Urban Development and Research Needs in Europe

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In the 1990s, though the evidence is not completely clear, the European system of cities appears to be evolving in complex, even contradictory, ways. Much of the difficulty of interpretation concerns the appropriate geographical scale of analysis. At the broadest geographical scale, there is continued growth of mega-urban regions, particularly in the Central Capital Region (South East England; Ile-de-France; Randstad Holland) but also around the largest political and commercial capital cities in other regions of Europe (Copenhagen, Milan, Madrid). But, at a finer geographical scale, there is a noticeable geographical deconcentration from the most heavily urbanised areas which form the cores of these regions, including most of the capital cities of North-West Europe (London, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen), with the most severe losses occurring where urban decentralisation is reinforced by industrial decline and the loss of port activities (United Nations 1997, 57). The gainers are smaller metropolitan areas within the outer parts of the same regions, which have been among the fastest-growing urban areas in Europe; in the very largest and densest urban regions (London, Randstad Holland), there is a process of long-distance deconcentration from the largest central cities to wide rings of medium-sized cities in the surrounding rural areas.

This pattern emerged from work during the 1980s (Hall and Hay 1980; Hall 1988; Cheshire and Hay 1989) which showed a fairly regular progression over time, from centralisation to decentralisation within European metropolitan areas (Functional Urban Regions), culminating in a stage when decentralisation from central city to suburb accompanied loss of population from the entire metropolitan area. Cheshire and Hay showed that areas in this stage tend to be concentrated in a narrow band through Europe, from Genoa and Turin through eastern and northern France, the Saar and Ruhr and Southern Belgium to the Midlands, North West and North East England, and finally north to Glasgow and Belfast (Cheshire and Hay 1989). They have suffered massive deindustrialisation, and they have failed to develop compensating service functions (Hall 1987a, Gillespie and Green 1987, Green and Howells 1987).

In contrast, Cheshire and Hay found that some of the best urban performers are either second-rank cities in the bigger countries – places like Bristol or Toulouse or Florence or Stuttgart – or the smaller national capitals like Brussels, Amsterdam, or Copenhagen. But there is an exception to that: older industrial and port cities that served as provincial capitals for old industrial regions, like Glasgow or Liverpool or Dortmund, did not do well at all.

Below these medium-sized metros, Europe has over one hundred smaller places with less than a quarter of a million people, many of
them administrative centres for rural areas, or resort and retirement towns. Cheshire and Hay show that nearly three-quarters of them gained people in the 1970s; more than two in five had gains of 5 per cent or more. The fastest-growing metros, whether small or medium-sized, tend to be semi-rural but not remote: they are often close to the biggest metros, which are losing people and jobs. There is thus a process of re-centralisation of jobs in these smaller places, with local concentrations of residential populations in relatively small and compact areas where they live and work.

In other less-urbanised regions of Europe, too, a range of medium-sized and smaller cities have demonstrated strong growth as regional service centres and sometimes as locations for tourism and high-technology industry. But this is not universal: out-migration is also occurring generally from less-developed low-income rural areas, particularly in the rural hinterlands of the larger agglomerations in Southern Europe, but including the less heavily populated areas of Ireland and Scandinavia (United Nations 1997, 57). Here, the larger central cities tend to be the beneficiaries from continuing in-migration from the countryside; but, in these regions, longer-distance migration streams tend to take workers into the more attractive cities in the more central regions.

The same applies to Eastern Europe, despite the fact that until 1989–90 this region operated under an entirely separate economic and political system. One important aspect was that in the state-controlled economies of this region, manufacturing industry received priority over services and that industries were located in places quite different from those which would prove profitable in a market economy; they were also allowed to survive long past the point when they would have been deemed unprofitable in a market economy. So cities in this region did not experience the rapid deindustrialisation that had been true of their counterparts in western Europe. In addition, the lack of a land market and a substantial private housing market meant that the distribution of land uses was often different from western cities (United Nations 1997).

By the early 1990s this area had experienced the highest rate of total and urban population growth of any part of Europe, albeit slow by the standards of most of the world, and with big differences between countries; but overall population growth has slowed notably in the 1990s. It seems likely that economic problems arising from structural transformation, plus political conflicts in some areas (such as the former Yugoslavia) may precipitate major international population movements in the present decade, perhaps especially affecting cities in the recipient countries in the border zone to the west (Germany, Austria).

The dominant feature in this region, both before and after 1990, has been migration from rural to urban areas. Everywhere except Albania and parts of the former Yugoslavia, more than half the population already lives in urban centres; in the Czech and Slovak Republics and in Bulgaria, more than two-thirds live in urban centres. A significant part of the inter-regional migration trend pre-1989 was attributable to official government policies which promoted the growth of large cities to provide the labour force for major industrial enterprises.
However, a significant fact is the fact that more than half the region’s urban population, in 1992, lived in urban centres with less than 100,000 inhabitants; while only one quarter of the total population lived in cities with 100,000 and more people, as against one half in the European Union. Surprisingly, however, there are some large metropolitan agglomerations, including Warsaw and Budapest with more than 2 million and Prague, Zagreb and Bratislava, as well as second-level agglomerations such as Brno, Krakow, Poznan, Lodz and Wroclaw. Almost all are old-established; the exception is also the largest, the Katowice mining and industrial area in southern Poland, an eastern European equivalent of the Ruhr area, with 2.25 million inhabitants (United Nations 1997, 67–9). Many of these bigger metropolitan areas have shown appreciable rates of growth: between 1970 and 1990 Katowice grew by 25 per cent, Warsaw by 30 per cent, Bucharest by 32 per cent, Sofia by 49 per cent. Prague, with 13 per cent, and Budapest, with 9 per cent, are the slow-growing exceptions. Notwithstanding this fact, the proportion living in cities with more than one million people has declined in most eastern European countries, due to communist policies to develop cities lower down the urban hierarchy – sometimes involving discouragement of living in the capital, as in the case of Budapest. And this reflects the fact that in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania there is an unusual degree of concentration of national population in and around the capital: 40 per cent in Bulgaria and Romania, 30 per cent in Hungary (United Nations 1997, 69). Summarising, we can say that eastern Europe tends to have a strongly primate distribution of population, with dominant capital cities, weakly-developed intermediate cities and a wide spread of population in small rural service centres.

A major debate among European urbanists has concerned counterurbanisation. The evidence from the 1970s seemed to suggest that, just as in the United States, there was such a tendency: specifically, a movement from major cities and their metropolitan areas to smaller places. However, as reported by Cheshire (1995), the pattern in the 1980s has been less clear: counter-urbanisation seems to have been less general, with a general slowing-down and even a return to larger cities. Cheshire concludes:

It may be that the smallest and most rural places, at least in northern Europe, have continued to gain population the fastest; but if attention is focused on the EU’s larger cities, an important change of pattern emerges. The regular onward march of decentralisation appears to have faltered and, in northern Europe, it has halted, even reversed (Cheshire 1995, 1058).

Table 1, which shows trends in urbanisation and counterurbanisation for thirteen countries, suggests that more countries were experiencing urbanisation in the 1980s than in the 1970s, especially in the second half of the 1980s. However, there were significant differences between countries, with France, Italy and Ireland moving against the general trend. The reasons for this apparent re-urbanisation are not clear; to some extent they may represent a statistical artefact of the definitions used in the study; but they may also reflect a new wave of urban building in old port and industrial areas, abandoned during the deindustrialisation phase of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Urban System: The Current Picture
How does one try to summarise this mass of partial and sometimes contradictory data? Some kinds of urban area, it seems, are unambiguously growing through in-migration:

First, the hinterlands of the major cities, mainly in Northern and Central Europe, that are benefiting from the exodus from these cities – as around London, Copenhagen and Randstad Holland; possibly this trend has weakened since 1980 with the trend to reurbanisation, though rapid growth has continued in the fringe areas.

Second, medium-sized and smaller metropolitan areas in less-urbanised “sunbelt” zones with medium-sized and smaller cities, particularly in the southern UK, southern France, Portugal and central and northern Italy.

Third, a few selected larger urban centres and their immediate hinterlands in the less-developed, less-densely-populated regions of rural out-migration, particularly Scandinavia, Mediterranean Europe, Ireland and some eastern European countries (United Nations 1997, 57). This tends to reflect the magnetism of such cities at the stage of development these regions have reached, and also government policies in eastern Europe. It also reflects that there are relatively few such large city regions in these parts of Europe which can act as foci for in-migration.

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<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>+0.69</td>
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<tr>
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These trends reflect underlying economic realities. Globalisation and the shift to the informational economy give special value to large cities as centres for efficient face-to-face information exchange. They are the locations of the major hub airports and the high-speed train stations; they also are hubs for commuter traffic. But they also experience some economic disadvantages: high rents, congestion, pollution, the costs of attracting middle- and junior-level staff. So certain activities (“back offices”, R & D) tend to migrate outwards: to corridors leading to the airports, to suburban train stations, to country towns in the sur-
rounding ring. Meanwhile, medium-sized cities ("provincial capitals") in "sunbelt" rural regions (Bristol, Hannover, Bordeaux, Oporto, Sevilla, Bologna) are growing through strong concentrations of public services (higher education, health services), retailing and tourism. Some of these also act as centres of high-technology manufacturing, and/or have attracted longer-distance office decentralisation. Some similar-level cities in older industrial regions (Dortmund, Leeds) have seen a similar growth, though others have been less successful, especially if they are peripheral either nationally or in a European sense. Finally, there are many cases of growth at the next level of the hierarchy: the "county town", or medium-sized administrative-service centre of a rural region, of which hundreds of European examples exist. These centres have grown as local service centres; they often offer a high level of environment (and some, like Freiburg, are outstanding examples); they are attractive both to migration and inward investment.

Thus, the overall picture is not easy to summarise. On the one hand, significant concentrations of activity are occurring in the cores of the very largest cities; they generate wealth and, through multiplier effects, jobs, even though some of the process may be "exported" to commuter towns in the surrounding ring. However, such growth does not generate sufficient employment to compensate for the loss of traditional manufacturing and goods-handling activities. The result is a paradox: high levels of income generation are accompanied by localised long-term structural unemployment. In terms of employment and population growth, medium-sized and smaller towns are showing more rapid growth than larger ones; and some are benefiting from spillover effects from larger cities into their commuter rings. However, their performance varies significantly from region to region: it is strongest in the zones of deconcentration around the largest metropolitan areas of the Central Capital region, strong also in "Sunbelt" regions, variable in the peripheral regions of out-migration where the main beneficiaries are at the next level up the hierarchy. In Eastern Europe, cities at this level of the hierarchy tend to be weakly represented.

Another way of looking at the evidence, therefore, is to return to the macro-level of geographical analysis. The Eurocore or Central Capitals region continues to exhibit strong growth, with a reversal of the counter-urbanisation tendencies of the 1970s in at least some of the cities, but with continuing local out-migration which effectively extends the metropolitan area into a huge and complex polycentric structure. The more peripheral political and commercial capitals also exhibit growth, sometimes accompanied by local decentralisation to smaller cities, but sometimes not; here, the pressures for deconcentration, in the form of congestion and other negative externalities, are fewer. The Euro-periphery exhibits general continued out-migration, but accompanied by local migration patterns which benefit a relatively few local service centres. Table 2 attempts to summarise this pattern.
At the macro-level of analysis, the dominant feature is the contrast between the Central Capital Region, with its dense cluster of cities closely networked through air, high-speed-train and telecommunications links (London, Paris, Frankfurt, Luxembourg, Brussels, Amsterdam), and the "gateway" or "regional capital" cities in the more peripheral European regions, each dominating a large but less-densely-populated territory (Dublin, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Madrid, Lisbon plus the eastern European capitals of Ljubljana, Budapest, Prague, Warsaw and Tallinn). Here, we find an interesting degree of competition between a higher-order city that appears to control such a wide sector of the European space, and next-order cities controlling parts of that space (as, for instance, Copenhagen versus Stockholm and Helsinki; Berlin versus Vienna; Madrid versus Lisbon). Additionally, in one or two instances, this critical Euro-regional role is divided between a "political" and a "commercial" capital (Rome and Milan; Madrid and Barcelona).

These intermediate-size gateway cities have proved relatively dynamic in the 1970s and 1980s. They invariably act as regional airport hubs, with a range of long-distance destinations (Copenhagen, Madrid) and as the hubs of regional high-speed-train systems (Madrid, Rome); they have a wide variety of global service functions, especially where they dominate linguistic regions (as Madrid for Latin America). With expansion of the EU eastwards, the eastern gateway cities (Berlin, Vienna) promise to play new roles in their respective areas, returning to the roles they played before 1914. However, policy does not appear to have played much of a direct role in this development; it is a function of European geography and its relation to the wider global economy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Region/Area</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Chief Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Core</td>
<td>London, Randstad</td>
<td>Growth plus deconcentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral Capitals</td>
<td>Madrid, Copenhagen</td>
<td>Growth plus local dispersal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunbelts</td>
<td>Bristol, Bordeaux, Stuttgart, Bologna</td>
<td>Growth plus local dispersal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral Regions</td>
<td>Oporto, Bari, Cork</td>
<td>General outmigration; selective growth of cities</td>
</tr>
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Table 2: A typology of European metropolitan areas in the 1990s.

Smaller cities seem to have experienced some advantages when they are clustered so as to constitute a wider economic area sharing labour markets and specialised services. The outstanding examples are the
Greater South East region outside London and the fringes of Randstad Holland. But many other parts of Europe have developed corridors of intense urbanisation along major transport spines, as in the Rhine Valley above Frankfurt, the Rhone Valley below Lyon, or the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. In a few cases (as in South East England) planning policy has played a conscious role in this; elsewhere, again, it seems to have been a spontaneous evolution. But there is now a general agreement that such a form, which can combine small mixed-use urban developments clustered along strong public transport spines, represents perhaps the most sustainable form of urban development (Breheny and Rookwood 1993; Calthorpe 1993); and some national planning strategies are beginning to adopt it, for instance in the UK.

Many more isolated medium-sized towns, outside these major trans-European corridors but located on national movement corridors connecting larger cities, have shown remarkable dynamism. Examples include Nottingham and Bristol, Hannover and Munich, Grenoble and Toulouse, Naples and Ravenna, Zaragoza and Valencia. The key seems to be first that they are in “Sunbelt” rural regions that are themselves prosperous, either through efficient agricultural production, or (more commonly) because these cities themselves have become the main centres for advanced service employment. Public sector spending policies have played a role here, by concentrating such functions as higher education and hospitals in these places. But the sources of growth are more subtle than this, and such places show remarkable variations in fortune, depending on local socio-cultural factors that may go back for centuries – as, for instance, between northern and southern Italy (Putnam 1995).

Increasingly, at every level of the urban system, traditional location factors – coal, iron ore, even navigable water – lose their former importance. For the new growth sectors – financial and business services, command and control functions, health and education, creative and cultural industries, business and leisure tourism – an entirely different set of factors is relevant: on the one hand, nodality in terms of access by air, road or rail, on the other, environmental quality. Under this latter head it is important to distinguish between the quality of the natural environment (presence of mountains, water features, forests and the like) and of the cultural environment (historic buildings and attractive townscapes which can be enhanced by appropriate and careful treatment such as pedestrianisation and traffic calming). Nearly every European city, over the last thirty years, has taken major steps to improve the level of its environment; some have become models for the rest of the world. And it is significant that very recently a few cities, quite strongly clustered in certain parts of Europe – south-west Germany and central Switzerland, north-central Italy – have begun to establish new benchmarks as model European cities, with imaginative policies in the areas of transport, energy and housing.
Towards a Spatially Integrated Approach

Many of the developments just described are quite remarkable, and they have produced a quality of life in many European cities that is at least as high as any in the world. But they do not constitute in any sense a spatially-integrated approach. Even where, in a few cases, urban development has taken a particular form (as for instance urbanised corridors), it has seldom been through concerted action. The question is whether it is now possible to develop such an approach on principles that would be broadly acceptable across the European space, by national member governments which would have to bear the main burden of implementation.

There are good reasons to suppose that it may be. The member-countries of the European Union share common problems, common concerns and broadly similar policy objectives. All of them, for instance, are concerned to promote economic development in order to generate new jobs and new wealth to replace the losses that arise from globalisation processes, especially deindustrialisation. All wish to promote social cohesion so as to reduce the problems that arise from concentrated deprivation and social exclusion. All subscribe to the principle of sustainability and wish to apply it to urban development. All want to promote a more balanced distribution of economic development across their national territories, so as to reduce regional disparities. Of course, the resulting policy prescriptions are likely to have a different emphasis in different regions of the Union: in some they may suggest the need to regenerate older industrial cities, in others the desirability of enhancing urban infrastructure in smaller rural service towns. But the principle remains the same.

The central question is how these objectives translate into policies and how then those policies receive a spatial dimension. A central objective of the European Spatial Development Perspective is to promote the “development of a polycentric and balanced urban system and strengthening of the partnership between urban and rural areas”. But it applies this principle at the largest possible geographical scale: the European and even the global scale. The aim is not so much to redistribute some fixed amount of activity in a kind of zero-sum-game; it is to encourage a significantly higher level of growth in less-developed European regions and cities, some of which will be older industrial cities in need of restructuring, but a much larger number of which will be cities in the less densely-populated, less-developed fringe regions of western, southern, northern and eastern Europe.

Specifically, it refers to the need to develop more than one “integration zone” in Europe. Currently, as our SPOESP report emphasises, only the area that used to be called the Central Capitals Region – defined by the metropolises of London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Ham-
Towards a Spatially Integrated Approach

Toburg – can truly be regarded as a true integration zone, fully integrated into the global economy. There is potential for developing a number of other such zones, and as our report comments, “By so doing, the network of internationally accessible metropolitan regions and their linked hinterlands that this could produce could play a key role in improving spatial balance in Europe” (Nordregio 2000, 17).

Now, it’s evident that this key word, polycentric, needs to be carefully defined: it has a different significance at different spatial scales and in different geographical contexts. At the highest, global level, polycentric refers to the development of alternative global centres of power. Presently, there are a very few cities worldwide that are universally regarded as global control-and-command centres, located in the most advanced economies: London appears in all lists, Paris appears on some. Importantly, however, Europe has a number of “sub-global” cities (or what the Loughborough geographers would call “Beta World Cities”), performing some global functions in specialised fields: Rome (culture), Milan (fashion), Frankfurt and Zürich (banking), Brussels, Luxembourg, Paris, Rome and Geneva (supranational government agencies) (Hall 1993, Hall 1996, Beaverstock et al 1999a, b, 2000a, b).

Within a specifically European context, therefore, one meaning of a polycentric policy is to divert some activities away from “global” cities like London (and perhaps Paris) to “sub-global” centres like Brussels, Frankfurt or Milan. But there is also a very important spatial dimension: while some of these cities are found in the Central Capitals region (Brussels, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Luxembourg), a much larger number are “gateway” national political or commercial capitals outside the Central Capitals region: they include Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Vienna, Rome/Milan, Madrid/Barcelona, Lisbon and Dublin (and, it might be added, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and perhaps some of the northern English regional capitals). They serve broad but sometimes thinly-populated territories such as the Iberian peninsula, Scandinavia and east central Europe (and of course Scotland and Wales). Because they are national capitals serving distinct linguistic groups, they invariably have a level of service functions larger than would be expected on grounds of size alone; they tend to be national airport and rail hubs, and the main centres for national cultural institutions and national media.

A major issue here is whether it will be either necessary or desirable to concentrate decentralised activity into a limited number of “regional capitals”, each commanding a significant sector of the European territory – Copenhagen, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, and Edinburgh – or whether it would be preferable to diffuse down to the level of the national capital cities, including the smaller national capitals. Essentially, how far should Madrid be regarded as the dominant gateway for south west Europe, or should it share this role with Lisbon, Bilbao, Barcelona and Seville? And likewise with Copenhagen vis-à-vis Stockholm, Oslo and Helsinki. This could be particularly important in eastern Europe, where Berlin and Vienna may develop important roles for their hinterlands reflecting past geographies, but where also there is a real need to
reassert the service roles of the different national capitals and selected provincial capitals (Gdansk, Kraków, Plzen, Szeged).

But, at a finer geographical scale, however, there is yet another meaning of polycentricity: here it can refer to the outward diffusion from either of these levels of city to smaller cities within their urban fields or spheres of influence. As the SPOESP report comments, “Fostering well balanced relationships between urban and rural areas through partnership could support this overall aim of polycentric development … urban-rural partnership is promoted as a key mechanisms for spreading the benefits of dynamic growth zones to their hinterlands” (Nordregio 2000, 17). This, our report stresses, is essentially a different meaning of polycentricity, referring to integration at the regional level, not the European level (ibid.) We can see this process happening in a number of places: the most dramatic is around London, which is now the centre of a system of some 30–40 centres within a 150-km. radius. In contrast, for different historical reasons, Paris and Berlin have much more weakly-developed urban systems. At the next level, cities like Stockholm, Copenhagen and Milan also show widespread outward diffusion while other cities do not. East European cities, in particular, have had relatively little impact through decentralisation on their surrounding regions, though this may change in the future.

In general, at this regional scale a policy of “concentrated deconcentration” (as the Dutch planners have usefully called it) would suggest adopting the principle fairly widely, but adapting it to the specific development stages and problems of each city and region. Specifically, the general principle should be to guide decentralised growth, wherever possible, on to a few selected development corridors along strong public transport links, including high-speed “regional metros” such as those under construction around Stockholm and Copenhagen, and planned for London, or even along true high-speed lines such as London-Ashford, Amsterdam-Antwerp or Berlin-Magdeburg. These would not of course be corridors of continuous urbanisation, but rather clusters of urban developments, at intervals, around train stations and key motorway interchanges that offer exceptionally good accessibility. Some of these sites could be at considerable distances, up to 150 kilometres, from the central metropolitan city.

In the more remote rural regions, far from the global and sub-global centres, the pursuit of polycentricity must have yet another dimension: to build up the potential of both “regional capitals” in the 200,000–500,000 population range (Bristol, Bordeaux, Hannover, Ravenna, Zaragoza), and smaller “county towns” in the 50,000–200,000 range. The main agents will be enhanced accessibility both by road and (most importantly) high-speed train, coupled with investment in key higher-level service infrastructure (health, education); the systematic enhancement of environmental quality, to make as many as possible of these cities “model sustainable cities”; and finally the competitive marketing of such cities as places for inward investment and relocation. Again, but on a smaller scale, the growth of such centres could be accompanied by a limited degree of deconcentration to even smaller rural towns within easy reach.
How far does existing reality conform to all this? As we’ve seen earlier, in the 1990s, though the evidence is not completely clear, the European system of cities appears to be evolving in complex, even contradictory, ways. At the broadest geographical scale, there is continued growth of polycentric mega-urban regions, particularly in the Central Capitals Region (South East England; Ile-de-France; Randstad Holland), but also around the largest political and commercial capital cities in other regions of Europe (Copenhagen, Stockholm, Milan, Madrid, Barcelona). But, at a finer geographical scale within these regions, there is a noticeable geographical deconcentration from the most heavily urbanised areas which form their cores, including most of the capital cities of North-West Europe (London, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen), with the most severe losses occurring where urban decentralisation is reinforced by industrial decline and the loss of port activities (United Nations 1997, 57). This conclusion is not fundamentally modified by the recent reversal which has seen population gains in London; the long-term trend is relative deconcentration from such places. The big gainers are smaller metropolitan areas within the outer parts of the same regions, which have been among the fastest-growing urban areas in Europe; in the very largest and densest urban regions (London, Randstad Holland), there is a process of long-distance deconcentration from the largest central cities to wide rings of medium-sized cities in the surrounding rural areas.

In other less-urbanised regions of Europe, too, a range of medium-sized and smaller cities have demonstrated strong growth as regional service centres and sometimes as locations for tourism and high-technology industry. But this is not universal: out-migration is also occurring generally from less-developed low-income rural areas, particularly in the rural hinterlands of the larger agglomerations in Southern Europe, but including the less heavily populated areas of Ireland and Scandinavia (United Nations 1997, 57). Here, the larger central cities tend to be the beneficiaries from continuing in-migration from the countryside; but, in these regions, longer-distance migration streams tend to take workers into the more attractive cities in the more central regions.

All this points to the need to develop a clearer understanding of the nature and extent of urban-rural relationships. Logically, our report devotes a lot of space to this topic. We conclude that there is an urgent need for a new research programme to define Functional Urban Regions in Europe. After a good deal of urban discussion, we have recommended adoption of criteria already developed in a Scandinavian-based research programme. This would be based on NUTS 5 units, with urban cores defined as built-up areas according to United Nations definition, to which are added NUTS 5 units from which people commuting to work exceed 40% of the active labour force in each unit (Nordregio 2000, 27).
Implementing ESDP

At whatever scale, spatial planning strategies cannot impose rigid blueprints. They can only suggest broad desirable directions; since the ESDP is advisory, and the principle of subsidiarity will apply, implementation will come mainly at national, regional and local levels. And there can be no firm guarantee as to outcomes: increasingly cities will compete directly in a global marketplace, and it can and should be no part of planning strategy to discourage this process. The European Union will however play an increasingly valuable role in coordinating efforts at these other levels, and in managing a variety of funds which can help shape them.

The most urgent question at European level, perhaps, is how far and in what ways the new Spatial Development Strategy can influence the distribution of the Structural Funds. This is not the place to enter the controversies about the restructuring of these funds around a more limited set of objectives, as set out in the European Union’s Agenda 2000. Undoubtedly agreement will be reached on the appropriate formulae, which might indeed be applied nationally within some overall EU-wide ceilings. The important point, which is not specifically addressed in the Agenda 2000 report, concerns the ways in which the new Structural Funds could contribute to realising the ESDP. This would seem to require more fine-tuned geographical targeting, focused on particular types of centre which could most effectively serve the twin principles of a more polycentric Europe and of clustered collaborative development. The objective would be to enhance those qualities most likely to raise the competitive position of such centres: above all, accessibility to flows of people and information, and a high urban quality of life.

The structural funds could play a crucial role here, as could other specific Community funds, not least the TENs as and when they produce serious infrastructure moneys. The significance of infrastructure is well underlined in a recent report for the Commission, which shows that the infrastructure endowment of European countries ranges from a maximum index value of 100 in the Netherlands, down to a value of only 1 for Latvia. In individual provision the best-endowed country varies: for transport it is Belgium, for telecommunications Sweden, and for education Finland. What is clear is that the aspiring member states of East Central Europe are much less well endowed than the present member states; they will need generous investment in order to catch up. And this is exacerbated by their peripheral locations in relation to the Central Capitals Region; measuring airline distances from Frankfurt am Main, the capital cities range from Prague (408 km.) to Tallinn (1454 km.) and Bucharest (1452 km.) (IfLS 1998).

However, it must be recognised that many of the crucial instruments will be at a national governmental level, and that the trend to privatisa-
tion and deregulation presents a challenge in harnessing transport or telecommunications policies in the achievement of spatial strategies. In the UK, for instance, the privatised rail infrastructure company, Railtrack, will largely determine its own infrastructure priorities in association with the private Train Operating Companies (TOCs) which operate the passenger and freight services. Clearly, government could intervene through selective subsidies and also through regulation; but, as the saga of the London-Channel Tunnel High-Speed Rail Link illustrates, there can be problems in making these instruments work effectively, particularly when private companies think increasingly in terms of short-term returns. As more countries follow the model of privatisation of basic infrastructure provision, this problem is if anything likely to intensify.

The negotiations between the UK government and the contractors for the Channel Tunnel high-speed rail link offer an interesting case study in this regard: in effect, the government have subsidised a critical TEN link which is also intended to achieve important spatial objectives by regenerating an urban corridor east of London. This suggests an approach whereby a combination of European and national funds could be used to influence and guide private investment strategies so as to achieve specific spatial planning objectives.

Similarly, as the ESDP report points out, liberalisation of telecommunications may not automatically meet specific spatial needs. Indeed, competition is likely to focus on the most promising markets in the major cities; the result may be increasing disparities, both within member states and between member states, between centrally-located major cities with advanced telecommunications infrastructure (especially broadband) and peripheral smaller cities that are lacking. Again, it would fall to national governments to influence telecommunications investments through taxation and subsidisation, insofar as these are compatible with the basic aim of liberalisation.

Implementing the ESDP will therefore require broad agreement among member states as to broad policy objectives and the instruments that could be used to achieve them. These will include national policies for regional development and land use planning as well as infrastructure investment. The next step would surely be to attempt a systematic review and appraisal of the available instruments, both at Community and national-regional levels, to understand their likely relative roles in the implementation of the ESDP.

We should be realistic about the scale of the task. In contrast to many other Community activities, this one is remarkable if not unique in its reliance on voluntary cooperation within a framework comprising a set of Community initiatives and a much larger range of national and regional policies. This means that the ESDP is going to be achieved over a long time scale. But it would be quite wrong to dismiss its chances of achievement. The very fact that the ESDP has reached the stage of a first official draft indicates that within less than a decade, the relevant Ministers and their Departments have signed up to a common agenda. Building on that will be a task for the next half decade of activity.
References


Urban Development and Research Needs in Europe