

Spatial reconfiguration and problems of governance in urban regions of Europe

An introduction to the Belgeo issue on advanced service sectors in European urban regions

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s under the challenges of globalisation, de-industrialisation and tertiarisation European urban regions are changing their traditional urban fabric and pattern and their economic orientation. Fragmented structures and the rise of advanced business related services are to be observed in most urban agglomerations. The traditional core-periphery pattern of the «urban continuum» turned into an urban patchwork, in which peripheral locations were upgraded and now host some of the most active economic functions of the city regions. The liberalization of regulated social and economic systems, the opening of national boundaries, the globalization of economic and social networks in functional supra local interdependencies, and the acceleration by informational technologies changed the spectrum of urban governance in a complex fabric of non-local and local interferences. Privatization and deregulation of public policies created new action spaces for economic and social actors in the private sector. Also within the domain of the public sector, tendencies of differentiating the proactive role of national government in the intergovernmental relationships – via simultaneous processes of decentralization and internationalization – created a new multi level arena of public governance, which involves all governmental levels of scale in the making of urban policies. Thus, the clear single dominancy of central government of the welfare society disappeared and changed into a plethora of intergovernmental relationships. This article gives a short overview on these spatial and political tendencies. It also moderates the following articles, which are more or less related to the knowledge, created by the EU-project COMET – Competitive Metropolises, realised in the 5th Framework Programme.

KEY WORDS: city regions, competitiveness, advances services, governance

RÉSUMÉ

RECONFIGURATIONS SPATIALES ET PROBLEMES DE GOUVERNANCE DANS LES ZONES URBAINES EUROPÉENNES

Depuis les années 80, les zones urbaines d'Europe, confrontées aux défis de la mondialisation, de la désindustrialisation et de la tertiarisation, voient se modifier leur tissu urbain, leurs structures traditionnelles et leur orientation économique. Dans la plupart des agglomérations, on rencontre des structures fragmentées et les services avancés aux entreprises sont de plus en plus nombreux. Le schéma classique centre-périphérie

du " continuum urbain " s'est mué en un patchwork où les localisations périphériques ont été revalorisées et abritent aujourd'hui certaines des fonctions économiques les plus dynamiques des villes-régions. La libéralisation de systèmes socio-économiques dirigés, l'ouverture des frontières nationales, la mondialisation des réseaux économiques et sociaux en interdépendances fonctionnelles supra-locales, couplées à l'accélération due aux technologies de l'information ont transformé le champ de la gouvernance urbaine en un tissu complexe d'interférences, locales ou non. La privatisation et la dérégulation des politiques publiques ont créé de nouveaux espaces d'action pour les acteurs économiques et sociaux au sein du secteur privé. Parallèlement, dans le secteur public, les tendances à la différenciation du rôle proactif du gouvernement national au profit de relations intergouvernementales – via des processus simultanés de décentralisation et d'internationalisation – ont créé une nouvelle arène pour la gouvernance publique, impliquant tous les niveaux de gouvernement dans l'élaboration des politiques urbaines. Ainsi, la nette domination du gouvernement central dans une société d'abondance a disparu au profit d'une pléthore de relations intergouvernementales.

Cet article donne un aperçu de ces tendances spatio-politiques, et modère également les articles qui suivent et sont plus ou moins en rapport avec les acquis du projet COMET – Competitive Metropolises-, réalisé dans le cadre du 5^e Programme Cadre.

MOTS-CLÉS: villes régions, compétitivité, services avancés, gouvernance

INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of decades European agglomerations are confronted to development trends, which change fundamentally their internal structure, their importance and their functional orientation. There are various indicators for this fundamental change: the skyline shows a scattered pattern of high buildings, fragmentation is also visible in the socio-spatial pattern, and central functions are tending to locate in peripheral situations. European metropolises have to face globalisation, de-industrialisation and tertiarisation. However, they also have to react to new locational preferences of the most dynamic advanced services and of the larger installations of retail trade which are moving to the fringes and outskirts of the agglomerations. So, intermetropolitan and innermetropolitan competition, fragmented and segregated social and functional urban bodies, the rise of post-suburbia, the problems of governing the agglomerations and the search for new concepts of governance are the main challenges for European agglomerations. To a certain degree the emergence of globalisation is a main cause for these developments.

European urban agglomerations face the phenomenon of rapid globalisation in different ways. Under an economic perspective a growing service sector and the tertiarisation of the economic structure is the most important impact of globalisation. Whereas industrial production tend to move from Western and Central Europe to East European or to Asian locations (Korea, China) the service sector is the most effective driving force of economic growth in Europe.

This process implies most remarkable changes of urban structures in European cities, regarding locational patterns of enterprises, socio-spatial differentiation, infrastructure, housing and traffic flows. The emergence of an economically potent medium class with good buying power, the increasing mobility by car-traffic, new technologies of communication and the shift of transport from railroad to trucks are main factors. Whereas suburbanisation started in the early 1960s driven by young families searching for cheaper building lots and homes, since the 1980s' industrial plants, retail trade, logistics and other space-extensive busi-

nesses moved to the suburban areas. When in the 1990s strategies for cost reduction became necessary, the ability to integrate into an existing urban structure was even more shrinking, and became evident even for the office sector. New architectural techniques made possible quite exciting structures, which would not have been able to be permitted within a traditional urban setting, sometimes underlying monument protection rules.

As other activities like IT, education, and entertainment also are leaving the core cities, two main results are to be noticed: A rapid fragmentation of the urban-rural fabric and the urge of an «rurban»-patchwork in which the former suburban areas – complementary to the city-centre – loose their dependence and develop to post-suburban zones with proper functions and own catchment areas. New communication technologies (mobile phones, internet, and web-mail) have overhauled the traditional locational theory.

Traditionally the service sector and the most powerful units of retail trade were located in the centre of the city. The recent move to the outskirts breaks the former boundaries of the cities' administration area and initiated the development of a «Speckgürtel» (bacon ribbon) of relatively wealthy communities surrounding the traditional agglomerations. Comparative research in eleven European agglomerations of different size and structure demonstrated the variation of the re-structuring of city-fringe relationships, structures, functions and of the governance conceptions developed to deal with these challenges (Dubois-Taine, 2004; Borsdorf/Zembri, 2004; McEldowney, 2004).

To deal with the new spatial structure is necessary, as a new competition arose between the traditional city-regions and their former rural fringes, which are now developing in a post-suburban way. City councils have to meet the challenge to keep the growing services within the administrative units of the cities and to attract new international investors to locate in their urban perimeter. They have to look for new forms of regional co-operation and governance in order to steer the

tertiarisation process and to enhance the competitiveness of the respective region. In addition to the inner-metropolitan competition between the urban centres and their fringes the inter-metropolitan competition means another front line for European urban agglomerations. In order to create economic growth, social cohesion and life quality European metropolitan areas compete with one another by carving an image that stands out from other regions. Strategies are the specialization on some branches, cultural enlivenment, upgrading of infrastructural facilities and, notably recently, large-scale projects.

Among urbanists the discussion on «world cities», initiated by Hall (1966) and continued by Friedmann/Wolff (1982), Friedmann (1986), Castells (1989) and Sassen (1991) is still ongoing. According to Beaverstock et al. (2000) and Taylor (2003, 2005) only few European metropolises can be regarded as world cities, command centres of national and international political power, containing the headquarters of national and international commerce, of banking, insurance and related financial services, of information gathering and diffusions, of consumption and centres of arts, cultures and entertainment. However, the world-city hypothesis raised the attention of the political and economic actors in various agglomerations to attract advanced producer services, international headquarters and global players to locate themselves in the respective city regions. Thus Cheshire/Gordon (1998) observed an increasing competition between urban regions in the European Union that fosters the specialisation (being a competitive advantage). Hall (2001) mentioned that the falling costs of transportation and communication have allowed certain economic activities to migrate to the suburbs, particularly finance/business services and power/influence. Specialised business services, such as law and accountancy migrated close to their customers. New communication technologies enabled TNC (Transnational corporations) headquarter functions to decentralise - seeking new (and cheaper) locations (Beaverstock *et al.*, 2000). This is why

world cities are no longer defined by the presence of TNCs headquarters (Castells, 1989) and smaller metropolises get their chance to attract such investments in their urban perimeters.

As an answer to the challenges of globalisation and tertiarisation multi-level and multi-actor policy processes have unfolded in Western Europe during the 1990s. Authorities at sub-national levels have been faced to these challenges, and new ideas about co-ordination, negotiation and control involving actors at different scales. In European city-regions this has led to a situation where the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies have been characterised by multi-level governance. Despite the affinity of problems in city-regions in the different European countries the routes towards multi-level, urban

governance display variation. The routes depend upon contextual factors such as industrial and institutional legacies, including the established practices for negotiation between public bodies and private actors, and the division of labour between national, regional and local authorities.

Recent comparative research into the economic innovation and entrepreneurship in European cities showed that public-private partnerships at local and regional levels often are relatively successful, while public-public relationships often appear more problematic (Salet, 2002). Moreover, studies of European metropolitan governance in twenty regions and spatial planning demonstrate that the conditions for multi-level governance of metropolitan development are very much differentiated across Europe (Salet *et al.*, 2003).

SPATIAL RECONFIGURATION OF URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS IN EUROPE: THE REGIONAL SCALE

Suburbia may be seen as a result of modernism and, in this sense, to a certain degree a result of fordistic rationalism. The modern city was characterised by rapid population growth in their peripheral areas by inner-city migration from the core city districts. Thus sectoral and circular space structures developed and the suburban belt was characterised by a certain wealth. Suburbia in modern times was functionally dependent from the centre and only low level trade and service infrastructure was to be found in the outer-city belt.

In contrast the post-modern city or post-fordistic city shows quite different spatial trends, structures and movements. High social stratus population is migrating back to the city centres, where gentrification takes place. On the other hand an accelerated process of social segregation and polarisation is to be noticed within the complete city region. Gated communities are developed, public space is privatised, and island of poverty can be found all over the urban fabric. Fragmentation is the main characteristic of a post-modern urban agglomeration. Functional relationships in such an urban

archipelago are outlined like a network with a relatively flat hierarchy, but with quite different oriented knots (technology parks, office estates, edge cities, leisure centres), and the periphery gains new work places with quite a broad variety of qualified activities.

The urban-rural dichotomy, which differed city and countryside till the first decades of the 19th century was followed by an urban-rural continuum in modern times. However, this continuum with its basic central-peripheral incline is no longer the basic principle of urban configurations. It was superseded by an urban-rural compound, characterised by patchwork structures. Urbanscape (Eisinger & Schneider, 2002), netcity (Baccini & Oswald 1998) «Zwischenstadt» (Sieverts, 1997) Ville Émergente (Dubois-Taine, 2002), Metropolitan Peripheries (Burdack, 2005), Postsuburbia (Kling, Olin & Poster, 1991; Aring, 2001; Borsdorf, 2005) or City's Hinterland (Hoggart, 2005) are terms which try to describe the phenomenon.

It should be mentioned that the term «periurbanisation» does not fit the phenomenon, as is it still related to gravity patterns in the sense of centre-periphery.

Thus, periurban regions still are commuter areas towards the core cities. On the other hand post-suburban regions are much less related to the city centres, and they receive remarkable commuter streams themselves.

A recent typology shows five general structure types, a polynuclear model, realised in the BAB-San Sebastian or the Florence

agglomeration, a container model, like in Belfast or other British towns, a patchwork model, to be observed at Berlin, Nicosia or Zürich, or finger structures, like in Copenhagen, Helsinki or Innsbruck (Borsdorf, 2004, fig. 3).

On a higher aggregation level these types may be generalised to a model of the new urban configuration (see fig. 1).

Characteristics	Suburbia	Post-suburbia
Impulses	Demographic growth, urban sprawl	Fall of the iron curtain, immigration from East and South towards the core cities, individual mobility
Conditions	Housing demand, industrialised rational (fordistic) construction, low price levels, accessibility by public transport	Transformation, globalisation, social change, lifestyle diversity, segregation, polarisation, post-fordistic flexibilisation, motorisation
Image	Living with nature, escape from pollution	Living styles, (post) modernity, sportsmanship, leisure orientation
(Infra) structure	Only basic infrastructure, only few employment opportunities	Specialised infrastructure, qualitative employment opportunities, commerce
Forms and structure	Sterile architecture and green areas	Diverse architecture and green areas, but "ufos" and "clones"
Actors	Lower and middle class, young families	All classes, investors, business people, "developers", sports people
Results	"Concrete towers", "dormitory towns", "green widows", monotony	Social, economic and spatial fragmentation, multi-functionality, transformation of rural space, decline of centrality in central locations
Function	Supplementing the city centre	Independent zones, neither urban nor rural

Table 1. Comparison of suburbia and post-suburbia (Source: A. Borsdorf 2004, modified).

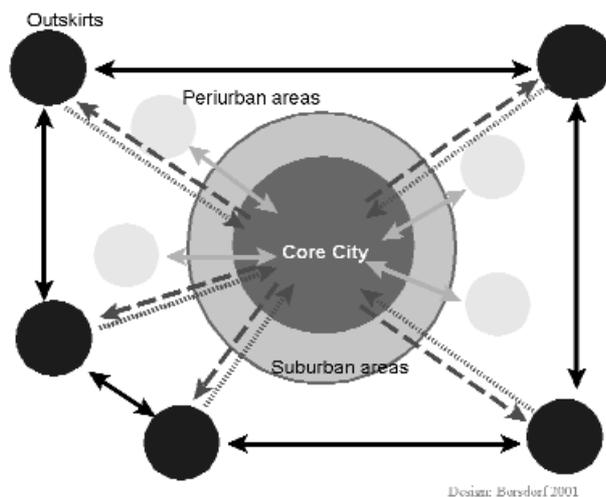


Figure 1. A model of the urban-rural compound (Source: Borsdorf 2004).

SPATIAL RECONFIGURATION OF ECONOMIC AGGLOMERATIONS IN EUROPE: THE EUROPEAN SCALE

The 19th century was characterised by the rise of large industrial regions in Europe. The Ruhr-Region, Baden-Württemberg or the Rhine-axis in Germany, Flanders in Belgium, Lombardy in Italy and the Rhone-Alps region in France – among others – were economically fast expanding regions. They were parts of larger manufacturing belts, which began to emerge in Europe in the last decades of the 19th century and played a dominant role in economic development for a long time.

However, during the 1970s this situation changed. The production capacity of the capital goods industry grew beyond demand. Overcapacity became a fact. The oil crises of 1973/74 and 1979 made the situation worse. The demand for capital goods declined even more, production had to be reduced and, later on, production capacity closed down. The mining industry, the steel and metal industry and large parts of the machine tool industry suffered this development and factories were closed down.

Whereas the traditional manufacturing belts lost their importance: The industrial heritage, having been an advantage for so long, had become a handicap. New industries, primarily the information and communication industries, became an important driving force in economic growth. Expansion in these fields was to a large extent due to companies located in regions outside the old manufacturing belts. New regions took over the role as dynamic centres. Even former rural areas became the centres of innovation and growth, like East Anglia in Britain, Namur in Belgium, Utrecht in the Netherlands, Languedoc-Rousillon in France, Puglia in Italy. In their centres, like Cambridge, Montpellier or Utrecht the focus changed from short-term macroeconomic policy to long term inno-

vation policy (Nilsson, 2004, 36ff).

The milieu of innovation, appropriated by these new regions, is decisive for the success of the new poles of development in Europe. French researchers found that almost 37 % of Europe's scientific potential, as measured by the Science Citation Index, is concentrated in just fifteen urban regions: Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Cambridge, Karlsruhe, Madrid, Munich, London, Oxford, Paris, Randstad, Rhine-Ruhr, Rhone-Alps, Stockholm and Stuttgart. They have also measured the rate of patent registration, and find out that just fifteen agglomerations, most of them mentioned before, accounted for one quarter of all European patents. However, the French researchers also found, that in the last decade these leading European regions had suffered a significant fall in their relative importance, in favour to peripheral regions like Southern Europe, Finland, Iceland, Saxonia. The only core regions, not losing, were Munich and Stuttgart (Blatt & Gollain, 2000; Gollain, 2002).

So, on the regional and on the continental dimension, in Europe decentralization is a leading tendency, encouraging economic growth urban regions, located in former peripheral regions and, within these city regions, favouring the new post-suburban locations. Geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers and service providers are forming «clusters» (Raines; 2002), most located not in the core city but in the peri-urban belt, and universities, economic corporations and government contribute successfully to regional development, forming a «Triple Helix» of innovation. Within the triple helix, advanced service sectors play an important role for the economic success of the specific cluster, providing the connections to the global market.

THE CHALLENGE FOR NEW GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

The fascinating thing of metropolitan governance in the current reconstruction of the city in the 21st century is that the process of urban transformation only can be understood as part of the macro level transformation of the national welfare societies towards open global systems that are characterized by multi-actor and multi-level arenas. Until deep in the era of the national welfare societies of Europe, the prototype model of arranging collective action in urban regions was provided by the coalition of local / regional policy makers with dominant local stakeholders, under the protective umbrella of the national state. There were of course many variations to this generalized model, but in the last two decades the foundations of this basic pattern have been changing in more dramatic ways. The liberalization of regulated social and economic systems, the opening of national boundaries, the globalization of economic and social networks in functional supra local interdependencies, and the acceleration by informational technologies changed the spectrum of urban governance in a complex fabric of non-local and local interferences. Increasingly, the spatially bounded government and the local and regional jurisdictions face aspirations and claims that are brought forward in trans scalar social and economic relationships. The public sector lost its monopoly or dominant involvement in its arranging of collective action and (semi-public) services. Liberalization, privatization and deregulation of public policies created new action spaces for economic and social actors in the private sector. Also within the domain of the public sector, tendencies of differentiating the proactive role of national government in the inter-governmental relationships - via simultaneous processes of decentralization and internationalization - created a new multi level arena of public governance, which involves all governmental levels of scale in the making of urban policies. Thus, the clear single dominance of central government of the welfare society disappeared

and changed into a plethora of intergovernmental relationships.

Discovering the meaning of governance, directly refers to this structural change of institutional conditions in society. It is easier to grasp the institutionalized relationships in the welfare states - even in their variation - than to typify the multifarious forms of current institutional conditions. There are many different notions of governance (see for instance the oversight of Kooiman, and the six really different definitions by Rhodes (Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1996). We consider governance not as a form of public action as such but as a new institutional context to action. The problem of defining this context precisely is that the current conditions are seldom fully institutionalized and that the conditions demonstrate a lot of variation in local situations. In its present state, we believe, governance might be the best defined as a «crossing border» context to the organization of collective action:

- Crossing the borders of local considerations and local decision-making, also including different levels of scale;
- Crossing the borders of territorial jurisdictions;
- Crossing the borders of public sector decision-making and the diverse sorts of action in privately based social and economic sectors, inclusive the different systems of organizing legitimacy and efficiency.

The idea of multi-level governance gets its significance in a differentiation of coalitions at several levels of spatial scale and also in links between these levels. The differentiation of economic policy strategies and planning perspectives has to be regarded as well as strategies from European and national government. This has raised the need to guide, co-ordinate and direct various tiers of government by other means, e.g. covenants and negotiated agreements. Innovation may be effective if innovative milieus can be provided. Universities and other research centres, the research departments of large firms, but also the support and even funding of

governmental institutions are decisive for the progress. Government, understood as a top down instrument of steering, is no longer appropriate to create and stimulate innovative milieus. New horizontal structures of governance, incorporating the stakeholders and even shareholders of regional and economic development must be integrated not to stabilize this innovative structure, but to stimulate continuously the creative milieu. This kind of governance may include informal elements, should be self-regulating and open for new ideas, functions and structures, and should stress the decentralizing virtues of local co-operation. Continuing interactions between the network members is necessary to interchange resources. These interactions should be organised game-like on the base of common agreed rules and be funded on confidence and common interests. A certain degree of autonomy from the state is necessary, although governmental partners should be integrated to the system.

The new context of multi-actor and multi-level governance poses many new and largely unsolved questions for the arrangement of legitimate and efficient collective action. Governance is not better or worse than governmental action, it is just a new context that generates many new and puzzling challenges for public action. Just to give some examples of the new dilemmas under the present context of multi-actor and multi-level governance: Economic and social activities may easily (at least far easier than under previous conditions) escape the public norms that are held by territorial jurisdictions.

Local representatives increasingly must take regional or interregional responsibilities but they are only held accountable at local level. How to combine trans scalar action with local legitimacy, and vice versa: how to combine trans scalar public dependencies with local action?

Groups of citizens may be organized at different levels than the articulation of political or economic interests;

New combinations of the mechanisms of selection by the market, group-level agreement in networks of cooperation, or the public budget mechanism have to

combine many contradictory conditions. These dilemmas and questions usually are not completely new, but are brought forward so frequently under the current conditions that they may be considered as becoming typical expressions of the new stage of governance.

How variegated and non-crystallized the new institutional conditions to governance may be, they already opened the playing field of public action for many new games of collective decision-making that were unthinkable only fifteen years ago. In the urban arena, local and regional administrations – whether or not in coalition with private sector stake holders, may invest in their own geopolitical opportunities by forging coalitions with other cities and regions, national or international coalitions. They may combine their interests with other partners in coalitions as trans scalar countervailing powers to existing coalitions. German regional states, for instance, sometimes successfully cooperated with the European Union in order to counteract the federal economic guidelines of regional economic policy. Or on the other hand, European Union may attempt to change the local coalitions of social policy making by conditioning its subsidies, such as happened for instance in the Urban program. The emergent multi-level context enables various sorts of lobbying, coalition making and joint decision-making («crossing borders») that urge local stake holders to new sorts of public action and leadership.

However, the new conditions never may be considered as free and equal opportunities for each actor at every place. Many existing inequalities of power and accessibility have been reproduced under the new conditions. There is a lot of inequality in the social and economic position of different regions and regional economists don't see much convergence under the conditions of the post welfare states. Many observers found even more hierarchy in the spatial organization of economic activity, for instance in the networks of trade and financial services. The same lack of interregional convergence is found in the social interrelationships of international migration. The urbanization of

regions is still progressive in contrast to the position of rural regions, and there are many differences as well within the different urban regions. The liberalization and opening of boundaries has enlarged the awareness of regions and national systems of being in a position of open rivalry and competition with other regions. Many regional economists demonstrated the dominance of this competitive interregional attitude since the emergence of the «entrepreneurial city» in the early 1990s (Moulaert *et al.*, 2003). Neil Brenner even concludes that – in order to promote the further growth of national economies and to be competitive with new intercontinental rivals – national states and regions increasingly cooperate in joint strategies of promoting the strongest economic regions (Brenner *et al.*, 2003). Even Europe (with its tradition of regional redistribution) gradually is entering this forum of competitive alliances. The dominant tendency of promoting economic regions with a strong competitive position, usually is mitigated by attempts to integrate the economic, the social and the environmental aspirations in a context of regional governance. These aspirations are considered as mutually strengthening. This ambition of integration is so widely spread that Buck, Gordon, Harding and Turok labelled it (cynically) as The New Conventional Wisdom (Buck, Gordon, Harding and Turok, 2005). However, practices may easily differ from the idyllic aspirations, the new conditions of governance do not simplify the chances of successful collective action.

In our own comparative research into the framing and alliances of strategic urban projects in seven urban regions of Europe (in the frame of EU sponsored research program COMET*) we met all dilemmas of urban governance mentioned above (Salet and Gualini, 2006). Our investigation was focused on the largest economic spatial projects in seven regions that indeed proclaimed the conventional wis-

dom of policy integration in a context of regional governance. The projects demonstrated many similarities in ambition but we were surprised to find very different outcomes in terms of regional governance. Only a few projects play the geopolitical trump with confidence (in particular Barcelona in Forum 2004 and Copenhagen in Ørestad), most projects however still are embedded in the traditional local/ national nexus of collective action. Regarding the promotion of economic goals we were surprised not always to find the proclaimed dominant role of private corporations. All projects aimed at a structural contribution to the economic position of the region in its competitive external relationships, at least according to the statements of the involved governments and the representing market sector (the chambers of commerce). The market itself, however, often takes other decisions, its commitment to the strategically selected spaces of symbolic economic growth is not at all evident (rather disappointing for instance in Berlins Adlershof, Straatsburgs Technopolis or in Barcelona, and even dramatic in Copenhagen Ørestad). We only found a solid commitment by the private sector in Amsterdams South Axis project and in Brussels Tour et Taxis. The aspiration of integration with social and cultural goals appeared to be endowed with more creative energy in the inner city settings of regeneration (such as Barcelona's Forum 2004 and Viennas Erdberger Mais). Apparently, social and cultural groups still find it difficult to cross the mental and material borders of established urban places to the new strategic «out of town» locations, such as South Axis in Amsterdam, Adlershof in Berlin and Ørestad in Copenhagen. This short indication of findings may demonstrate the ambivalent nature of organizing collective action under the still transitional conditions of urban governance in the current stage of development.

THE COMET PROJECT AND SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THIS BELGEO ISSUE ON ADVANCES SERVICES SECTORS IN EUROPEAN CITY REGIONS

In 2001 the European Commission approved the proposal of a consortium of leading European researcher to study the global competitiveness of European metropolises and to study the role of business related services for economical development. The project «COMET - Competitive Metropolises» (Project No. EVK4-CT-2001-00050, 5th FP) co-ordinated by the Institute for Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences was realised by scientific partners in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Strasbourg and Vienna, incorporating governmental partners and end-users (consultants, planners) of these agglomerations and their respective regions. In Brussels, Christian Vandermotten, the editor of Belgeo, and his team was the Belgian scientific partner, the Region of Brussels Government (Cabinet of the Minister President) was incorporated as the governmental partner.

The results of COMET were published in more than 15 volumes including a teaching tool for universities and a handbook for practitioners. These publications are easily available on the homepage of COMET: <http://www.comet.ac.at>.

The current issue of Belgeo does not intend to duplicate the already published results of this project. To the moderators of this issue it seemed much more fruitful for the international scientific discussion to invite other European researchers to reflect the topic of COMET from their specific point of view and thus open the COMET results for an international discourse on the competitiveness of European metropolises, the role of advanced services, the spatial structure of city regions on different levels, and the effects of globalisation of European space and economy.

In an introductory essay a Belgian group of researchers present the position of the Belgian agglomerations within the system

of world cities. Given a bi-polar structure, Antwerp in contrast to Brussels could improve its situation. Another team, constituted by COMET-collaborators from Belgium and Germany looks to the spatial configuration of the metropolitan structures in Europe. Their results are based by an enquiry among service firms in seven European Metropolitan Areas.

Lars Winther, a COMET partner, presenting the Danish situation to a certain degree contrasts the Belgian example. Space can no longer be seen only as a structure, it is more and more to be seen as a space of flows. This is true not only for global commodity chains, but also and even more for advanced services. Ludovic Halbert demonstrates this issue in his contribution.

World cities and mega cities – the two terms mean quite different subjects. Lise Bourdeau-Lepage and Jean-Marie Huriot's contribution makes quite clear, that the simple size of a city does not correlate with its importance.

If the above cited thesis of the growing importance of former peripheries is right, the study of the development in the Eastern periphery of Europe is very important. V. Kolossov, D. Eckert and – in another contribution – Lise Bourdeau-Lepage deal with the quite different situations of agglomerations on the Eastern fringe of Europe to develop as *global cities*. Robert Musil investigating the Vienna case, constricts the perspective to the regional dimension: Are the new service firms, located in the periphery of the core city, more than a supplement of the core?

The moderators of this issue, the editors of Belgeo, and, last not least, the scientists, governmental partners and end-user-partners of COMET do hope that this Belgeo issue will stimulate scientific discussion, but also help Europe to sharpen its profile in the global competition.

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