

1 Preface – Introduction

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“New Disparities in Spatial Development in Europe” – several topics are included in both the title and theme of the *German Annual of Spatial Research and Policy* for the Year 2009.

We are first of all concerned with the **concept of spatial disparities**, which has its roots in national spatial planning and spatial development policy. Regional development as interregional equalisation policy, for example, is well-anchored in the German constitution through fundamental legal standards and the division of powers among the respective federal states. The “establishment of uniform living conditions within the federal territory” and “securing the uniformity of living conditions beyond the borders of any single federal state” (Section 72 Paragraph 2 of German Basic Law [GG]) are expressly specified as aims of government action in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. With the major reform of Germany’s financial system in 1969 and incorporation of the joint task “Improvement of the Regional Economic Structure” in Section 91a of German Basic Law [GG]¹ interventions on the part of the federal government and the wealthy federal states for the benefit of states and regions with less economic success were legitimised in constitutional terms as well.

All of this would be inconceivable without the concept of spatial disparities. Yet what is meant by this? In order to provide the term with content a spatial reference value is required; either the total area of a national state or the total area of the European Union. “Spatial disparities” thus represents a relational category which may only be established in relation to a spatially superordinate scale. A “desired condition” of economic performance and social welfare on the part of a society and its equipment with technical, social and cultural infrastructure is defined as it were from a central top-down perspective and should be evenly distributed throughout the respective total area. If deviations from this “desired condition” are determined “toward the bottom” for regions and/ or sub-regions, then these are considered to be spatial and/ or regional disparities. The concept of spatial disparities is thus a measurement concept and a methodical instrument for regional research. With the aid of specific indicators regional deviations from given characteristics judged by a society to be relevant and which, in an ideal projection, should be evenly distributed

1 The basis of the major reform of the German financial system in 1969 was provided by a constitutional reform on the part of the then Grand Coalition with which the longstanding practice since the 1950s of co-financing the tasks of the combined federal states by the German federal government was given a legal basis. As specified in Section 91a/ b of German Basic Law [GG], a completely new instrument of interrelated policy was created with the “joint tasks” within the scope of German federalism.

are measured within the total area and/ or in all of the regions of a national territory. The concept of spatial disparities is at the same time a normative concept. Which characteristics are deemed as relevant in a society ultimately represents a value judgment. A politically desired condition of social welfare is considered as the (value) standard for measuring regional disparities as undesired conditions that are to be eliminated with the aid of interregional equalisation policy.

What was valid over decades as the basis for legitimating interregional equalisation policy and financial transfers in several EU Member States, in particular in German regional planning and regional development policy, is now undergoing an interesting expansion in connection with European integration. The European Union already exhibited a wide variety of the most diverse types of regions with its enlargement towards the west, north and south up to 1995 – flourishing economic regions, metropolitan centres, rural regions, stagnating and crisis regions, border regions; but also regions with special geographical characteristics such as, for example, the Alpine regions in Austria, the groups of islands in Greece, the long coastal regions of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the North and Baltic Seas, or the very sparsely populated regions in the north of Sweden and Finland which are also shaped by extreme climatic conditions.

Past understanding of interregional equalisation policy, i. e. how it has been implemented within the national context, has only been partially suited to a European scale. The **concept of territorial cohesion** is used by the European Union to confront the disparities of spatial development and at the same time to preserve and shape the variety of European regions as development potential. Mentioned for the first time in the draft European Constitution, then in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), this concept stands for the spatial integration of sectoral, i. e. economic and social, cohesion. Moreover, it aims to preserve natural resources and cultural heritage, while promoting more balanced competitive ability between the EU Member States and their regions. The title of the Green Paper published in October 2008 on territorial cohesion concisely brings the strategic focus of the concept to the point: “Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength.” The following two contributions will deal with this concept.

Karl Peter Schön (BBSR) begins the discussion with some fundamental remarks. He provides an overview of the process of formulating a European position on the topic of “territorial cohesion” during the past ten years. In 1999 the document entitled *European Spatial Development Perspectives (ESDP)* stood at the beginning of this process. However, with the Green Paper on territorial cohesion it was given a further programmatic focus in October 2008.

Thiemo W. Eser (Luxemburg/ ARL) is concerned with the problem of disparity at the European level in conjunction with the logic of this concept. He also initially outlines the landmarks related to the concept of territorial cohesion. Eser takes up the message “Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength” in the title of the Green

Paper. He analyses the problem that regional development policy in the European Union requires an indicator system for the measurement of spatial disparities if it seeks to make efficient and effective use of its resources and instruments, while building on the potential and unique strength of the European Union to preserve and shape its regional diversity. He characterises the concept of territorial cohesion as one that is complex and applied across various sectors and at the same time aims to establish relations between areas and regions of the European Union.

A further topic is then created with the concept of new spatial disparities. With the end of the Cold War and the waning of confrontation between the systems, with the collapse of the former socialist planned economies and their transformation into market economies in Central and Eastern Europe, and with dissolution of the economic and military alliances in the former Soviet sphere of influence, the European process of integration was confronted with completely new challenges. Already with German Reunification on 3 October 1999 – when the former GDR automatically became a member of the European Communities through accession to the sphere of influence of German Basic Law – and even more so with enlargement of the European Union toward the East in 2004 and 2007, social and economic inequality in the European Union reached dimensions which until then were completely unknown. However, new spatial disparities developed not only within the enlarged European Union, but also at the national level within the new EU Member States that have undergone profound transformation processes since the 1990s.

These new regional patterns of social and economic inequality in the European Union are combined with processes of structural change that affect all of the EU Member States. The transformation from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, the transformation in settlement structures due to extensive suburbanisation and thus growth processes in the surrounding areas of large cities, and the demographic transformation due to natural population development should be noted in this regard. To that extent the adjective “new” should be understood in a double sense: “new” in quantitative, but also in qualitative terms. The following contributions are concerned with new disparities of spatial development as a result of structural change.

Hans Joachim Kujath and Axel Stein (IRS) address the spatial consequences of the transformation from the industrial to the knowledge society. The key argument here is that the transition to the knowledge society is more than a paraphrase of metropolisation. They discuss the development of the knowledge society and its spatial impact with regard to its technical, economic and social dimensions. On the basis of a factor and cluster analysis they identify nine clusters for Germany that stand for the types of space and locations of the knowledge society. They, in turn, may be grouped into three regional patterns: (1) agglomerations shaped by the knowledge society; (2) rural intermediate zones in which the knowledge society is propagated and which connect the respective agglomerations as corridors of development; (3)

regions which (still) exhibit deficits in terms of the knowledge society and which they refer to as the “new periphery”. They demonstrate that to a substantial degree the regions of the knowledge society are formed by networks. Thus the constitution of cognitive knowledge regions in which questions of proximity and distance are redefined is observed in their work.

In their contribution **Suntje Schmidt and Manuela Wolke (IRS)** discuss the position that metropolitan regions in particular would profit from expansion of the knowledge economy as they possess the required infrastructures for the trading, transferring, and accessing knowledge. In contrast they argue that the knowledge economy is not concentrated exclusively in metropolitan regions. The empirical database, on the basis of which they argue, represents a source data collection within the scope of corporate surveys carried out in the two metropolitan regions of Berlin and Munich and their surrounding areas in Brandenburg and Bavaria. What they observe is a close connection between forms of functional specialisation within the knowledge economy (they differentiate between four forms: high-tech industries; transformation-oriented services; transaction-oriented services; and the information and media industry) and their spatial location. This is expressed by the fact that companies that offer transformation-oriented services as well as companies in the information and media industry settle in non-metropolitan areas. The scope and quality of the interaction and cooperative relationships that companies in the knowledge economy maintain with their customers, suppliers and other partners in the generation of knowledge is regarded as an important explanatory approach.

Volker Schmidt-Seiwert (BBSR) examines development in four types of settlement structures (i. e. central regions; urbanised surrounding areas; rural surrounding areas; and rural areas) of the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union as well as EU candidates and neighbouring countries in the period from 1981 to 2006. Ratios reflecting the development of the population, gross domestic product, and patent applications form the empirical basis of the study. Schmidt-Seiwert comes to the conclusion that the core urban regions – and with them in particular the densely populated surrounding areas – form the focus of concentration for both the population and the economy. However, in accordance with his findings, these developments do not follow the same course in all countries. Thus the suburban area forms the area of economic concentration and development, particularly in the countries of Northern and Western Europe.

In their contribution **Isolde Brade, Christian Smigiel, and Zoltán Kovács (IfL)** are concerned with the spatial patterns of the suburbanisation processes that have drastically increased in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990. With Sofia and Budapest they selected the capitals of two new EU Member States; with Moscow they direct their view beyond the borders of the European Union. In three case studies they work out common features, but also important differences, which

they derive from privatisation of the housing markets, the motorisation of private households and a liberalised housing policy. They see further important factors for the development of new settlement structures in the transformation of the social structure in post-socialist societies, in the gradual formation of a middle class in Budapest and a stratum of “nouveau riche” in Moscow and Sofia as well as in domestic and foreign investors who operate as new participants in the housing markets. They demonstrate that due to the special development of Hungary since the 1970s (“Goulash Communism”) the capital Budapest exhibits a completely unique development in the transformation of settlement structures. Despite the apparently necessary regional differentiation they speak of the “specifically post-socialist path of residential suburbanisation” which they demonstrate with one feature in particular: the complete isolation of newly built housing developments from their surrounding areas, both in physical, material and in social terms.

Bernhard Müller and Paulina Schiappacasse (IOER/ TU Dresden) deal with demographic transformation in the EU 27 and its regional developments. The focus of their investigation is placed on the phenomena of aging and population decline. For their analysis they evaluated data on the 260 NUTS II regions of the EU 27. They ascertain profound demographic disparities between the various regions of Europe – after the last enlargement of the EU in particular – and speak of a “rather colourful demographic mosaic.” A further result of their investigation is that life expectancy is evidently higher in the countries of Western Europe – in particular in Italy, Spain and Sweden – than in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the *East-West Health Gap* they see one of the greatest challenges facing the European Union. They suggest the introduction of a regional *Demographic Vulnerability Index (DVI)* with which the positioning of each and every one of the 260 NUTS II regions may be shown in the course of demographic transformation as part of comprehensive ranking throughout all of Europe. Thus the DVI can function as a type of early warning system for regional and local participants whose areas of responsibility are affected by the consequences of demographic transformation.

In his investigation of regional differentiation in the generative behaviour of the population in Hungary **Tim Leibert (IfL)** treats a further aspect with regard to the topic of “demographic transformation”. He approaches the topic of disparity by setting changes in the generative behaviour of the Hungarian population in relationship to regional differences in economic power, employment/unemployment, and education level. In terms of theory he relies on two approaches to explain the transformation of generative behaviour: *crisis behaviour theory* and the *theory of the second demographic transition*. The key arguments of both theories are subjected to an independent descriptive analysis of important demographic indicators as well as a multivariate analysis. His findings can be described as the “internal polarisation of Hungary”; that is, high regional fertility among teenagers, early marriage and a high number of children are closely connected with economic and social crisis indicators.

Examples are the regions in east Hungary and in Somogy County in southwest Hungary. In contrast, a high degree of childlessness and fertility postponement mark generative behaviour in the powerful economic regions of west Hungary with their respectively high levels of income and education. Leibert comes to the conclusion that the spatial pattern of generative behaviour in Hungary exhibits both elements of convergence and polarisation because the fertility rates have declined in all of the regions of Hungary and at the same time exhibits considerable differences within the scope of an interregional comparison.

Juliane Albrecht (IOER) handles the topic from a completely different perspective. In her contribution she addresses the question as to whether or not the principle of subsidiarity prevents equivalent ecological living conditions in the European Union. She elucidates the dynamic relationship between the principles of limited authority and the appropriateness in which the subsidiarity principle is located. Using the examples of the Water Framework Directive, the Environmental Noise Directive, and a currently discussed draft for a Soil Protection Framework Directive, she examines whether the environmental policy of the European Union is in agreement with the principle of subsidiarity. Albrecht comes to the conclusion that the principle of subsidiarity in the EC Treaty does not represent an obstacle for the implementation of European environmental policy. She thus concludes that the EU Member States obviously take a positive stance toward uniform European legislation in order to achieve high standards in terms of environmental protection and in order to create equivalent ecological living conditions in Europe, even if the problems are of a regional or local nature.

Following the main contributions **short reports** provide further insight into the research topics that are being worked on in the respective institutes of the regional sciences network, within the scope of their event activities as well as their promotion of PhD students.

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