

Hans Heinrich Blotevogel

## **History of spatial planning (*Raumordnung*)**



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# History of spatial planning

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**Spatial planning as a political/administrative field of action was first institutionalised predominantly at the municipal level in the 1920s, and at the state level in the 1930s. A comprehensive multi-level system of spatial planning was created in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s and adopted in the new states after reunification.**

## 1 Development up to the First World War

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Supra-local spatial planning emerged in Germany shortly before the First World War, when the negative effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on people's living conditions became apparent. The 19th-century liberal concept of the state gave way to the realisation that predictive planning of settlement and infrastructure development by public authorities was necessary in order to remedy the worst grievances and in order to create 'rational' spatial planning by controlling the use of space, particularly the development of settlements and open spaces. The following text is based to a large extent on the detailed account by Blotevogel and Schelhaas 2011, which is referred to here in summary.

The first milestones of regional planning, then known as 'federal state spatial planning', can be seen in the memorandum for the creation of a general settlement plan by Robert Schmidt (1912) and the establishment of the first regional planning associations for Greater Berlin (1912) and the Ruhr area (1920). Governmental spatial planning in Germany followed in 1935. The Greater Berlin special purpose association (*Zweckverband Groß-Berlin*), founded in 1911, encompassed the municipally fragmented settlement area of Berlin and two surrounding districts. Its tasks included planning trams and underground and/or elevated railway lines, participating in the municipal building line plans and construction plans, a standardised building line plan for through and arterial roads, a right of complaint for municipal building line planning, and the acquisition and maintenance of large open spaces (woods, parks, sports areas, etc.). The special purpose association was soon disbanded in 1920 in favour of the formation of Greater Berlin (ARL 1971).

## 2 The 1920s

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The Ruhr Coal District Settlement Association (*Siedlingsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk, SVR*) had a more lasting effect. After the Essen alderman Robert Schmidt, in a memorandum for the creation of a general settlement plan (1912), demanded comprehensive regional planning for the maintenance and creation of green spaces, regulated settlement development and transport planning, the Ruhr Coal District Settlement Association was founded in 1920 by Prussian law, encompassing the entire Ruhr area, and Robert Schmidt was appointed director. The Ruhr Coal District Settlement Association's planning scope focused on planning measures of *regional*, i.e. supra-local significance: (1) the maintenance of large green spaces, (2) development and organisation of the regional transport network, and (3) participation in the construction of building line plans and binding land-use plans.

In the course of the 1920s, other regions of the German Reich also formed municipally dominated federal state spatial planning institutions, albeit mostly in a loose form as an association or informal cooperation. There was a particular need to coordinate settlement and transport developments in the densely populated areas, for example in the central German industrial area concentrated around Leipzig and Halle, or around Hamburg and Berlin. In 1931, the planning regions covered 29% of the territory and 58% of the population of the Reich.

### 3 Spatial planning in the National Socialist period

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In the early 1930s, ideas emerged for authoritarian governmental spatial planning in the sense of a hierarchical multi-level system with central control, from the Reich level to the states and provinces and down to the cities and local authorities. Spatial planning was intended not only to contribute to the rational regulation of land use but also to control the locations of industry and to resettle populations on a large scale. In 1935, the Reich government founded the Reich Agency for Spatial Planning (*Reichsstelle für Raumordnung, RfR*). According to its founding decree, its task was ‘the collective, overarching planning and ordering of German space for the entire territory of the Reich’. The same year saw the founding of the German Association for Spatial Research (*Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumforschung, RAG*), an association of scientists from numerous universities, whose task was to develop the scientific foundations for the new political/administrative field of action, coordinated by the agronomist Konrad Meyer. The spatial planning policy was to be underpinned by ‘spatial research’ in the service of the National Socialist ideology and policy, which was intended to give it scientifically legitimacy. The German Association for Spatial Research founded the journal *Raumforschung und Raumordnung* (Journal for Spatial Research and Planning), which still exists today, and after 1945, the association became the Academy for Territorial Development (*Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung*).

The municipal federal state spatial planning associations formed in the Weimar Republic were aligned with the strict hierarchy of National Socialist spatial policy; they had to submit to ‘supervision and instruction’ by the Reich Agency for Spatial Planning and were subsumed in 1936 into 23 new federal state spatial planning associations, now organised nationwide by state and/or Prussian province, as well as the Reich capital of Berlin (Istel 1985). Until that point, planning associations had only been formed in urban regions with intensive settlement development; now, for the first time, rural areas, for example in southern Germany and in the eastern provinces of Prussia, were also incorporated into the system of spatial planning (Reich level) and federal state spatial planning (provinces or states).

The ideological programme of Nazi spatial planning aimed to overcome the allegedly ‘unhealthy’ spatial structures created by liberalism and industrialism by means of a planned organisation of German living space. The programme demanded the ‘deconcentration’ of industrial areas in favour of industrial locations in small towns, as well as resettlements of farming populations in connection with the realignment and consolidation of agricultural land holdings and land improvement measures in order to create a ‘healthy’ agrarian social structure; however, this was scarcely implemented in practice.

A particularly dark chapter of German spatial planning history is the cooperation of leading spatial planners such as Konrad Meyer in the so-called ‘General Plan for the East’. In the service of the SS, plans were created for ‘Germanisation’, i.e. the displacement and resettlement of millions of people in the regions of eastern Europe occupied by the Wehrmacht (Heinemann and Wagner 2006).

## 4 The early post-war period (1945-1960)

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After the Second World War, the focus was on practical questions of reconstruction of the infrastructure and the war-torn cities, as well as on remedying the housing shortage. The states created by the occupying forces enacted reconstruction laws for this purpose, which were de facto also federal spatial planning acts.

In the Federal Republic, there was a controversial debate in the 1950s about the legitimization and tasks of a spatial planning policy designed as a multi-level system. Although the term 'spatial planning' was politically discredited because it was frequently associated with state economic control, most of the federal states – both in West and in East Germany – gradually established federal state spatial planning authorities; regional planning institutions, which were often informal, grew up alongside them. North Rhine-Westphalia was a special case, since the federal state spatial planning drafted by the local authority there for the (northern) Rhineland, the Ruhr area and Westphalia had remained entirely functional during the war.

When assessing the fundamental spatial planning problems, a clear continuity from the inter-war period into the early post-war period can be identified: 'agglomeration problems' on the one hand and rural 'emergency regions' (including the 'border zones') on the other were seen as the main challenge of spatial planning (Isbary/von der Heide/Müller 1969; Leendertz 2008). There were contentious discussions about the establishment of spatial planning as a political/administrative multi-level system and, above all, about the establishment of spatial planning on the federal state level. It was not until 1965 that the Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Raumordnungsgesetz*) was adopted in the Federal Republic, which at least granted the federation a framework competence in spatial planning policy with regard to the states (Ernst 1991).

## 5 Spatial planning in the German Democratic Republic

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After the German Democratic Republic was founded in 1949, spatial planning and central economic control were concentrated under the umbrella of the State Planning Commission (*Staatliche Plankommission, SPK*) and became an important instrument for the 'development of socialism' according to the Soviet model. After the dissolution of the states and the creation of 14 districts (1952), supra-local spatial planning and economic location planning were merged into area planning, whereby a certain dualism between economic future planning and technical/creative planning to shape settlements remained intact. From 1965, offices for territorial planning, which were subordinate to the district planning commissions, were active in the districts. In principle, however, territorial planning remained subordinate to centralised economic planning (Kehrer 1998).

Part of the aim of developing a socialist society was to overcome the disparities between town and country, which were viewed as a capitalist inheritance, as well as those between the more heavily industrialised southern districts and the sparsely populated northern districts. This was the purpose of the decision to expand district capitals such as Rostock and Neubrandenburg, as well as to develop and expand industrial cities in connection with industrial combines (Schwedt, Eisenhüttenstadt, Hoyerswerda). Ultimately, these goals were not achieved, particularly as the

industrialisation policy along Soviet lines was accompanied by an overexploitation of natural resources. The system of territorial planning in the German Democratic Republic disappeared with the end of the republic itself.

## 6 Spatial planning in der Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s and 1970s: planning optimism and crisis

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In the 1960s and early 1970s, spatial planning generally met with broad political acceptance, which was now democratically legitimised and free of totalitarian aspects. Spatial planning was now seen as a political/administrative field of action which could make an essential contribution to the rationalisation and modernisation of policy and administration (Kaiser 1965).

In 1965, prepared by an Expert Report (SARO [Expert Committee for Spatial Planning] 1961), the Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Bundesraumordnungsgesetz, ROG*) was finally enacted, which acknowledged the federation's own, albeit restricted competence with regard to federal state spatial planning, as well as a framework competence for spatial planning in the states. The specification of the general principles of spatial planning through the Federal Spatial Planning Act and, above all, the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning (*Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung, MKRO*), which was founded in 1967, in which all the states worked together alongside the federation, guaranteed a more or less standardised spatial planning policy throughout the national territory. A few years earlier (1960), municipal spatial planning had been given a new, national legal foundation in the Federal Building Law (*Bundesbaugesetz, BBauG*), and as a result of the Federal Spatial Planning Act, the final federal states had also enacted federal state spatial planning acts and implemented regional planning, with the result that a seamless spatial planning system now emerged on four levels: federation, state, region and local authority. This multi-level system was (and is) characterised by the so-called mutual feedback principle, in which the top-down specifications by the higher level are linked to bottom-up cooperation from the next level down.

In the *federal states*, the system of federal state and regional planning received a comprehensive instrumental structure in the 1960s and 1970s. Gradually, all the non-city states began to develop plans and programmes on the basis of their federal state spatial planning acts. The guiding principle here, too, was to align the spatial and settlement structure in accordance with the normative guidelines of the Federal Spatial Planning Act towards a system of central places, development axes and interjacent free spaces, as well as to set regionally specific objectives by means of spatial allocation according to territorial categories or regions with particular developmental priorities. Examples of such plans, which focused on conventional spatial planning issues, are the Federal State Development Plans I and II in North Rhine-Westphalia (1966, 1970) and the Lower Saxony Federal State Spatial Planning Programme 1969.

Some states linked the task of federal state spatial planning to a comprehensive remit for federal state development in the sense of integrated development planning. The pioneers of this model were Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia, followed by Lower Saxony. North Rhine-Westphalia produced the first state development programme (1964) and the first federal state development plans (1966, 1970), and in the municipal reorganisation between 1967 and 1975,

## History of spatial planning (Raumordnung)

the political/administrative map of North Rhine-Westphalia was reorganised according to the principles of federal state spatial planning.

By 1974, almost all the non-city states had established spatial development plans. They had various names: federal state development plan (Baden-Württemberg 1971/73, Hesse 1971, North Rhine-Westphalia 1970), federal state spatial planning programme (Hesse 1970, Lower Saxony 1974), federal state development programme (Rhineland-Palatinate 1968, Lower Saxony 1973, North Rhine-Westphalia 1974), federal spatial development programme (Saarland 1967/70, Schleswig-Holstein 1967), spatial development plan (Schleswig-Holstein 1969/73). The last state to do so was Bavaria, where the first state development programme was not set up until 1976.

At the *regional level*, regional planning was implemented extensively in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. Around 1960, two very different organisational models existed: the municipal federal state spatial planning associations in North Rhine-Westphalia and the governmental regional planning in Bavaria and Lower Saxony, which was organised as part of federal state spatial planning. Since the Federal Spatial Planning Act left the organisation of regional planning to the federal states, the states decided on organisational forms which combined municipal and state elements in different ways. Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate formed municipal planning associations at the regional level, whereas North Rhine-Westphalia expanded the influence of the state.

It became evident by the mid-1970s at the latest that the demands of far-reaching vertical and horizontal coordination in spatial planning could not be fulfilled (Scharpf and Schnabel 1979). This is exemplified by the Federal Spatial Planning Programme of 1975 (*Bundesraumordnungsprogramm, BRÖP*), which was adopted by the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning in 1975. In the preceding discussions over many years, several federal ministries as well as the states turned against an effective programme, with the result that the Federal Spatial Planning Programme was finally reduced to a number of empty phrases and the objective of horizontal and vertical planning coordination failed (Hübler 1991).

Spatial planning policy has since concentrated on policy and planning which is spatially relevant in the narrower sense (i.e. connected with area and structural policy) with selective horizontal coordination. In the process, spatial planning has always proven itself adaptable in orienting its guiding principles and goals to the changed problems of spatial development. The shift in guiding principles is evident in the changed assessment of rural areas and agglomeration areas, in different emphases of ecological, economic and social objectives and in the relationship between the objectives of equalisation and growth (ARL 1991).

## 7 Spatial planning in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1980s: loss of significance and ecologisation

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After the years of noticeable planning optimism, in the second half of the 1970s a widespread scepticism in relation to planning set in, in some cases intensifying into a complete rejection of public planning. With the end of the Fordist era, which was characterised by stability, the understanding of government also changed: the European model of the welfare state entered the firing line of criticism, and with it the idea that the state should and could provide for growth and

full employment and ensure its citizens a comprehensive provision of public services in all areas of the country at an approximately equal level. In addition to this came a profound change in the planning processes, since citizens were increasingly unwilling to let themselves unquestioningly be 'planned' by the planning bureaucracy, no matter how legally legitimated and scientifically justified the planning processes were.

From the 1970s, environmental questions gained significant importance. As the population became increasingly sensitised to ecological matters, the prevailing technocratic planning, with its focus on growth and the development of infrastructure, was criticised. It became increasingly evident that the hard modernisation policy pursued in connection with optimism about progress, including the car-friendly restructuring of cities, land regeneration measures, concentrated large housing developments, large-scale industrial energy production, the radical realignment and consolidation of agricultural land holdings, etc. came at the expense of people's natural resources. In public, spatial planning was increasingly viewed as part of the problem rather than as its solution.

A new emphasis was set by the influence of the nature conservation and ecology movement. In 1976, the Federal Nature Conservation Act (*Bundesnaturschutzgesetz, BNatSchG*) replaced the Imperial Nature Conservation Act of 1935. The great social significance attributed to ecological issues since the 1970s triggered a discussion in spatial planning about a readjustment of the target system. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, questions of social justice (equivalence of living conditions) and economic efficiency (growth and employment) were at the forefront, principles such as the preservation of natural resources, the securing of open spaces and environmental quality targets now attained at least the same level of importance. The 'ecologisation of spatial planning' (Gnest 2008) also found expression in the allocation of federal state spatial planning authorities to the environmental ministries in many federal states.

## 8 Development since reunification

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German unification heralded a new phase of spatial development and spatial planning in Germany. In the new Federal Republic, a sharp disparity emerged between West and East in economic performance and income, which gave a new topicality to the spatial planning political principle of "equivalent living conditions". Policymakers responded to the challenges with an unprecedented investment and development programme in order to balance out living conditions and create the conditions through which the new federal states could 'catch up' in terms of growth. The infrastructure was modernised and expanded, urban development renewal was subsidised, the horizontal fiscal equalisation in favour of the East German states and local authorities was increased, and economic development from the federation (*GRW* [Principles and Guidelines for Competitions in the Fields of Spatial Planning, Urban Development and Building]) and the European Union was extended to East Germany with top priority.

At the state and regional level, too, spatial planning experienced a kind of renaissance after 1990. The East German federal states developed spatial planning systems on the West German model. In quick succession, federal state spatial planning acts, federal state development programmes and regional plans were created. In a radical break, the institutional systems of German Democratic Republic planning were replaced by the West German planning system.

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In western Germany, a lively debate developed in the 1990s about the expedient institutionalisation of policy and planning at the regional level, also as a response to the intensified location competition as a result of globalisation. In many areas, a closer connection between regional planning and a regional location and development policy was called for. There was usually a preference for informal cooperation such as in the Bonn/Rhine-Sieg/Ahrweiler area, but ‘hard’ association structures also emerged, such as the special purpose association for the greater Braunschweig area, the association of the region of Stuttgart (1994), with a directly elected regional parliament, and the region of Hanover, with a diversified range of tasks, including regional planning (2001).

Spatial planning policy responded to the changed conditions of spatial development as a result of the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europeanisation and globalisation in two respects. Firstly, the ‘European dimension’ was increasingly strengthened in the instruments of spatial planning, and secondly, spatial planning policymakers directed their attention more strongly towards the role of the large cities and their competitiveness in the European and global sphere. As well as the equalising of regional disparities (social objective) and the safeguarding of natural resources (ecological objective), the third major component of the target system aimed at by spatial planning policy, sustainability – the promotion of growth, competitiveness and innovation strength (economic objective) – was also emphasised anew.

These new impulses decisively influenced the most important documents of spatial planning policy in the 1990s. In the Spatial Planning Policy Guidelines (*Raumordnungspolitischer Orientierungsrahmen, ORA*) (1992/1993), the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning firstly agreed on the new situation after German unification and on the new framework conditions of spatial development. In 1995, the Framework for Action in Spatial Planning Policy (*Raumordnungspolitischer Handlungsrahmen, HARA*) followed, in which the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning drew conclusions for the reorientation of spatial planning policy in Germany. Among other things, the strategic importance of the large European metropolitan regions for Germany’s growth and competitiveness in Europe was emphasised. In the same year, the federation began supporting the Model Project for Spatial Planning (*Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung, MORO*).

In 1997, in a parallel process, the German Federal Parliament amended the Federal Spatial Planning Act and the Federal Building Code with the so-called Federal Building and Spatial Planning Act amendment (*Bau- und Raumordnungsgesetz, BauROG*). This aligned the entire system of spatial planning with a standard guiding principle of sustainable spatial development. Essential components of this guiding principle are intergenerational responsibility for resources and the triad of economic, social and ecological goals. However, the introduction of the new guiding principle did not mean any fundamental material change in the spatial planning target system, since the components were already part of the normative core of spatial policy.

In the 1990s, there were new approaches to the procedural reorientation of spatial development policy, as informal instruments of persuasive and cooperative steering gained increasing importance (Gnest 2008). These include regional development strategies, an increased use of information and communication strategies, and processes for consensus-building by the participating stakeholder groups. This was also connected with a change in the overarching understanding of spatial planning: alongside the planning task, the development task was increasingly perceived as important, and attempts were made to put this into practice.

In this sense, planning activity can still be characterised as predominantly incremental, albeit now increasingly supplemented by a strategic perspective. This mode of regional development policy has been described as ‘perspective incrementalism’ (Ganser et al. 1993); other authors go even further and speak of a ‘renaissance of strategic planning’ (Salet and Faludi 2000).

## 9 Conclusions

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This review shows how the position of spatial planning varied throughout the different phases of history. The spectrum ranges from rather ineffectual informal regional planning associations in the 1920s to aspirations of totalitarian control in the National Socialist state. The idea of comprehensive spatial planning which aspired to across-the-board vertical and horizontal integration and coordination was articulated under very different sociopolitical auspices, and in some cases attempts were made to implement it, but without lasting success. The doctrine of a limited claim to steering, coordination and design, which had already been seen in the 1920s, only became common theory and practice in spatial planning in the second half of the 1970s.

In historical retrospect, the degree of flexibility with which the analytical and design instruments of spatial planning were applied in extremely contrasting social and political contexts seems remarkable. An example of this is the concept of sustainability, which was developed in the 1930s in the sense of the agricultural sustainability of particular areas. The concept was later used both as a justification for totalitarian resettlement and displacement plans and for agricultural and infrastructural planning in the democratic constitutional state of the young Federal Republic, as well as ultimately for ecological issues. The same applies to the central-place theory, which was developed by Walter Christaller before 1933. The central-place theory which developed from this was applied equally in authoritarian National Socialist spatial planning, in the regional and territorial planning of the German Democratic Republic, and in the spatial planning policy of the Federal Republic (Kegler 2015).

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