Abstract

Most spatial development would appear to happen without spatial planning. When analysing current strategy-oriented planning approaches like regional planning, planning guidelines, infrastructure plans, and urban development plans, we notice a certain number of shortcomings. Frequently, the planning documents lack a substantial analysis of dominant spatial driving forces, a coherent spatial vision, an orientation towards intended impact, and their communication to key decision maker, with the consequence that planning interventions are less effective than envisaged. This regularly results in the costly duplication of labour and investment. Looking at outcomes of current spatial planning instruments, we feel a need to propose a complementary approach that goes beyond the existing approaches in Germany. We call this approach ‘spatial strategy’. We develop the idea of spatial strategy by using results from an international workshop on spatial strategies, organised in 2010 and supported by core references.

Introduction

This paper firstly outlines our perception of contemporary planning and we introduce our own approach. We then deliver the findings of the international workshop on spatial strategy. Finally, we draw conclusions and formulate open questions and discuss the relation of complexity and our new approach to spatial strategy.

The necessity for spatial strategies results from the experience gathered in project work undertaken by the Chair for Spatial and Territorial Development at the Munich University of Technology. On close inspection of city development programs we encounter shortcomings of the established approaches in spatial planning: individual projects, events, spatial concepts, visions or land-use plans occasionally discount or overlook significant factors affecting spatial planning. Thus they fail to deliver on their promises and illustrate a number of weaknesses in conventional approaches.

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Established planning approaches often fail to take account of the initial position and the dominant driving forces that shape places and space. Contemporary planning provides no coherent spatial vision and the planned results are only rarely fully visualized. Such planning often misses the real spatial conflicts and lacks clear orientation. Stakeholders have difficulty understanding spatial plans and might not know what they could or should do to implement the planning goals. Thus, stakeholders cannot be blamed for ignoring spatial plans.

To a certain extent, established forms of planning, such as land-use plans, manage to ensure that “that undesirable developments do not occur, but (…) they are not able to ensure that desirable developments actually take place where and when they are needed” (Albrechts 2004, 754). Consequently, the actual developments do not result from intended developments (Blotevogel 2009). Albrechts attributes this in part to the historically insignificant political relevance of spatial planning in contrast to other areas of planning and policy (Albrechts 2004). Additionally, existing approaches neither acknowledge nor face the current challenges. Ovink claims that spatial planning is “too strongly assignment-orientated and too little challenge orientated” (Ovink cited in Blank et al. 2009, 332). Sartorio criticises the concentration on single projects with a strong local emphasis (Sartorio 2005). A long term perspective on spatial development is lacking and this regularly results in the costly duplication of investment and labour, stifling potential synergies.

According to Albrechts, one of the most important of the current challenges is the creation of a strategic approach that organizes space at different levels of scale (Albrechts 2004).

Furthermore, there is a poor horizontal and vertical coordination and integration of space relevant sector politics. The relationships between different territorial entities and policies on the same national-political level are relatively weak. Sartorio describes this in relation to Italy as a ‘(technical) dysfunction of political and administrative boundaries with respect to the growth in the size of cities’ (Sartorio 2005, 36). This has a negative effect on the design of public space and public transport sector. The same applies to vertical coordination and integration. The scales of national, regional, metropolitan and local space relevant policies are at best only partially integrated.

In Vigar’s view, “We see a shift away from planning as a land-use-focused, regulatory activity towards a more holistic ’spatial planning’ that integrates a number of policy concerns” (Vigar 2009, 1572). But how is this demand for ‘holistic spatial planning’ to be realized? Spatial planning seems to be trapped in a dead-end street. There is a definite need for a new planning approach that deals with the shortcomings, faces the challenges and therefore overcomes the quandary spatial planning is in. We call our solution ‘spatial strategy.’
**Spatial strategy as an answer**

We believe that the use of spatial strategies is a way to achieve better results. Let us first define spatial strategy. Strategy (in general) is the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities. As Porter puts it, “If there were only one ideal position, there would be no need for strategy” (Porter 1996, 68). A spatial strategy is a new planning approach that links strategic objectives with tangible spatial projects. “Increasingly, it is being assumed that the solutions to complex problems depend on the ability to combine the creation of strategic visions with short-term action” (Albrechts 2004, 743). This is exactly what spatial strategy is about. It eschews a one-size-fits-all ideal position and attempts instead to formulate solutions for complex situations involving a range of variables. Spatial strategy can be formulated for different scales and it accounts for the interactions between measurements in different scales. It formulates spatial development perspectives for a location and at the same time provides a frame of reference for tangible spatial planning. The centre of a spatial strategy is constituted by the assessment of the impacts on the region, its stakeholders and time.

Spatial strategy as we see it can be analysed as a sequence of seven different elements or steps. Many of these elements also appear in other authors’ articles (Albrechts 2004, 748). These elements suggest the structure of what we call spatial strategy.

**Analyses of dominant driving forces**

“To act effectively in the here and now, you need to look to the future while also taking account of the past” (Ovink in Blank et al. 2009, 344). The first step in developing an effective spatial strategy has to be the analyses of dominant driving forces that have shaped particular spaces – and that will continue to have influence in the future. The following questions must be answered: What are the driving forces that are most important for the area the spatial strategy is to be designed for? What qualities does this area have? Which spatial conflicts need resolving? What is the core area that is to be analyzed?

**Motivation of stakeholders**

“The creation of strategic visions (...) requires (...) the creation of awareness of the systems of power. Delivering on these new demand implies (...) a shift in planning style in which the stakeholders are becoming more actively involved in the planning process on the basis of a joint definition of the action situation and of the sharing of interests, aims, and relevant knowledge” (Albrechts 2004, 743). Spatial strategy aims to motivate the involved stakeholders. It depends on the experience and the knowledge of a place that inhabitants of city quarters as well as experts from the administration and politicians have. Spatial strategy focuses on places where stakeholders recognize certain qualities or the need for change and development. The stakeholders must be willing to work on and with the spatial strategy. This is the only way
to guarantee its implementation. At the beginning of the process, the motivation of the stakeholders is most important.

Selection

“Spatial strategy making involves exercising the power to select and simplify” (Healey 2009, 445; based on Albrechts 2004 and Healey 2007). A spatial strategy is not generated ubiquitously – in terms of not covering the whole area and in terms of not being comprehensive – because it focuses on a selection of, in most cases, socially constructed conditions, which are an intentional reduction and screening of particular objectives in order of priority. It focuses on the specific areas for which the stakeholders formulate a strong need for further development as well as on priority issues and challenges. “As it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, ‘strategic’ implies that some decisions and actions are considered more important than others and that much of the process lies in making the tough decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing fair, structural responses to problems, challenges, aspirations, and diversity” (Albrechts 2004, 751f). From these decisions priority issues can be deduced on which the restricted financial resources have to be focused.

Development of scenarios

Spatial strategy formulates possible solutions for a complex situation. In doing so, spatial strategy has to develop scenarios for the selected areas. They show which developments are to be expected with regard to the dominant driving forces. A wide range of possible developments is shown. The scenarios frame what a place is now and what it may become in future (Albrechts 2004).

Creation of a vision

“The heart of a strategy lies in the way that it frames ideas” (Healey 2009, 449). Scenarios show what a place could be in the future but it is the vision that shows what it should be in the future (Zonneveld 2008). The vision contains statements about quality and about the direction in which developments should be directed. A so called “story of change” can help to bundle all the aspects a vision contains (Sartorio 2005, 36). This story of change aims to communicate the vision to the most important stakeholders and to stimulate their emotions. The vision aims to create a connection under a certain principal theme between the different priorities regarding the content of the spatial strategy and the area that the spatial strategy is designed for (see also Thierstein et al. 2006).

Visualization

The next step in a spatial strategy is to visualize what this story of change suggests. “Spatial planning is about structure, relationships and positions. These can, of course, be discussed verbally but some key issues
cannot be addressed properly without some sort of visualization” (Zonneveld 2008, 121). Thus, probably the most important step in a spatial strategy is to create plans, sketches and pictures that show how the intended changes will look. Visualization helps stakeholders to really understand and realize the vision. “…spatial visioning without any sort of visualization is a contractio in terminis…” (Zonneveld 2008, 121).

Implementation

Spatial strategy can be seen as the sequence of analyses, the development of scenarios, the creation of a vision, its visualization and finally, its implementation. Implementation shows the interface between existing planning and projects and it formulates the subsequent steps to realization. The possible interfaces depend on the planning system. An important question is how to integrate spatial strategy in the formal planning system. Without this integration spatial strategy is merely speculative.

According to Albrechts the “end product (of strategic planning) consists of an analysis of the main processes shaping our environment, a dynamic, integrated, and indicative long-term vision (frame), a plan for short-term and long-term actions, a budget, and a strategy for implementation” (Albrechts 2004, 753). The seven steps we suggest for a spatial strategy fulfil this demand.

International workshop on spatial strategies

This paper develops the idea of spatial strategy by using results from an international workshop on spatial strategies in February 2010 hosted by the Chair for Spatial and Territorial Development, Munich University of Technology. The workshop discussed current projects in several European countries that include new elements of planning and/or that use new planning approaches. All the projects presented deal with strategies for metropolitan regions and strategic urban design. Participants in the workshop were planners, consultants and scientists from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany, and stakeholders from the mega-city region of Munich. Some of them will be cited in the following section, which will report on the findings of the workshop.

A) Analyses of dominant driving forces

The case of the airport region of Munich demonstrates the necessity for an analysis of the dominant driving forces. The case indicates that contemporary planning seems to ignore ongoing spatial developments and makes no attempt to understand them. In our view, the airport region of Munich compromises the City of Munich and the airport and its environs. This view is derived from a functional perspective on spatial organisation. The Airport is a hub airport, the second biggest airport in Germany. It was established in 1992. We will briefly introduce you to the actual development of the region and set this in contrast to the
envisioned development from a policy perspective. The map shows the development of the municipalities in contrast to the regional average of the workforce development between the years 1992 to 2004. The dark blue sections denote a relatively higher development than the average for the entire region (figure 1). This blue corridor is remarkable. It extends from the city of Munich to the airport and hints at a particularly prosperous economic development along this stretch. The Airport corridor is obviously one of the favoured company locations. From our research into spatio-economic dynamics we know that a hub airport is particularly attractive for information based concerns. Global players like Microsoft, General Electric, Swiss Reinsurance Company are located there. Let us now take on a policy perspective and examine the regional plan. What is the regional plan expressing about the airport-stimulated growth? It states, that population and employment should develop in a specific part of the region – a normative goal. The regional plan does not include any other specific goals for the airport region. The spatial extent of these two approaches overlaps to a certain degree, but there are more differences than commonalities (figure 2). Strikingly, the municipalities between the airport and the city are not fully included. Regional planning goals are unlike spatial development. Why is this so? In our view, regional planning lacks analyses of the dominant driving forces in the airport region. Connectivity is important for knowledge intensive companies. Thus, they locate not only in the city areas but also outside, where connectivity to the City and other locations worldwide is provided (Thierstein et al. 2007). They therefore do not locate just anywhere but in between the hub airport that generates connectivity and the attractive and accessible city. Between the core cities and hub airports airport corridors develop (Droß, De Jong 2007, Schaaafsma et al. 2008). Thus, the hub airport generates a very specific development, which is not adequately considered in the regional plan. The airport region of Munich

Figure 1: Development of employment 1992-2004 (source: own draft)
needs a spatial strategy which is grounded in a proper analysis of the dominant driving forces and which develops a spatial vision for the airport region in its entirety.

Figure 2: Comparison of the two approaches (source: own draft)

B) Motivation of stakeholders

How to motivate stakeholders? What sets people in motion? The workshop provided different answers. One approach is to start with the quality of places. The regional development project ‘Raumperspektiven Zukunftsland’ (Stein and Schultz 2010) started with a walk, guided by an artist. The stakeholders walked straight through the landscape. They did not use the pathways, climbed over fences and explored the rivers. They experienced their well-known landscape and places in a new way to gain a new and – within the group of stakeholders – mutual understanding. Such an undertaking will “Reinforce the strength and beauty of this area, drawn from the rivers, landscapes, history and people” (Savic 2010). Savic applied the same idea to another region, the Thames Gateway.

Another approach is to start with spatial conflicts and to ask the stakeholders what the pivotal issues are. That might be the best in a shrinking region, where there is a vicious circle of declining demand, declining public services, declining attractiveness, and so forth. The process might nevertheless be enhanced if preceded by a similar rediscovery, by looking for attractive places and attempting to change or at least to scrutinise existing perceptions.
C) Selection

Formal planning is comprehensive planning. It means all-encompassing planning, involving all sectors; traffic, ecology, and housing have to be included and the plan has to define utilisation for any part of an exactly defined area. These days place is an open, connected and multi-layered system. Place is an interplay of sub-areas with fuzzy and overlapping functional boundaries at multiple spatial scales (Savic 2010). Thus it is difficult to define exactly the boundaries of the area for which a spatial strategy should be developed. Instead of discussing the appropriate dimension of the region, it would be more efficient to search for either top quality places which could work as a stimulus for further developments or to ask about the challenges and search for the places which are most affected. Within this process, stakeholders focus on specific places and identify strategic themes and priority issues. If core issues are defined, those places which are most affected by these core issues, can be identified.

D) Development of scenarios

Scenarios develop possible futures. ‘Stedenbaan’ (cities line) is a project south of Randstad, Holland. A better regional public transport system was to be developed via a higher frequency on existing rail lines. This goal was linked with a regionally coordinated urbanisation. The stations of the Stedenbaan are to be used as nodes for urbanisation – as urban generator. Forty-seven stations were analysed with respect to existing buildings, their typology, free building sites and so forth. The next step was to work out scenarios of possible futures. The results were used to involve the municipalities. In a negotiation process the stakeholders discussed futures the scenarios (Balz 2010).

Scenarios could have many functions in a process of designing spatial strategies. The approach involves plotting possible developments and using them in negotiations with stakeholders. Furthermore, the scenario-method is linked to the analyses of the dominant driving forces (A). Forecasting the impact of the driving forces in the future helps to build scenarios. The stakeholders get a clear picture of what the actual driving forces are, what the driving forces will be in the future and how they might shape spatial development. It also is possible to use scenarios as a test. Different development approaches can be projected into the future along with an analysis of the driving forces that might affect them. At the end of the scenario process the stakeholders choose the most desirable or workable scenario.

E) Creation of a vision

Based on a particular scenario, a clear and engaging vision will be defined. Savic argues that instead of delivering generic visions, visions should be place-specific and should precisely describe what a place could look like in future and should deliver steps towards the vision and formulate the conditions which have to be considered. Visions should be visualised and their implications and outcomes should be clearly communicated. A ‘story of change’ must be developed (Savic 2010).
F) Visualisation

Design concretises the vision. Design could be used for generating different options, for providing different translations of the vision. At the same time, design could be used as a tool for visualisation. A design visualises the vision. Visualisation makes the vision understandable, conveys the idea of the vision, and makes the vision visible. Visualisation is of great importance in setting people in motion and motivating stakeholders to participate in the process of working out a spatial strategy (B).

G) Implementation

The vision already involves implementation. Also, integrating stakeholders at an early stage of a process means considering implementation, because it is the stakeholders, in the final analysis, who will implement the spatial strategy. In designing the vision the story of change begins. Now the story has to be written in detail from beginning to end. An implementation plan and delivery mechanisms must be developed. The delivery should be coordinated and monitored (Savic 2010).

Conclusion

Firstly, our workshop on spatial strategies with planning practitioners and architects confirmed the main challenges of spatial planning and spatial strategies. Contemporary planning fails by analysing dominant driving forces that shape places. Thus planning often misses the real spatial conflicts and lacks clear orientation. Thus, stakeholders have difficulty understanding spatial plans and might not know what their task in the implementation process could be. In the end it is no coincidence that the established forms of planning, such as land-use plans are not able to ensure that desirable developments actually take place. Furthermore, there is often no long term perspective on spatial development.

Secondly, the workshop demonstrated that planning practitioners and architects already use parts of what we proposed as spatial strategy in their daily work. Some approaches like the ‘strategic urban design approach’ by the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in the UK (Savic 2010) are similar to our approach.

Thirdly, only some of the workshop participants stressed the analyses of the dominant driving forces as heavily as we do. To present the importance of the driving forces we cited our own project, Airport Region of Munich. We believe that unless we understand what is driving spatial development we will necessarily fail to implement planning goals, visions and strategies.

Analysing the dominant driving forces is the key to another element of spatial strategy: selectiveness. If we know what is really shaping places, we can focus our energy where it is needed. We concentrate on certain
places; the ones which are the most affected or the most important ones. Knowing what the driving forces are, we can then try to understand how they shape these places and test future developments by processing scenarios. By choosing one of the scenarios, we start to build up the story of change and generate a vision. The vision contains ideas of implementation because it predicts the steps involved in realising the vision and conditions. The vision is visualised through design. The implementation process is prepared among other things, by involving the stakeholders in the process early on.

Finally, we will discuss the relation of complexity and our approach to spatial strategy. In our understanding, complexity, for instance in airport regions (de Jong, Suau-Sanchez, Dross 2008), means that (1) the government no longer appears as the focal point but just as one of many players, (2) new stakeholders emerge, such as airport operators, who are not involved in the (formal) planning procedures, (3) a constant tension between local and global market driven interests makes it more difficult to define goals for regional development, (4) some municipalities are winners and profit from the airport effects while others are on the losing side. Thus their interests are different. As a result governments and planners find themselves in the midst of whirls of complexity and conflict, performing difficult institutional work in building new policy perspectives and ideas through which they attempt to shape key aspects of (spatial) development (Healey 2007).

Spatial strategy is selective. Thus it reduces complexity. The dominant driving forces are analysed, the stakeholders select which are the most important issues and which places are to be integrated in the strategy. The process of setting up a spatial strategy is a stakeholder-oriented process. Thus, all important stakeholders can be integrated. Furthermore the process uses instruments other than formal planning procedures: scenarios, visions, and design. We think that by using other methods the process could be more efficient and achieve better results. Spatial strategy is an effective way of dealing with complexity.

**Open Questions**

Our draft of a spatial strategy is guided by our experience in project work. Otherwise, as already mentioned, spatial strategy is not a proven or tested instrument. Consequently, a number of issues arise that still have to be clarified. Basically there are seven open questions. (1) What are the minimum conditions for a spatial strategy? It is obvious that spatial strategy does not work in every case. So we have to find out what conditions are needed to establish a spatial strategy. Additionally we have to find out under which conditions spatial strategies work best. (2) Which stakeholders have to be involved? Not every stakeholder is fundamental for the spatial strategy. There must be clarity about the ones that are essential for the success of the process. (3) What does a spatial strategy exactly look like? What is its form? Sketches, pictures, diagrams and maps could be possible forms of a spatial strategy. (4) We have to elaborate how spatial strategy could
be integrated in the established planning system. Only if we succeed in doing so, will spatial strategy be of practical value. If it is not to some extent part of the planning system spatial strategy lacks democratic legitimacy. Moreover, the applicability of the approach to various planning models – top down, bottom up, mixed – has to be tested. (5) We stated the poor horizontal and vertical coordination and integration of space relevant sector politics as one of the main challenges. So far we have not demonstrated how spatial strategy could provide more coordination and integration. (6) Some of the workshop participants stressed the notion of ‘place’: ‘Architects build spaces, people are looking for places’. They asked if spatial strategy should be called ‘placial’ strategy. There is perhaps more to this question than mere semantics. (7) Long-term development has to be considered. In general, spatial strategy is flexible. Goals might change and challenges change, thus spatial strategy has to be flexible. There have to be mechanisms which ensure a capacity for adaptation.

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