

Metropolitan development and strategic positioning - Planning Efforts in selected cities on different levels

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1 ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the background of the collaborative project by Florida Atlantic University and University of Technology Vienna as well as the theoretical background of metropolitan development and metropolitan regions. Based on two case study regions – Centrope and South Florida – challenges of economic development and strategic positioning withing the local and global scale were tackled. Due to the huge difference in the urban structure as well as development dynamics the two regions seemed hard to compare on the first sight. Nevertheless, the overall goal of the project is to identify the similarities as well as the main differences of these two regions with respect to spatial structures, economic and social characteristics, how the regions deal with the future development and, finally, to elaborate actions and policy recommendations for strategic planning efforts.

2 THE VIENNA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY/FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

This was a collaborative project facilitated by two Universities - Florida Atlantic University and University of Technology Vienna - for the purpose of exchanging their teaching experience and developing stronger international relationships in the field of planning education. It was held as a two-semester project throughout the academic year of 2007-2008. Each institution participated in this project with a team of varying numbers of students and their tutors. For the project, a common aim and a topic were set; and the students from two universities, with different backgrounds, were supervised so as to focus on the same real planning issue simultaneously.

Aim of course: The students were to learn the capability of cooperative accomplishment of complex tasks in the fields of regional development planning and urban development planning. Through cooperation and a critical examination their methods and approaches for mastery of tasks they shall acquire a deepened understanding for problem coping strategies. A strong cooperation with the planning administration and planning practice was another goal to master analysis and demands of actual real planning problems. The subject of the course was the elaboration of structure and spatial development plans and development scenarios on regional and urban level respectively as well as possible substantiation in specific projects.

Topic: The joint project focused on a problem that many cities and regions face today, namely urban and regional fragmentation. The spatial dimensions of social and economic exclusion, as well as disintegration, seem to be more evident than ever before. Cities accommodate more and more compartments of the rich and the poor divided by social and/or physical walls.

The project is highly related to practice, because it deals with real planning situations and involves local experts. Working in planning teams simulates the every day life of a planner in practice. The students have to work together with colleagues coming from a different educational background, which is also very common to planning processes in practice. Students learn to convince the members of their working group form their planning ideas first. But moreover they have to present their work.

The project was based on two Workshops in February and May 2008. The first workshop held in Ft. Lauderdale encompassed the critical site and location analysis, a debate on urban conceptual models, the conception of development strategies for a specific location, the development of urban design schemes, as well as their visualization and presentation. This initial step was very important since all students met each other, visited the site, collected data, talked to locals, attended lectures given by guest speakers and thus understood the essence of the problem. The second workshop took place in Vienna and focused on topics like traffic, mobility, clusters, nature, environment and cooperation in CENTROPE.

The project follows the approach of interactive research. It is defined as „the whole family of approaches which are participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented” (Astleithner & Hamedinger, 2003: 632). The cooperative dialogue between researchers and other research participants and the understanding of research as a common learning process are central features. The principles for the process are interdisciplinary and a participatory bottom-up approach in an international context.

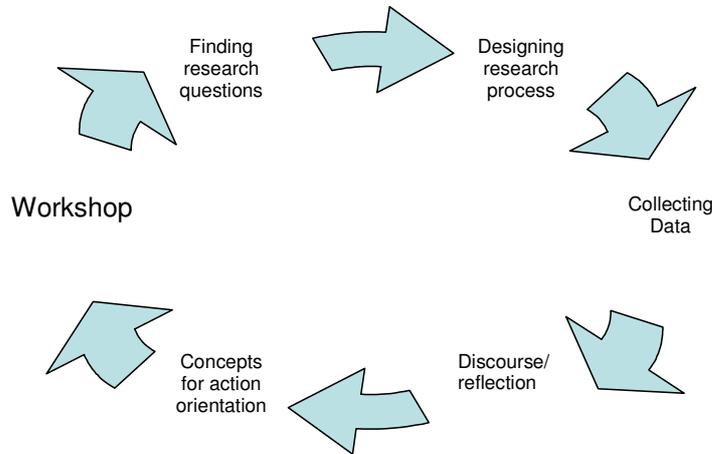


Fig. 1: Interactive research, Source: Astleithner & Hamedinger, 2003: 632

3 METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AND METROPOLITAN REGIONS

Metropolitan development and metropolitan regions, as they were dealt with in this project, are based on the following two principles: in the first place, the (European) urban system is a result of past development and cannot be addressed without considering its historical heritage. Second, urban agglomerations work as driving forces with respect to development. When analysing the disparities within countries, one recognises that urban regions grow faster. Therefore, the current situation in Europe can be illustrated as follows:

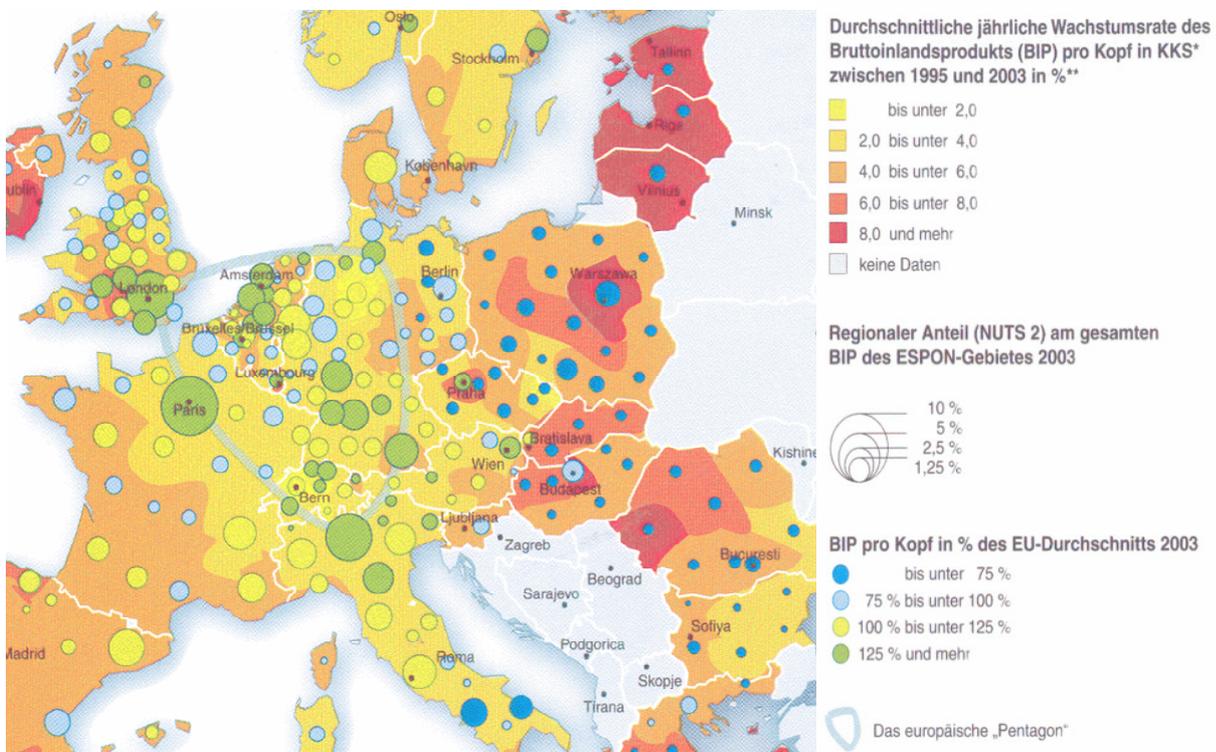


Fig. 2: “Pentagon” in Europe, Source: BMVBS, 2007: 9

As the map shows, a strong Pentagon of cities with the highest GDP can be identified, namely London – Hamburg – Munich – Milano – Paris. A kind of divergent development in Central Europe and Centrope has

to be observed, shaped by trends of monocentric against polycentric development. The Centrope region itself is characterised by great differences with respect to the GDP, dominated by Vienna.

3.1 Polycentrism

The concept of polycentric development has gained widespread importance in planning and territorial development strategies, though it remains a rather fuzzy concept as it means different things to different actors and on different scales. Some of these multiple interpretations of the concept of polycentrism are listed in the following:

- a strategic spatial planning tool
- a specific form of urban structure
- a socio-economic policy goal
- a place-marketing image

The common ground of these different points of view is the fact that polycentrism is an alternative to monocentric structures and urban sprawl:

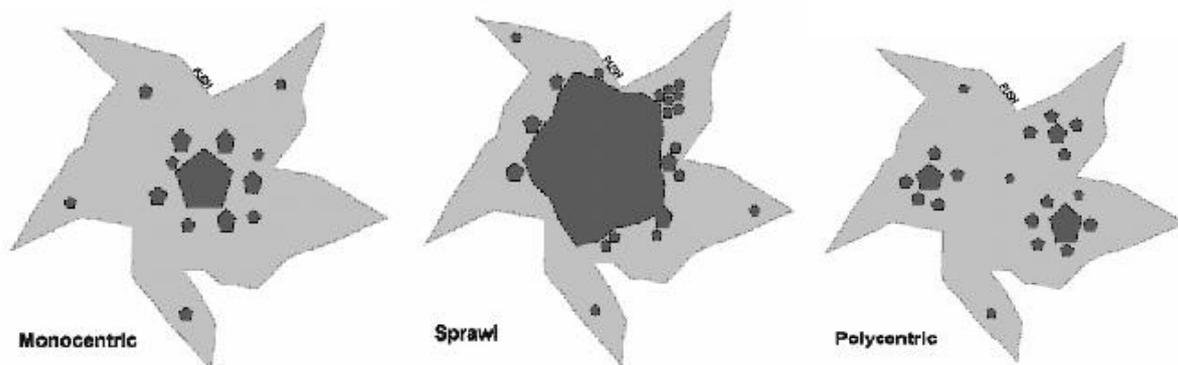


Fig. 3: Different spatial structures, Source: European Spatial Planning Observation Network: <http://www.espon.eu/>

Terminology: In general, polycentrism can be understood as a system with multiple centers respectively a system that favors multiple centers. There are two complementary elements that build up such a polycentric system, on the one hand the morphology (i.e. the distribution of urban areas in a given territory - number of cities, hierarchy, distribution) and on the other hand, the relations between urban areas (i.e. the networks of flows and cooperation). As it is a quite diversified concept, different levels of polycentrism have to be distinguished. Firstly, polycentrism can be considered on a macroscopic level (Europe, example Pentagon), secondly, on a meso-level (inter-regional, example CENTROPE) and thirdly, on the microscopic-level (regional/urban) where polycentric or fragmented development can be identified as the key challenge of metropolitan development planning.

Need for a new approach: However, cities and regions face new challenges as the „classical“ spatial structures have changed (fordism → postfordism), e.g. globalization, regionalization (competition between regions), social changes and tendencies towards fragmented development. Hence, new instruments for planning are necessary and the need of competitiveness becomes obvious on different spatial levels (urban – regional – metropolitan). These new approach of metropolitan governance is needed throughout various divisions, namely the strategic planning of the metropolitan area itself, all efforts in marketing and image building, co-operation with other regions as well as urban and regional development planning.

3.2 City networks (as form of co-operation and polycentric structure)

In 1991, the concept of city networks was labeled as „suitable instrument“ by the European Commission. Afterwards, it has been introduced as main strategy for spatial planning in Germany (cf. Gleisenstein/Klug/Neumann, 1997).

But what are “city networks”? City networks are different spatial and functional forms of exchange between cities/communities, developed because of competition between regions (European and global). Multiple knots (= cities) build a spatial structure with connection between the knots (= physical infrastructure, bilateral relations, contacts and contracts etc.)

With respect to the typology of city networks, one has to distinguish between physical city networks (e.g. traffic connections), functional city networks (net of cities with different size and function) and cooperative city networks (close exchange between stakeholders within the network; opposite to stakeholders outside the network).

City networks build up with certain goals such as efficiency, concentration of strengths or (expected) effects of synergy or simply out of searching for new solutions of problems with the help of co-operation. The effectiveness of these city networks always depend on “key persons” with the “right contacts” and the position of a kind of authority within the network. These key players pose as hubs for information input from outside the network (and vice versa) as well as hubs inside the network itself. Another important factor for the success of city networks are its character as an “open system” and the „embeddedness“ of its stakeholders (Granovetter 1985) which refers to the grade of integration of the stakeholders into socio-economic and cultural surroundings.

Conclusions: Polycentric development increasingly came to be mentioned as a spatial concept for the policy goal of territorial cohesion during the last years. This polycentric or fragmented development can be seen as the key challenge of metropolitan development planning. Due to new spatial challenges, fragmentation and a changed socio-economic framework, new planning instruments have become necessary. Therefore, the concept of polycentricism – as described above – contributes to a more balanced regional development and may help to reduce regional disparities. In the face of sustainable development as one central policy goal in Europe, the fuller integration of European regions into the global economy is promoted by using the concept of polycentricism. Finally, the concept of polycentric development helps to increase European competitiveness by supporting the goals of city networks and their effectiveness.

4 CASE STUDIES CENTROPE AND SOUTH FLORIDA

Centrope: The enlargement of the European Union has created new opportunities for the border quadrangle between the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria. In future this Central European Region (CENTROPE) possibly emerges as a common space and place to live in. The vision is to grow together towards a unique, attractive and strong region furthered by intensive cooperation.

Within CENTROP six and a half million people live and work. The existing strengths of the region like economics, society and politics as well as the diversity of languages and culture are the basis for a dynamic development. Within the Vienna Workshop of the collaborative project the students will focus on the following topics: clusters, traffic and mobility as well as nature and environment.

South Florida: The Miami–Fort Lauderdale–West Palm Beach metropolitan area, also commonly referred to as South Florida, encompasses a three-county area of the southeastern part of the U.S. state of Florida (Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach). In total there are 107 municipalities or incorporated places in the metropolis.

The urbanized area along the Atlantic Ocean is about 180 km long and has about five and a half million inhabitants. The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach area was the seventh largest Urbanized Area in the United States in the 2007 census. To elaborate the situation in the South Florida region four target areas were chosen on statistic analysis: Miami International Airport, West Palm Beach, Cypress Creek and Boca Raton. In the first step the students worked on a physical, economical, social and organizational analysis of the areas.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The international and interdisciplinary project between the Florida Atlantic University - Fort Lauderdale Campus as well as the center of regional science and center of regional planning and regional development worked on the case studies of Centrope and South Florida. The goal of the project is to development strategic positions as well as guidelines/recommendations for selected planning efforts in a comparative approach.

Topics like the definition of metropolis and urban region, characteristics and description of selected metropolises (internal polycentricity or fragmentation, regional markets and local places), territorial and social capital as key element of metropolitan development and driving forces and factors of development (potentials and their utilisation, networks and strategic efforts on different levels) were discussed in an international and interdisciplinary environment. The spatial agglomeration of economic, cultural and financial functions and activities with different importance play an important role on the global, regional and local level. For many metropolitan regions the polycentric or fragmented development is a key challenge of future development and positioning on the local as well as on the global scale.

Based on two case study regions – Centropo and South Florida – challenges of economic development and strategic positioning withing the local and global scale were tackled. Due to the huge difference in the urban structure as well as development dynamics the two regions seemed hard to compare on the first sight. Starting with analysis on the local scale in four target regions in South Florida also the regional as well as global effects were taken into account. Furthermore the questions of whether they are becoming more polycentric or more dispersed and the consequences of the resulting (spatial) structures were addressed. The overall goal of the project, to identify the similarities of these two regions as well as their differences, culminates in the evaluation of how the regions deal with the future development and in the elaboration of actions and policy recommendations.

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