Third Joint Congress ACSP-AESOP
The Network Society: the new context for planning
Leuven July 8th-12th 2003 (Belgium)

Minas Angelidis
Associate Professor at National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) /
School of Architecture / Department of Urban and Regional Planning

Track: **The political organization of spatial planning**

Title: Strategic alliances of cities: a response to the network society effects on urban systems. The case of Greece.

1. Basic questions

Our basic hypothesis is that the intensifying of the networking between cities at different spatial levels[1] renders inadequate the current forms of spatial governance and more specifically the current form of spatial planning.

Could the formation of *"alliances of cities"*, going with suitable territorial planning, constitute appropriate answers (among others, of course) to these inadequacies?

These issues will be approached through the analysis of the transformation of the Greek urban system and the discussion of the weaknesses of spatial governance and spatial planning, which has been presented in Greece, as well as the potentials to confront them by supporting suitable "alliances of cities" and *"networking" territorial planning*. They will be considered within the framework of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (1999), calling for a better balanced and polycentric development of the European territory.

Specific questions that will be examined are:

- Which are the contributions of the "networking" on the content of the spatial planning in each territorial level (metropolises, small and medium sized cities, urban – rural relations)?

- If we consider that the "strategic alliances of cities" constitutes a more powerful form of collaboration / networking (compared to the occasional one) for the development of a network of cities and its region (corresponding to given jurisdictional boundaries), which could be the main objectives of the relevant territorial planning? Which are the main sectors that should be confronted in common by the collaborating local/ regional bodies? Which are the forms of intervention required?

- Which are the necessary adaptations of the Greek polycentric development policy to implement objectives and instruments of the European wide spatial planning?

---

[1] As well as between cities and the rural space

2. New networks and spatial structures

Since the ' 70s we have entered a period of transformation of the development process, dependent on the growing influence of new technology, with new localization patterns of large as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (flexible specialization etc), with change in the economic sectors and their "space"[2] (Castells 1989).

Three major forms of urban networking

In this general framework, a first change is the rapid integration of the cities in network. Networking concerns relationships between the cities as well as between the cities and the space of the countryside. Consequently, we have new forms of *Geographical Units* (analytical concept) as well as *new forms of Spatial Planning Units* (SPU) (spatial policy concept). Thus, a second change, closely related to the first, consists of the emergence of new forms of spatial governing and spatial planning.

Complementarities / regroupings of the cities are shaped and the relations between cities located even very far between them intensify. In several cases, the setting in network becomes independent of the space proximity, as well as the dimension of the cities and their activities.

Even before the '70s there have been networks of cities in various areas, related to the polarization around an administrative scheme (and its centre), around significant economic activities (and their estuary) or around these two polarized schemes in synergy. Today, *urban networks are articulated around the "competing" networks of activities, which develop* (Veltz 1994, Offner - Pumain 1996) at international level and also at the level of the European Union - which interests us more[3].

Dependent in network are not only the small and medium-sized cities, but also metropolitan spaces and spaces of the countryside.

We can discern three major forms of urban networking:

(a) Extension of the metropolitan areas through the integration of neighbouring cities and towns

The cities are spread out initially towards their suburbs. Nowadays, the "city" is more dependent on small towns and settlements and on areas of the countryside, located beyond the suburbs (near or remote)[4].

Consequently, a new urban form emerges, which constitutes a "Geographical Unit" and, usually, a Spatial Planning Unit (SPU). We can call it "urban region". Here, the setting in network is being reflected on the intensity of daily commuting, and, in general, on the intensity of the economic and social relations.

In the metropolitan areas where the potential (of the activities, population, relations) is more significant, the formation of this new urban form of three zones - the "metapolis", according to some (Ascher 1995) - is more obvious. That does not mean that this third zone does not relate to the other large cities or the small and medium-sized ones.

---

[2] Industrial space, service space, agricultural space etc
[3] They depend on one or more branches of industry, services etc.
[4] We can compare this third zone (beyond the dense urban area and suburbs) with the islands of an archipelago.

(b) Strengthening of the urban – rural relationships

Almost in all the rural areas the potential of the agricultural activities is restricted, these last being hardly dominating, while the activities of trade, services, tourism etc are developed. In these areas, the agricultural activities are connected in network to the non-agricultural activities of the local centres (towns, cities) much strongly than formerly. *The networking of the towns and the small settlements of the countryside between them intensifies.* Also, *the networks of the settlements of the countryside are dependent more strongly on the cities*[5].

(c) *Strengthening of the urban networks*

Networking between cities[6], as distinct entities, strengthens as well. This networking concerns different levels of cities: networking between small and medium-sized cities and networking between those cities and the metropolises. It also concerns cities located at different distances between them or at different territorial levels; international, national, regional or local level.

3. From spatial governing to spatial governance.
The role of the "alliances of cities".

Main objective of the spatial governing is to manage local problems of economic development and citizens' quality of life. As we already mentioned, nowadays, relationships between different spatial levels and, therefore, between bodies governing spatial entities at different spatial levels have become complex. On the other hand, apart from the public administration, collective bodies of the private sector or semi-public bodies, intervene more actively to the management of the local problems. Therefore, a new form of spatial governing emerges, called ***"spatial governance"***, which better integrates into the spatial governing the action of these numerous and various stakeholders (actors). Spatial governance means *better vertical and horizontal partnership* between different stakeholders.

Spatial governance in practise refers to concrete Spatial Planning Units (SPU), the areas of which are defined by the extent of the productive structures, the infrastructures, the services, the problems that should be approached in common. As we pointed out previously, the strengthening of the urban networking extends the areas (at different levels) that should be approached in common. For example: first: an SPU corresponding to a city has to be extended to include the surrounding rural areas; second: an SPU referred to an emerging network of medium-sized cities should be established, which would cover the SPUs of the corresponding cities. "Governance" of the new, extended, SPU does not mean suppression of the existing SPUs; it requires enhancement of the cooperation between them, constitution of an ***"alliance of cities"***. Obviously, in some cases, merging of the existing SPUs is more efficient.

Objective of an "alliance of cities" is the management of the infrastructures, the services etc referred to the total of the considered area. Therefore, *a strategic plan* of this area has to be elaborated and implemented, so that the alliance of cities could be named ***"strategic alliance of cities"*** (SAC). In an important number of cases, coordinated actions in the framework of SACs have improved the spatial planning implementation considerably.

---

[5] As we mentioned before, the networks being relatively closer to the cities are inclined towards them to benefit from their services, and, more generally, from their advantages. They are connected in network to those instead of following an "endogenous" development.

[6] "Urban regions"

4. Polycentric development of the EU territory and proper levels of strategic alliances of cities

Unification of the European territory raises the competition between different European cities and regions, so it constitutes a threat addressed to these last. By the enhancement of the cooperation and complementarities between cities, stronger urban networks are constituted which can cause the development of their wider regions to be more competitive, so to respond effectively to the threat.

European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) aims at a balanced and polycentric development of the European territory. So, it favours the constitution of more competitive urban networks and regions. It is of course crucial to analyse spatial inequalities in the EU territory to specify what kind of urban networking, what kind of strategic alliances of cities to promote.

This is obviously a very complicated question. Simplifying, five levels of integration zones and corresponding (more or less) cities networks could be discerned:

a. The level of *Global Integration Zones* (GIZ). GIZ are regions containing very strong urban systems, including international level metropolises.

b. The level of *Transnational cooperation / MESO Regional zones*.

In the EU territory there is only one GIZ, the "pentagon", situated in Western Europe. By promoting transnational cooperation, mainly between metropolises and other transnational level cities, we could promote the formation of other GIZs in the rest of the EU territory.

c. The *Major Urban Systems at national level*.

d. The *networks of small and medium sized cities at national level*.

c. The *urban – rural relationships at national level*.

These issues are examined by several projects elaborated in the framework of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON). These projects have not produced final answers to the above questions yet. Although, taking into account the provisional ESPON results as well as other approaches, we estimate that in European level *priority should be given to the cooperation, and, therefore, to the establishment of strategic alliances between the major urban regions situated outside the pentagon, mainly in the north-eastern, eastern and southern parts of Europe*.

Strategic alliances of cities contribute to balanced and polycentric development in different *national contexts*. Although, configuration and weaknesses of urban systems differ in each specific context. Therefore, we have to examine these particularities in order to define proper strategic alliances of cities in each country. We will present here the results of the analysis of the Greek case as an example of this approach.

5. The Greek urban system: structure and threats

We used mainly the results of two research programs, one on the "urban system" (Angelidis M. et al 1998) and another on "small and medium-sized cities and the countryside" (Angelidis M. – Wassenhoven L. et al 2001) in Greece.

In the first three post-war decades, spatial growth in Greece was focused in the metropolitan regions of Athens and Thessalonica and in the S-shaped "Patras – Athens – Thessalonica – Kavala" (Map 1). However, in the '80s and '90s the Greek urban system changed considerably.

The *metropolitan region of Athens* maintains its primacy, even though its administrative domination on the rest of the country is now limited[7].

The *metropolitan region of Thessalonica* has expanded and at the same time its influence over Northern Greece has increased, an influence, which, progressively, has spread in the wider Balkan territory.

Other urban centres[8] *with an important regional and local role* remain comparatively weak.

Only Patras, Heraklion and the twin pole "Volos – Larissa" have reached a population size of 130,000 – 240,000 (Map 1). The remaining administrative regional centres do not exceed 80,000 residents. Most prefectoral centres, i.e. the centres of the administrative division of nomos (prefecture), are even smaller. 40% of them have a population below 20,000. Their role as service centres of their countryside is limited.

Apart from changes in demographic size and economic importance, what should be emphasized is that *functional relations between cities (large, medium or small) or between them and their suburban zones and the countryside have grown considerably in intensity, often to an impressive degree.* We can also detect a considerable intensification of relations and flows within the countryside.
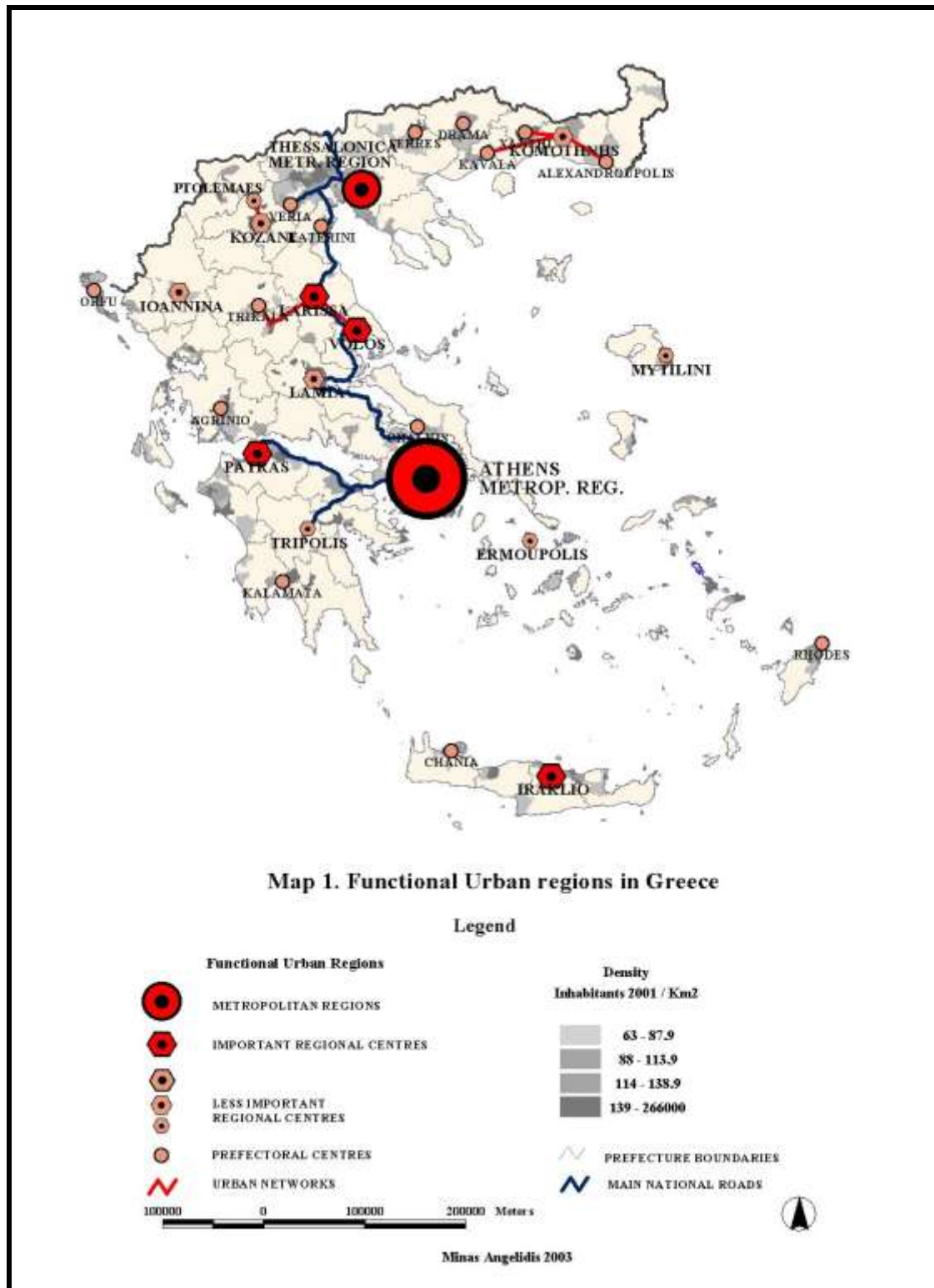
This intensification of flows / relations at local, regional, national or even European/international level is due to marked improvements in transport and communication infrastructure and to the development of a more open and "extrovert" economy, everywhere in the country. New and wider spatial entities are emerging, at all the territorial levels.

The intensification of internal area relations and the enlargement of spatial units are already having an impact on spatial development planning and spatial governance in the country, an impact that is likely to increase, as indeed it should.

---

[7] The population of its agglomeration, as initially defined, i.e. the so-called Basin of Athens, is stabilised, but the metropolitan region now extends to all Attica and maintains high rates of economic and demographic growth

[8] The development of other Greek urban centres is sharply differentiated, depending on size, location, economic characteristics and type of interconnection with other centres and with their respective hinterland.

In all these centres, the contribution of the rural, as well as the industrial sector, to the urban economy and employment is now limited, while the contribution of services, especially, in most cases, of tourism, has increased. Even in urban centres with a population of 10,000 – 20,000 or less, employment in services and tourism represents more than 50% of total employment.

Map 1. Functional Urban regions in Greece

Legend

Functional Urban Regions

METROPOLITAN REGIONS

IMPORTANT REGIONAL CENTRES

LESS IMPORTANT REGIONAL CENTRES

PREFECTORAL CENTRES

URBAN NETWORKS

Density
Inhabitants 2001 / Km2

63 - 87.9

88 - 113.9

114 - 138.9

139 - 266000

PREFECTURE BOUNDARIES

MAIN NATIONAL ROADS

100000   0   100000   200000 Meters

Minas Angelidis 2003

If we examine the Greek case in a European perspective, we will realise that *the Greek urban system disposes of two dynamic competitive poles, the metropolitan regions of Athens and Thessalonica, and several much smaller urban systems, of inadequate cohesion and development, therefore of unsatisfactory competitive potential at a European level.*

Therefore, **priority should be given to the support of alliances between Greek small and medium-sized cities in order to create urban networks, which could be competitive at European level.**

6. Spatial governance and strategic alliances of cities in Greece

It is important, in order to better comprehend the partnership arrangements between municipalities, to present, very concisely, the place and the role of the municipalities in the Greek system of Spatial Planning.

In Greece there are four levels of Spatial Planning and four relevant levels of responsible Authorities:
- *National level:* Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works and Ministry of Economy.
- *Regional level:* Thirteen Regional Authorities which are indirectly elected[9].
- *Prefectoral level:* 52 Prefectoral Authorities which are elected.
- *Municipal level:* 1,000 Municipalities (and some small Communities), which are elected.

Mainly since 1981, the participation of the Municipalities in the Spatial Planning has been strengthened progressively.

In 1997, with the conjunction of many small Communities into powerful Municipalities (aiming to reduce the overall number of Municipalities and Communities from 5,000 to 1,000), the "new" Municipalities in practice acquired the possibility to apply Spatial and Urban Plans but also to participate effectively in the formulation of the orientations of the Spatial Plans.

Already since the '80s many Municipalities have begun to collaborate in issues, such as the joint construction of shared infrastructure but also in Spatial Planning issues.

This collaboration took the form of:

1. *Developmental Associations*, which deal with some or many common issues.

2. *Developmental Companies*, which as a rule deal with more subjects in comparison to the Developmental Associations.

Beyond the improvement of collaboration, presented initially, the "Developmental Company" had certain additional advantages:

---

[9] Each Regional Authority is directed by a Secretary General designated by the government and a Board of Directors comprising of: the prefects of the Region, delegates of the Local Unions of Municipalities and Communities (LUMC) of the interested Prefectoral Authorities and delegates of some professional bodies.

- It offered the economic and administrative flexibility required for the implementation of actions and programs, an element that was missing from the type of Municipality relevant in the Greek context, whose actions were closely controlled by the Public authorities.

- The Developmental Company would undertake the finding of resources and programs from the EC, an activity which also could not be undertaken easily by the Municipalities.

During the last decade, fourteen Developmental Companies had an important activity. There are also some other Developmental Companies with less important activity.

Relevant studies[10] demonstrated that *cooperation between Greek cities*, mainly through Developmental Companies, *had mainly been motivated by the improvement of their potentials to exploit EC regional policy founds, the implementation of more flexible forms of financial management and, only in a few cases, the construction of common infrastructures. The collaborative Municipalities didn't proceed, in most cases, to the constitution of strategic plans of their regions.* This weakness mainly explains the fact that many actions financed by the Community Support Framework of Greece 2000-2006 are not included in proper strategies of regional development.

It is true that Greek public authorities didn't support these collaborations as they should have. Therefore, nowadays, these collaborations don't present a remarkable improvement, since local rival ties remain strong.

The Greek Ministry of Interior, Public administration and Decentralisation has proposed a set of incentives favouring Municipalities implementing spatial development strategies in common. The passage of the relevant bill is absolutely necessary. It is also necessary that the interested Municipalities express a strong political will to promote strategic alliances between their cities.

More generally, we could conclude that in less developed countries, where the spatial planning systems as well as the intervention of local authorities in spatial development are weak, formation and efficient functioning of strategic alliances of cities only on local authorities' initiative are difficult. Support from regional, national and even EC authorities is necessary.

References

Angelidis M. (scientific responsible) – Karka G. – Panrazis A. et al, *The National Urban Network: Existing conditions and policy recommendations*, National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), 1998.

Angelidis M. (sc. resp.) – Wassenhoven L. et al, *Strategic action plan for the development of small and medium size towns and of the surrounding countryside,* NTUA, 2001.

Angelidis M. (sc. resp.) – Karka G. et al, *The central activities network of the Athens metropolitan region*, NTUA, 2000.

The above three research programs were financed by the Greek authorities.

---

[10] Our research on local authorities' partnership in spatial development in Greece, done in the framework of the ESPON project 1.1.1 (2003) as well as our researches on urban networking in Greece, op. cit.

Ascher F., *Métapolis ou l' avenir des villes*, Ed. Odile Jacob, Paris, 1995

Castells M., *The Informational City*, 1989.

ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) on going project (ESPON 1.1.1): *"The role, specific situation and potentials of urban areas as nodes in a polycentric development"* (2002 -) - Second Interim Report, March 2002

ESPON on going project (ESPON 1.1.3): *"Enlargement of the European Union and the wider European perspective as regards its polycentric spatial structure"* (2002 -) - First Interim Report, March 2002

The rapporteur is a member of the Greek team participating in the Transnational Project Groups of the above two projects.

European Commission, *European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)* (adopted at ministerial level in May 1999*)*, EC Publications Office, 1999.

European Commission, *Study Programme on European Spatial Planning (SPESP) - Final Report,* Brussels - Stockholm, March 2000. (See the final and the preliminary reports in www.nordregio.se)

European Commission*, Second report on economic and social cohesion,* EC Publications Office, Luxembourg, 2001.

National Technical University of Athens and University of Paris X / Coordinator: Angelidis M. - Conference on "*The new polycentricity (polycentrism) and spatial development: Urban areas, small and medium size towns and the countryside*", Athens, September 2001. The proceedings of this conference are under publication.

Offner J.-M. – Pumain D. (éd.), *Réseaux et territoires: Significations croisées*, Ed. de l' aube / territoire, Paris, 1996.

Veltz P., *Des territoires pour apprendre et innover*, Editions de l' Aube / Série Territoires et Sociétés, Paris, 1994