completed after next step: the definition of the region at stake.

4.3 The region

Since spatial development is driven by forces like economic investments, nature conservation, migration, pollution etc which can only partly be influenced by public interventions, it is of great importance to define the area of the region under consideration not in the first place by administrative boundaries, but by issues.

Territories affected by specific developments and territories offering specific opportunities are not defined by legal boundaries.

Therefore the planners should be so open minded that they propose to consider territories which go beyond the boundaries of the public body they work for. Their political responsible authorities should support thinking beyond the administrative boundaries.

In order to define the territory that will be considered in the process aiming at consensus building about a common vision for the future development, all relevant functional networks should be considered.

Each of those networks cover different areas, since they consist of relations between activities and objects, between different cities and regions. Such areas are not bound by administrative borders between municipalities, regions or countries.

In order to concentrate the shaping of a spatial development vision on opportunities, it is essential to identify the territory which will be relevant for future developments, economic activities as well as natural/cultural values.

The area where relevant overlapping networks show most intensive interrelations should be determining for defining the borders of the region under consideration. Those boundaries are probably not clear lines but will consist of more or less fuzzy zones.

It will be clear that the undefined term "region" refers to any territory beyond that of a local municipality. Therefore it is important to establish, even in fuzzy terms, early in the process which is the territory when the term "region" is used.

The invitation of stakeholders for participating in the process will be based on the territory which will be taken into consideration.

4.4 Organizing the process

The process aiming at consensus in a "region" about the direction of future development, can be referred to as shaping a common vision on the region's future.

This complex and vulnerable process should be organised very carefully:

It should be open to all relevant influences, it should be flexible to unforeseen information, it should respect relative minor interests, strategic stakeholders should play important roles, public responsible politicians should act as serving society and at the same time offer guidance, it should be future oriented and result in broad agreements on goals, objectives, and solutions which determine the main direction of development, it should build on public support.

In short, modern governance must be practiced when working together on a common view for the regional future.

This open, interactive process of integrated strategic planning must be agreed explicitly with the stakeholders, specifying in a flexible way:

1. The list of participants (see step 2)
2. The goal of the exercise, describing the issues to be addressed.
3. The roles of different participants: which legal responsibilities are in force, which party is entitled to decide, who organises the process, who prepare proposals, which group advices decision makers, how will be decided, how will wider groups be involved, who will be responsible for communication, what is the commitment of participants, which participants may be replaced by others in different stages of the process, etc
4. The envisaged time schedule of the process, indicating the various steps (1-10), specifying moments of deciding and moments of formalizing agreed achievements.

It would be good to inform the wider society about the progress of this stage and organise meetings which might bring new information and views, which can be adopted and included.

4.5 SWOT- analysis and benchmarks should be prepared.

In order to avoid fuzzy discussions based on misinformation and non-realistic ambitions, the preparation of a SWOT-analysis and the benchmark of strategic economic activities or natural and cultural qualities, is an essential step.

Planners and other experts can prepare and inform those actions, but the SWOT-analysis should be a real interactive process. Although experts must inform the study, the SWOT analysis must not be presented as a completed expert's report. Expert's reports tend to be read, agreed, adopted, filed and forgotten.

But the result of this action should be that all participants should discover and get convinced about the very specific opportunities and chances for future development which are real

unique and distinctive for their region. Also benchmarking is very helpful to get to realistic ambitions. The position of the specific region on a ranking of regions which are more or less comparable should be established. The regions to compare with can be located every where, important is comparability in terms of economic, functional, cultural and natural characteristics which are relevant for specific opportunities of development. This step is extremely helpful to focus the discussions among participants on real opportunities, based on existing endogenous qualities.
The resulting information should be agreed as common basis for further steps in the process.

Planners can play an important role in identifying and articulating existing qualities, analysing problems, gathering information for SWOTs and benchmarks, draft conclusions and organise sound discussions.
Interactively discussing the issues leading to a SWOT and to benchmarks has as a side effect that the participants coming from different backgrounds, develop more mutual understanding about the thinking and values of the other, public and private parties.
More understanding is also helpful to shift attitudes. Different interests are not always conflicting interests, often only different weights are given to the same values.

The agreements on SWOT and the adopted benchmarks should be widely published.
Meetings open to the wider public and "secondary" interests can provide new views, which should be taken into consideration.

4.6 Objectives, criteria

The discussions to establish and adopt a SWOT-analysis should be elaborated in a list of objectives of the participants. During extensive discussions it becomes clearer and clearer: what is the perspective of different participants, what are they really aiming at?

The discussions should critically focus on agreeing on an extremely short selection of opportunities for future development. It is essential that the conclusions will be the agreed conclusions of the participants and not only views of some experts.
In this stage it is all about spearheads. It is normally really difficult to keep those spearheads sharp. Being real selective is anyhow the big challenge in this stage of the process: being satisfied with a list which results from a compromise about too many opportunities will not sufficiently focus future efforts.

This stage should conclude in a combination of one to three specific promising economic activities which may constitute the future economic basis of the region, and a few specific distinct aspects of the quality of life, together establishing the relative position according to the ambitions. Thereby strategic issues which are conditional for successful development must be identified. The conclusions of step 4.5 about SWOT and benchmarks provide the needed information.

A small step further is to reformulate objectives into a list of criteria of "good" (wished-for) spatial development.

The results of this step in the process should be formally adopted by the participants in the process and then by the councils which have formal responsibility for spatial development.

Also the results of this stage should be opened for wider discussions. "Forgotten" issues, aims and views should be related to the agreed objectives. Sometimes it is about semantics, sometimes about symptoms of other issues, sometimes new issues should be adopted.

4.7 Sketch scenarios

Spatial planners should in this stage, elaborate mapped models for possible future development. These scenarios, based on different ways in which the objectives of future development can be imagined, offer a tool for structuring further discussions among the participating stakeholders. Maps show interrelations and consequences in a single overview. The scenarios should be presented for consideration in comparable ways: maps with similar legends and clarifying reports structured equally.

In 3-5 maps, different combinations of the location, size, distribution of densities, mutual relations and connectedness of the main land-use types must be shown, together with the related infrastructure, projected over maps of the actual situation.

The time perspective of the scenarios should be longer than participants are used to. The point is that considerations should go far beyond actual (political) issues, problems and projects. When considering the possible future situation after 25 or 30 years, the discussions will concentrate on objectives rather than on actual problem solving, with the related conflicts of competence.
The direction of future development is the subject of a development vision rather than planning concrete problems and projects.

Sketching the scenarios can be done in an open, interactive way: planners can draft first proposals which are presented in such a way that differentiation into 3-5 models can result from discussions about preferences of different groups of stakeholders.
The resulting maps show the effect of the different weights attributed to different values by the participants.
They reflect more or less different development visions.
If those different possible visions on the future of the region, reflect in a comprehensible way different attitudes of individuals in society (social, liberal, green, etc) than those groups can recognise their interests in the scenarios.

By presenting the scenarios to the wider public, and organise an open discussion on consequences and preferences, more groups than those directly involved (the relevant stakeholders) may recognise the way their interests are secured or neglected. Discussion and requests for comments may result in unexpected information and views. These results should be considered carefully for including or correction.
The outcomes of this evaluation of the "new" information must also carefully be communicated.

4.8 Analyse Scenarios

By comparing the scenarios in a new set of meetings of the participants, a selection process of the model which offers most promising best opportunities, will start.
Open discussions, offering the opportunity to express first impressions of the scenarios by all participants, should fast be followed by a more systematic comparison.

The open discussion should preferably be organised in terms of identifying advantages and disadvantages of the various scenarios, using purposely these quite relaxed qualifications which does not exclude certain solutions.
More systematic analysis can then be started by comparing the scenarios with the criteria which resulted from step 4.6.

Simple scoring with pluses, neutral zeros and minuses, results in a first evaluation.
Also this stage of the work may take time: extensive discussions may lead to more refined evaluations.
But also better understanding and trust among the different participants will grow most probably.
During the discussions in this stage of the process, participants will experience several important things:
- that certain part-solutions can easily be transferred to other scenarios;
- that different weighing of values does not necessarily end in conflicting interests or conflicting claims for space;
- that there are more solutions than only one for meeting certain wishes;
- that seemingly conflicting interests can exist in the same territory if they are not directly confronted to each other by juxtaposition..

Most probably, the participants will agree on making one or more new scenarios which combine detected advantages and opportunities in a new way.

The expertise of planners can assist and facilitate that process by providing information, examples, solutions, sketching new scenarios. More and more the results of this process in which scenarios are used as tools for structuring the discussions, will gain ownership of all participants.

4.9 Optimizing/Priorities

Best scoring scenario(s) of stage 4.8 can be improved by including part-solutions of other scenarios or by designing new solutions for remaining problems. Also composing a new scenario on basis of all previous considerations may optimize the results.
After evaluation, according to the criteria of stage 4.6 the participants can agree on the best, optimal scenario as being their provisional common vision on the region's future.
This result should explicitly be called provisional, because still open for moderation.

Next the provisional result should be discussed in interactive meetings with all relevant stakeholders and the public. Those meetings must be focused on detecting possible improvements. Carefully considering the proposed improvements and explicitly adopting, amending or refusing the proposals on basis of respectful argumentation is then needed.
The conclusions must again be communicated to the wider public.
The achievements up to this stage may be called *the common vision* on the development of the region, and should be agreed explicitly among the participants.
Finally a tool for monitoring and evaluation of the progress and for eventual revising documents must become part of the agreed vision.

The whole process should be well documented, recorded and published in order to establish the considerations and argumentations in the various stages of decision making.

4.10 Further Steps

Finally the achievements of the process should be well communicated by all parties involved, in official Councils, public meetings, websites, brochures etc
The commitments of all involved parties should be expressed in every communication.
For councils which are responsible for further decision making, the achievements of the above open, interactive and integrated approach is reassuring. It helps to modernize the culture of governance.
The process is so organised that not only consensus is sought, but also support may be expected.

All spatial planning and development related official bodies are finally requested to officially adopt the vision/ and take it as basis for legal spatial and sector planning processes.(if needed)

This stage also requires a lot of attention: The relation between the considerations leading to the vision and the responsibilities of the official body must be clarified and discussed. The way in which the specific interests of the official body are addressed and secured must be made clear, and the synergetic extra qualities resulting from the vision must be promoted.

Legal plan making, consequently is aiming at the best legal way to facilitate and promote the aimed development. Legal plans are at least a tool to avoid not-wished- for developments. It is recommended to create within the legal regulations flexibility for unforeseen developments, which do not jeopardize the vision.
Because further plan making is based on the agreed vision, it takes less time and efforts to accomplish such plans.