

1 Preface – Introduction

Wendelin Strubelt

For the third time, the five leading German research institutes for spatial planning and policy – beyond German universities – offer an international audience a focused overview over their engagement in scientific analyses and political counselling.

This time we have concentrated our papers around the topic of the development and the formulation of guiding principles, concepts, or visions – in German we use a term not yet well known in international contexts, *Leitbilder* – for spatial planning and policy. For the non-German audience it might be important to know that, within the German context, we are dealing with a rather complex federal system.

On the one hand, this complexity results in a very fragmented structure of formal and legal duties and actual decision-making beyond any established hierarchical assumptions for administrative efficiency. On the other hand, this form of a cooperating and competing political system with its different constituencies and bureaucracies allows for or supports different views to be developed and presented. Faced with such a fragmented national structure, the analysis of spatial planning and policy needs to carefully differentiate between the various levels of decision-making and the interactions between them. With the contributions at hand, we have assumed to cover this complex picture.

In this regard, this book reflects the use of concepts or visions – *Leitbilder* – for spatial planning and policy at the different federal levels. This includes the European level or cross-border relations at the macro level and the micro level of the local community as well. It includes rather theoretical reflections about the “philosophies” behind such concepts as well as the very concrete analysis of local concepts required by local communities with different historical traditions and backgrounds. It includes analyses about the physical background of urban planning and the concepts providing means of cooperation needed for spatial planning and policy along national borders.

Thus, the reader may find a lot of information and analyses from a very complicated field of policy-making, of conceptual framing of spatial development. Perhaps this picture of federal interacting seems strange to foreign readers, but it may provide valuable insight, especially if we take into consideration that such complicated interaction will comprise our future. On account of the necessary interactions in a Europe of regions, this implies the absence of a strict or single national and supra-national authority. The fading away of strict structures and the rise of fragmented structures throughout might very well be our future.

This book is a common endeavour of the five German institutes for spatial planning and policy. Again, it intends to strengthen the position of German spatial analysis in the international contexts. It is in the hand of our readers whether we succeed.