



## **CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE FACE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: NEW CHALLENGES FOR PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The last two rounds of European enlargement drastically have shifted the frontier of European Integration eastward. Since the beginning of the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, there has been a growing need to forge new foreign relations between the European Union and Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) that were progressively moving away from their common socialist past. In an effort to strengthen existing relations with CEECs, the European Union specifically emphasized the need to achieve a closer and stronger cooperation among all European Nations in the preamble of the Treaty of Maastricht (7th February 1992), resulting in their accession to the EU on May 1st 2004 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Slovenia) and again on January 1st 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania).

For the first time in its history the European Union, which was founded and developed from a strongly western perspective, had to face a completely new reality in terms of economic, social and territorial development. The 1990s included the first democratic elections in nearly forty years for some CEECs not to mention highly contested albeit ongoing structural reforms. Yet despite CEECs having had to meet several negotiated socio-political and economic benchmarks in order to qualify for accession to the EU, eastward expansion continues to involve several challenges in terms of both opportunities and threats. These socio-economic opportunities and threats, and their consequential challenge to multi-level governance within and between regions of CEECs and the newly Enlarged EU, poses a historically significant endeavour for EU spatial planning. That is, despite their shared socialist past, CEECs involve multiple paths and stages of development, and dynamically distinct governance structures. And the future development of CEE Member States and their integration with the European Union likely will manifest in several regional policy and territorial development tensions over important issues involving social cohesion, economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability.

In fact, the importance of the territorial dimension of the enlargement process becomes clear when one considers that in the period from 2004 to 2007 the EU population grew from 380 million to 494 million inhabitants, and the EU territory expanded by nearly 40 percent (Wikipedia – European Union). At the same time more than 92% of the population of CEE Member States live in regions with a GDP (per head) below 75 percent of the EU 27 average, and generate a combined GDP that is 10 percent of the overall EU output (Davoudi, 2006; Wikipedia – European Union). These macroeconomic indicators undoubtedly will present themselves in several socioeconomic development challenges for several strategic policy sectors such as the economy, education, environment and social welfare.

These challenges, however, will be contingent on the accommodation of necessary ongoing changes that must be activated through multi-level governance in order to facilitate CEECs' engagement with new planning, development and sustainability issues. For both the EU and the new Member States this has and will imply building on

enlargement through the activation of new investment channels and new market possibilities in order to address common issues such as the increase of spatial polarization and economic disparities and environmental damage. In other words the tasks that lie ahead for European spatial planning are manifold as CEE will likely undergo future phases of transition from socialist centralized planning toward western market-oriented planning systems (Pallagst, 2006). Furthermore, cross-sectoral planning or spatial planning efforts will involve issues concerning the integration and training of the unemployed and jobless, the provision and modernization of physical infrastructure, the development of entrepreneurial skills to foster economic development and social innovation in community planning, and the maintenance of a long term and environmentally sensitive outlook on overall territorial development.

Though, despite these widely known local and regional development challenges to the European integration process, there is scarce knowledge of the 'real' functioning of spatial planning in Central and Eastern Europe. The scarce knowledge of CEE spatial planning is partly due to the rapid changes in national and regional approaches, which often can outpace efforts to comprehend their evolution (Pallagst, 2006). This lack of knowledge also can be attributed to the seldom involvement of CEECs in past analyses of EU territorial development whilst those studies that have focused on Central and Eastern Europe address it as a stand-alone area (e.g. Gorzelak, 1996; Gorzelak et al, 2001). Moreover, this condition is exacerbated by the outdated EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997). The Compendium, which is the official document that comparatively analyzes different European spatial planning systems to date, only considers the fifteen EU Member States at the time of its publication. And there is currently no update of the Compendium in preparation, with the likely exception that the EU ESPON II Programme, during the period 2007-2013, will be more focused on the new Member States than its predecessor (ESPON). Thus the premise of the following special issue takes the current relatively unexplored complexity of EU spatial planning into consideration, and aims to contribute to the scarce but growing knowledge of CEE spatial planning and development issues in light of the ongoing process of European integration.



In the first two contributions Adams and Cotella introduce the practice of spatial planning in CEECs, respectively discussing the distinct realities of the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Visegrad (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovak Republic) countries. The different spatial planning frameworks that characterize these nations are the principle object of analysis, emphasizing organizational and territorial issues. Both authors underline the structural and procedural arrangements and its associated changes, which have contributed to the different context specific frames of planning activity and the role that the European Union has had in the process. In an effort to demonstrate the influence of EU policies, Adams compares the Baltic countries and Celtic (UK) countries whereby both regions can be seen as a peripheral group of nations whose spatial planning systems have undergone an important transformation process in recent years.

The second pair of contributions by Capik, and Czapiewski and Janc discusses two distinct challenges for territorial development in Central and Eastern Europe. Capik takes into consideration the different long term and ad hoc approaches adopted by Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia in order to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), which many consider the main driving force of economic development in CEECs. Czapiewski and Janc discuss the spatial diversification of education possibilities in Poland and correlate their findings with the regional absorption of EU pre-Accession Funds and Structural Funds, concluding with suggestions for future territorial development opportunities. Both contributions present different faces of Polish development.

The environmental focus of the contributions by Ceccatiello and Nitkiewicz offers an introduction to long term challenges with which Central and Eastern Europe must contend. Ceccatiello offers interesting insights to the necessary future development of Environmental Management Systems in Europe in the face of specific environmental conditions in CEECs, correlating the adoption of such systems to new opportunities to redefine environmental and local development strategies. Nitkiewicz starts from the concept of 'sustainable development', with particular reference to the production of sustainable energy. He carefully discusses the Polish case as a mirror of a broader Central and Eastern European 'reality', involving CEECs that desperately want to fill the development gap that separates them from other European countries albeit conscientious of their need to develop alternative and less environmentally-impacting systems of energy production to sustain national growth.

Lastly, the final contribution to this special issue is an attempt to familiarize the reader on the present Eastern border of the European Union with Russia. Razumeyko discusses the practice of strategic planning in North West Russia, which is a region strongly connected with CEECs both territorially, due to their common borders, and culturally, due to their common past. When read in light of

the challenges that currently characterize Central and Eastern Europe, the paper offers the reader a unique opportunity to learn from its case study and to begin to contemplate the extent of EU integration in light of its new borders with Russia.

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**Richard Nunes**  
**Giancarlo Cotella**  
**Elisabete Cidre**



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The AESOP YA network is a loosely structured organization in which everyone who wishes to is invited to participate. The activities of the AESOP YA network are in particular addressed at planners who have only recently entered the academic world: PhD, postdoc, people starting in academic positions. The activities of the AESOP YA network are complementary to other activities that are being deployed within AESOP as a whole.

The AESOP YA network has two core aims:

- Make AESOP a challenging environment for young academics; and
- Open up the structure of AESOP to better encourage young academic involvement

AESOP was founded in 1989 as a network of university departments that teach and conduct research in the field of spatial planning. Today it has over 140 member schools and an expanding link with other planning associations and networks across the world.

- Representing the interest of planning schools in Europe;
- Promoting the development of education and spatial planning research;
- Facilitating co-operation and exchange between planning schools in Europe;
- Articulating a European dimension within planning education; and
- Fostering and enriching higher education in planning across Europe by mutual support, regular dialogue, exchange visits and dissemination

The following special issue is the first of two volumes. The present volume - Central and Eastern European Engagement: Planning, Development and Sustainability - places a greater focus on regional development whereas the subsequent special issue - Central and Eastern European Engagement: New Challenges and Opportunities for Urban Environments - will focus on local development, urban design and community empowerment issues. Both special issues include revised and edited papers presented at the 1st Aesop Young Academics (YA) Meeting: 'Central and Eastern European Engagement' (CE3), which took place at the Slovak University of Technology (STU), Bratislava (February 7-10 2007).

The four day event sought to stimulate discussion and debate on Central and Eastern European (CEE) issues and research interests most pertinent to the wider region within a planning and urban design context. The conference debates were structured around 5 tracks, each providing a conceptual framework for examining a wide range of issues: Track 1 - Migration, Social Exclusion and Cultural Integration; Track 2 - Growth Regions and Centres of Excellence; Track 3 - Community Planning and Regeneration Processes; Track 4 - Environmental Sustainability and New Technologies; and Track 5 - Transportation, Infrastructures and Housing. The result was an enriching experience for all those well versed in Central and Eastern European issues as well as for those seeking to engage and learn from scholars in the region thanks to the kind support of several individuals and organizations.

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**Richard Nunes**  
**Giancarlo Cotella**  
**Elisabete Cidre**

