Cohesion policy towards a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the European territory

By Thomas Brandmann

First of all I would like to thank you for providing this platform so that I can openly give my own point of view to the European cohesion policy. As a student of geography, who listen a course in European spatial planning politics, this is of special interest.

I support the aim of setting a harmonious and balanced path of development for the European territory. It is crucial that the European Union as a political entity works towards a Union which will be less separated in social and economic concerns. But as mentioned in the fourth report on European cohesion policy this hard work to do. Some regions will always be of higher economic potential. Some regions, as an expression of their geographical exclusion, will always be at the outskirts of the European heartland. I do not think that there is an ambitious plan at hand which will cure this antagonism at once. But what I do think it is worth working for. Out of this, the connection of European regions, especially the new member states of the east, is of particular importance. And for this setting up a European Spatial Planning Perspective is a good way to start.

In our course some national spatial planning concepts were presented. And I got the impression that the European Spatial Planning Perspective was in some way lost. The focus was often on the strong, urban regions and the rural areas were a little bit neglected. In the Netherlands the Randstad got focus, in Germany the Metropolregionen got focus and in France Paris has ever been the focus. Is this the concept of a Lisboan-Strategy like planning? Sadly the Gothenburg-Strategy was not mentioned in the same way. I do not want do be misunderstood; the Lisboan-Strategy is badly needed to keep the economic and social level we nowadays enjoy. And yes, there has to be more focus in the European Union on competition, invention and technology. The maps of ESPON gave us a good imagination of a spatial development which is only concentrated on the established growth regions. Everybody knows what kind of developments will go hand in hand with that: congestion, high land prices and social exclusion are only a showcase. So where is the middle way, the way cohesion policy will lead to success? Openly, I do not know. The cooperation of European regions in programs like INTERREG are very exciting and bring the European spirit to the local, other programs like LIFE+ or Culture 2007
-2013 are also important. Often these programs fund innovative but largely small projects with limited recognition in the European public. Perhaps there is a chance for a broader approach towards European cohesion. It is quite understandable why the national view upon the problems of cohesion dominate the debate. Speaking as German European for me it is normal that the regions (e.g. Bundesländer or Regierungsbezirke) have a strong voice. Hence it is critical to me that the European regions have a stake in the debate of cohesion and that not only the potent regions can lobby for them, but also the weak are able to speak for themselves.