

TENTH CONFERENCE ON URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH
Topic II. How can polycentricity of territorial development
improve functional integration?

RESPONSE PAPER

1. The European Union (EU) is one of the largest and economically strongest regions in the world, but it suffers from the uneven development.² The EU is constantly trying to bring together different national traditions in the planning and management of regional development. In order to achieve more balanced regional development across the EU territory, the EU regional policy was focused on the financial aid to the whole peripheral and sub-developed regions. However, this kind of policy did not produced expected results and old/new concept of the polycentric development has become on the agenda from 1999.³

2. Precise definition of the term "polycentricity" is elusive. Urban planners use this concept as a strategic spatial planning tool. Economics use it to explain a specific form of an urban structure and growth. The EU representatives use polycentricity as a concept that promote socio-economic policy goal. For non-governmental scene (NGOs) it is a synonym for a modern lifestyle. (Davoudi, 2003)

Polycentric development⁴, as defined by Hague & Kirk (2003) is a spatial and functional form of development in which there are many centres and not just one large city that is dominating all the others. The centres are linked in networks and complement each other functionally and co-operate together. Polycentrism is a belief that there are benefits to be gained from the polycentric development is a form of increased competitiveness, cohesion and regional balance, parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge and sustainable development.

Gløersen (2005) differs "polycentricity" through:

- normative definition "*...is about promoting balanced and multiscalar types of urban networks that are most beneficial from social and economic point of view both for the core areas and periphery*" and

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² Within dorsale or so called Blue Banana 50% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) is produced in 20% of its area that covers 40% of the EU population.

³ The adoption of the European Spatial Development Perspective by the informal meetings of the ministers responsible for spatial planning in the EU in Potsdam 10-11 May 1999 represent the latest attempt to shape the EU spatial policy planning.

⁴ Polycentric development is seen as an alternative to the monocentric development in which one city or metropolitan region dominates other. Monocentric development was on the agenda after the II world war until 1970's. In mid 1970's it became irrelevant due to the (Davoudi, 2003) decentralisation of economic activities increased mobility thorough new transport technologies, multiplicity of travel patterns and complex cross commuting and changes in the households and their life style.

- analytical definition "*...it is a spatial organisation for the cities characterised by a functional division of labour, economic and institutional integration and political co-operation*".

It can be noticed that there is no straight definition of polycentricity but various interpretations of the concept, which can be attached to different spatial scales. For that reason polycentricity is referred to a nested concept. (Waterhout, Meijers and Zonnveld, 2003) Whatever definition is used, there is a fact that term "polycentricity" is now cropping up everywhere. And instead of using it as an aid to describe reality, it is coming to be a determinant of reality. In Croatia it is fashionable to use this term among the politicians when discussing future regional development.

3. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) has found polycentricity as an answer to the more balanced development. The ESDP promotes polycentricity at the EU level, firstly, to ensure a more regionally balanced development and, secondly, to enhance the EU competitiveness in the world market. ESDP's aim is to achieve balanced development across the EU territory has a strong resonance with the traditional regional development policy aimed at providing financial incentives and appropriate infrastructure in less developed regions. ESDP lies in policy approach to distribution of resources and proposed policy tools. As regards to the policy approach, the pursuit of development in the periphery is not proposed to take place at the cost of any losses to the core, i.e. development of the periphery is not to be achieved through outflows of resources from the core. The idea is to create new cores and more dynamic zones of global economy integration, well distributed throughout EU territory. As regards to the policy tools, the EU spatial effective policy (particular funding from the Structural Fund) should be oriented towards promotion of polycentric development model. Polycentricity is a major policy aim at time macro level while at the same time it is a key policy tool at the intra-regional scale (meso level). (Pumain, 1999)

Polycentricity also means rethinking of the EU regional policy and allocation of the structural funds. Through INTERREG programme the idea is put into practice: INTERREG IIC projects have explored and applied the concepts of polycentric development and new urban-rural relations while INTERREG IIIB gives chance to work with partners from other countries in a shared programme of local action. (Hague & Kirk, 2003)

4. The ESDP prevails principle regions for themselves and emphasis that development of poor periphery is not to be achieved through the outflow of sources (traditional approach) but to develop spatial strategies that promote polycentric urban development. Future development must rely on spatial structures that are individually tailored-made to maximise individual potentials of these localities. (Davoudi, 2003)

5. Spatial planning⁵ in Croatia is oriented towards production of individual spatial plans that are in fact passive documents defining the use of space but without its development. Parallel to spatial plans regional (urban) development plans are

⁵ In 1997 a spatial development strategy for Croatia was produced and two years later Croatian government also issued an action plan. Recently, a draft of the National Strategy for Regional Development (2005) was produced.

produced on a voluntary basis and there is no direct link between those two plans. Future territorial development must be based on an integrative approach to the planning system in order to create a consistent policy that will lead to the promotion of networking, i.e. polycentric development. Another important issue is that spatial strategy foresees cities as the driving force of future development based on the polycentric development. On the other hand, regional development strategy gives priority to the role of county as the development unit.

6. Polycentricity is differently overviewed when looked at the different spatial levels. On a macro level (Europe) polycentricity refers to the promotion of several global integration zones other than Pentagon. On a meso level (regional/inter-regional) it means integration of city-regions and enhancement of functional complementarity. Improvement of economic performance through improved links and better co-operation (creation of functional urban areas - FUA) is considered as polycentricity at micro level (intra-regional).

7. As Hague and Kirk (2003) argue, potential new global zones of economic integration are:

1. Hamburg - Øresund - Gothenbourg - Stockolm - Oslo (good TEN connections)
2. Lisbon - Madrid - Barcelona - Montpellier (based on the good TGV connections)
3. Vienna -Bratislava-Prague-Dresden-Berlin (former Austro-Hungarian empire)

Seen in a context of Croatia, The City of Zagreb, as the capital city, could join the third potential zone of global economic integration mainly due to the historical reasons (Croatia was a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire). Regarding good transport connections (TEN network), it is well known relation between Rijeka - Zagreb and Budapest (Hungary).

8. Regarding new polycentric urban regions, Randstad in Holland is the best example. Ranstad consists from Amsterdam (tourism, finance, transport), Utrecht (service sector), Hague (government seat), Rotterdam (port), i.e. four large cities each thriving on a different economic basis. It is a single EU coherent regional and the next European metropolis. Another examples of the polycentric urban regions are Flemish Diamond in Belgium (Brussels, Leuven, Antwerp and Ghent); Rhine-Rur in Germany (Dortmund, Essen, Dusseldorf, Cologne and Boon) and Padua-Treviso-Venice area in Italy.

Croatian urban development is based on four growth poles: Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek and Split. More than 50% of Croatian population lives in those centres.⁶ Regions that they cover are historical, natural and development subjects.

9. When looking at the intra-regional or micro relations, it must be noticed that Croatia embraces very heterogeneous territory. If looked through the "rank-size-rule", Croatia has a very dispersed system of cities but it misses bigger (up to 80.000 inhabitants) and medium-sized cities (up to 30.000 inhabitants). Looked

⁶ City of Zagreb has population of 770.058 inhabitants whereas Split, Rijeka and Osijek are only cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants and they represent county development centres. The level of urbanisation of Croatia is 64%. (Šimunović, 2006)

geographically, on a coastal zone most of the cities are smaller but they have a long history and they have played important role in a country development. Such examples are Pula, Dubrovnik, Zadar or Šibenik. Then there is a continental area with Zagreb as the capital and cities mainly developed on a riversides: Sisak, Vukovar, Karlovac, Slavonski Brod, Varaždin and similar. Between those two areas there is a vast space where no towns of local or regional significance are settled.

Certain number of Croatian cities is facing structural problems, i.e. old industrial cities that nowadays cannot cope with development. The city of Sisak historically had a great importance but during the former Yugoslavia it was perceived as a main Croatian industrial centre with steel plant and oil refinery is settled. Today, iron plant is about to be closed, transport connections with Zagreb are inappropriate and a city faces severe development problems (high unemployment, etc). If we put this into the EU context, it is a challenge for cohesion policy to provide effective support to the city is needed in order to revitalise the whole area (European Commission, 2004).

10. Croatian strategy and action plan for spatial development (Ministarstvo prostornog uređenja Republike Hrvatske, 1997, 1999) explicitly embodies polycentric development as the strategy of future regional development in Croatia. It can be quoted that around 600 local settlements should be growth initiators while network of cities and more important settlements shall be build in a long run. How to achieve this is seen through investment policy, as well as through decentralisation process⁷. There has been another issue that for historical and geographical reasons matters. This means that in a long run an importance of a cross-border co-operation of cities is going to be evident. As an example, it can be expected that cities within the County of Istria will even more co-operate with cities form the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region in Italy⁸.

11. For peripheral regions there is an issue of accessibility while for core regions issue of efficiency. Improvements to accessibility are seen as a critical priority in the development of the polycentric urban systems and precondition for persuasion of economic development within an overall spatial strategy of harmonisation. Transport and telecommunication opportunities are important factors in promoting polycentric development. Spatial differences in the EU cannot be reduced without a fundamental improvement of transport infrastructure and services to and within the regions where lack of access to transport and communications infrastructure restricts economic development. (Richardson and Jensen, 2000)

In its development documents (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2004) Croatia has explicitly chosen development of the motorway network as a key determinant of a balanced regional development. In a last decade intensive investments into motorway network have increased current motorway network from 350 km up to 1.000 km. Good connections of the capital city with Mediterranean cities such as Rijeka, Zadar or Split have increased mobility. At the same time building of this infrastructure has created so called "*tunnel effect*" on the less developed region it goes through (Lika).

⁷ In order to promote polycentricity as a development concept, Croatian government has recently announced polycentricity of Croatian higher education.

⁸ Even today it is quite common that students from Istria quite often choose faculties in Italy, especially Trieste rather than Croatian faculties. One of the reasons is closeness to the Italy.

12. We live in a network society and the concept of polycentricity can be applied throughout. Because of the diversity of the territory and areas in which it can be applied there is no unique approach no single scenario of polycentricity. It can serve as a common ground or as guidance but it cannot be prescribed in a manner of a "cookbook".

13. In Croatian example it is evident that monocentric development (the city of Zagreb) has produced more negative impacts than positive ones. That is why current policies are focusing on the ways to increase the role of regional development and furthermore on local, urban development. Implementation of decentralisation is an ongoing process through which an effort is made to strengthen the role of cities, especially the role of 32 bigger cities identified as development focal points. Announced decentralisation of higher education is another attempt to disperse activities throughout Croatian territory. The first project on cross-border co-operation of Croatian municipalities with ones in Slovenia and Hungary is another attempt to shift activities from the centre to the periphery through networking (Đokić and Sumpor, 2006).

14. Croatian legal framework allows networking among local government units and prescribes authority over dynamic development.⁹ On the other hand, central government is either limiting potential for development (by limiting borrowing mechanisms...) or it does not provide incentives that will foster more co-operation among local government units. Initiatives for a networking should come from the sub-levels of government since they do best match with actual needs. However, framework for the application of polycentricity should be a top-down process.

15. The concept of "polycentricity" is not new to Croatian spatial planners and researchers, but only recently it is considered as a development concept. But besides planners, the impression is that it is more used as a synonym for something that is currently *IN* and not realised as a severe determination of future development. It seems that immense effort should be made to explain a concept and how it can be applied into Croatian reality.

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⁹ An excellent example of how cities can co-operate is the Island of Krk. In order to promote economic activity and expand existing infrastructure 6 municipalities from the island have made a network and jointly invest into island development.

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