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*the 'businessification' of strategic spatial planning?*

Olesen, Kristian; Hansen, Carsten Jahn

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## **Introducing Business Regions in Denmark: The 'Businessification' of Strategic Spatial Planning?**

Kristian Olesen and Carsten Jahn Hansen, Department of Planning, Aalborg University

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the driving forces behind the promotion of new soft spaces of territorial governance in Denmark at the scale of city regions, the so-called 'business regions'. We interpret the emergence of business regions as outcomes of the most recent round of reterritorialisation in Denmark, producing new spaces for promoting neoliberal policy agendas of competitiveness, job creation and economic growth. We argue that the business regions should not only be understood as products of neoliberalisation, but also as spaces of neoliberal experimentation, contributing to the normalisation of policy agendas of job creation and business development as taken-for-granted planning objectives. We conclude that the new business regions emerging at the scale of city regions constitute new political spaces for reworking the Danish planning culture in the context of neoliberalism. We suggest that this development can be conceptualised as a 'businessification' of strategic spatial planning.

### **Keywords**

Business regions, soft spaces, neoliberalism, planning culture, Denmark

### **1. Introduction**

Significant attention has recently been paid to the new forms of territorial governance emerging at the scale of urban regions in Western Europe (Allmendinger et al., 2015; Janssen-Jansen and Hutton, 2011). In the planning literature, these new spaces of governance have been conceptualised as 'soft spaces' with 'fuzzy boundaries', as they are often located in between formal levels of governance, and are not necessarily univocally bounded (Haughton et al., 2010). It is claimed, that the new spaces of territorial governance do not as much replace formal levels of governance, as they seek to supplement existing governance structures in strategic ways, e.g. around specific policy agendas, thus adding extra layers to an increasingly complex and fragmented governance landscape (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009a).

As in many other European countries, Denmark has experienced an explosion in the number of informal or non-compulsory governance networks working across formal boundaries in recent years. As part of this general trend, a number of city region networks have emerged around the biggest Danish cities. Drawing on experiences mainly from other Nordic countries, several of the networks identify themselves as 'business regions', and have formulated goals and visions revolving primarily around attracting businesses and a highly-educated workforce to the region. In the Danish debate the concepts of 'business regions' and 'city regions' are often used interchangeably, as the networks, regardless of the self-proclaimed label, seek to address similar challenges. For

convenience we adopt the terminology of ‘business regions’ in this paper to describe the new governance networks at the scale of city regions.

In this paper, we explore the rationalities behind the emergence of business regions in and around the four biggest cities in Denmark. In our analysis, we draw mainly on state theory and the emerging literature on soft spaces and neoliberalisation. Following Haughton et al. (2013), we tentatively conceptualise the Danish business regions as ‘spaces of neoliberal experimentation’. On the one hand, we interpret the emergence of business regions in a Danish context as part of a longer genealogy, in which Danish spatial planning has been re-oriented towards urban entrepreneurialism and subjected to neoliberalisation (Olesen, 2011, 2014). In this context, the regions can be understood as products of yet another round of spatial restructuring and reterritorialisation, in which glocalisation strategies seek to promote particular spaces and scales for strategy-making and capital accumulation (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b). On the other hand, we also understand the new business regions as key spaces for challenging and transforming the Danish planning culture in general.

In these ways, the paper draws attention to how spatial governance at the scale of city regions is being transformed in the context of neoliberalism. In many ways, the reterritorializations in Denmark with increasing attention towards the scale of city regions mirror contemporary European trends of city regionalism (Harrison, 2012; Harrison and Growe, 2014; Janssen-Jansen and Hutton, 2011). What is particular about the Danish variation is the strong emphasis on ‘business development’, and the ways in which regional policy-making increasingly is shaped by local development agendas of business development and job creation, together with extra-local forces of globalisation and inter-urban competition. This transformation reflects the historical-geographical characteristics of how neoliberalisation influences in Danish spatial planning (Carter et al., 2015; Olesen and Carter, 2018). The Danish business regions can thus be understood as an example of how variegated forms of neoliberalism manifest themselves in particular forms of governance and policy agendas in time and space.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we outline our conceptual understanding of the emergence of soft spaces, and discuss how these spaces can be conceptualised as ‘products’ of reterritorialisations and neoliberalisations of strategic spatial planning, as well as key spaces for reworking the planning culture. Second, we describe the context in which the emergence of business regions in Denmark must be understood. We argue that the regions can be understood as the result of processes of spatial restructuring, in which third generation glocalisation strategies are being promoted. Third, we analyse the four most prominent business regions in Denmark, and examine the nature of the spatial strategy-making that is practised in those spaces. Fourth, we discuss the politics of the business regions and the ways in which the regions contribute to transforming the Danish planning culture. We conclude by suggesting that we might be witnessing a ‘businessification’ of strategic spatial planning in Denmark.

## **2. Soft spaces and planning culture**

In this section, we discuss the driving forces behind the proliferation of new soft spaces in Western Europe, and elaborate our understanding of soft spaces as spaces of neoliberal experimentation promoting a new planning culture rooted in neoliberal ideology.

### *2.1 The driving forces behind soft spaces*

The driving forces behind experimentation with soft spaces of territorial governance are many (Allmendinger et al., 2015). We can understand soft spaces as i) new state spaces emerging from continuous processes of state restructuring in the face of economic globalisation (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b); ii) spaces for experimentation with new approaches to strategic spatial planning in the context of urban entrepreneurialism (Olesen, 2012); iii) functional planning spaces reflecting a need to move beyond an absolute understanding of space inspired by relational geography (Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Haughton et al., 2010); and iv) networked forms of governance seeking to work outside the rigidities of statutory planning as a response to neoliberal policy agendas of policy delivery and effectiveness (Haughton et al., 2010).

According to state theorists, the production of new spaces of governance can be understood as the result of nation states searching for new 'scalar fixes' (Brenner, 2004a) or 'spatiotemporal fixes' (Jessop, 2000) in the face of economic globalisation. Since the 1960s, Western European nation states have experienced multiple rounds of spatial restructuring (Brenner, 2004a). Each round is characterised by reterritorialisations and rescalings of statehood, in which new scales and spaces are targeted for concentration of economic activity and experimentation with new forms of urban governance (Brenner, 1999, 2004b). In the most recent rounds of spatial restructuring, what Brenner (2004b) identifies as the rounds of glocalisation strategies, the experimentations with new forms of urban governance are limited to a few privileged 'new state spaces'. These spaces are argued to constitute the new key scales on which nation states compete.

As part of these processes of state restructuring, the form of urban governance changed from urban managerialism rooted in Spatial Keynesianism to urban entrepreneurialism rooted in a neoliberal ideology (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b; Harvey, 1989). Major European cities and urban regions regained the interest in strategic spatial planning and prepared spatial strategies, positioning cities and regions strategically within the global and European circuits of capital (Albrechts et al., 2003; Brenner, 2004a). Many of these (glocalisation) strategies were also concerned with developing new spatial imaginaries and identities for the new state spaces emerging in Western Europe at the time, such as the Flemish Diamond (Albrechts, 1998; Olesen and Albrechts, 2017) and the Øresund Region (Olesen and Metzger, 2017). We can thus also understand soft spaces as "exercises of re-branding, of shifting perceptions of a struggling economy for instance with a new, more positive imaginary" (Allmendinger et al., 2015: 219). The turn towards urban entrepreneurialism can in this context be understood as having paved the way for experimentations with strategic spatial planning in new soft planning spaces (Olesen, 2014).

The proliferation of experiments with soft spaces should also be understood as a result of an increasing concern with mismatches between administrative boundaries and the 'realities' of functional urban regions (Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Haughton et al., 2010). In many cases these mismatches have been deepened as a consequence of planning reforms driven by policy agendas of devolution and decentralisation, leaving behind gaps to be filled in by informal forms of governance (Haughton et al., 2010; Olesen, 2012). We can also understand the emergence of soft spaces as materialisations of European planning discourses on territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation (Faludi, 2010; Fabbro and Haselsberger, 2009). In both examples, the emergence of soft spaces reflects an ambition to move beyond an absolute understanding of space and engage with relational understandings of spatiality (Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Healey, 2007). However, despite these ambitions, critics maintain that understandings of spatiality often remain rooted in traditional understandings of space and place (Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Healey, 2004), questioning whether the usage of fuzzy boundaries and fuzzy representations of space constitute

conscious attempts to depoliticise strategic spatial planning processes (Olesen and Richardson, 2011).

Soft spaces have also been conceptualised as more pragmatic approaches to spatial planning, focusing on 'what works' in terms of implementation and policy delivery (Allmendinger, 2011; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009b). Here, soft spaces constitute deliberate neoliberal strategies to short-circuit formal planning requirements and move beyond the rigidities of statutory planning, in order to facilitate development and create a competitive advantage (Haughton et al., 2010). It has been noted that soft spaces are often constructed around highly selective policy agendas (Allmendinger et al., 2015), and that strategy-making in soft spaces tends to prioritise policy agendas of promoting economic development, whilst sidestepping formal planning responsibilities related to social justice and environmental sustainability (Haughton et al., 2010; Olesen, 2012). Furthermore, Olesen (2012) has suggested that soft spaces add to the increasing pressure on statutory spatial planning, and can act as vehicles for a neoliberal transformation of spatial planning.

## *2.2 The politics of soft spaces*

As indicated above, soft spaces should not only be understood as functional planning spaces, but also as expressions of politics in the context of neoliberalisation and postpolitics (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Haughton et al., 2013). We argue that soft spaces should not only be understood as products of the continuous neoliberalisation of spatial planning, but also as key spaces for 'destabilising existing governance practices and planning cultures' (Olesen, 2012: 911), as well as promoting new planning cultures.

Spatial planning can be argued to be strongly rooted in and restricted to the specific cultural contexts or traits of a society (Othengrafen, 2016). Planning culture has surfaced as a concept to promote an understanding of the importance of shared values and a range of intangible social dimensions in relation to planning practices and the mind-sets of those 'doing planning' (Zukin, 1995; Sanyal, 2005; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Hansen, 2011). Planning culture emerges as a result of accumulated attitudes, values, rules, standards and beliefs shared by the group of people involved (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009). However, the planning culture itself is also changeable, sensitive to changes in the overall planning frameworks, as well as political ideologies such as neoliberalism.

Recent theorisations on neoliberalism suggest that processes of neoliberalisation have moved beyond the phase of 'roll-out neoliberalisation', in which the state supports market logics and competition through strategic investments in urban development and infrastructure projects (Peck and Tickell, 2002). According to Keil (2009), we have now entered the phase of 'roll-with-it neoliberalisation', characterised by an increasing normalisation of neoliberal practices and concepts. Several authors have suggested that contemporary strategic spatial planning experiments are struggling to live up to progressive planning aims in the face of roll-with-it neoliberalisation (Cerreto et al., 2010, Haughton et al., 2010; Olesen, 2014). Allmendinger (2011) notes for example how New Labour's rationale behind soft spaces in the UK was transformed from functional spaces for policy integration and coordination to vehicles for policy delivery and growth in the aftermaths of the global credit crunch. Along the same lines, Olesen (2012) has illustrated how soft spaces in Denmark were turned into spaces for promotion of economic growth and transport infrastructure lobbying, whilst discrediting traditional regulatory planning approaches. This suggests that soft spaces have become important political spaces for promoting neoliberal agendas of stimulating

competitiveness, generating economic growth and attracting investments in transport infrastructures.

In fact, soft spaces seem to constitute important strategic spaces for promoting particular neoliberal versions of strategic spatial planning (Olesen, 2012), rooted in what Peck and Tickell (2002) have labelled 'the growth-first-principle'. Olesen (2014: 296) highlights how strategic spatial planning processes rarely allow for 'a critique of economic growth and competitiveness as the prime virtues of strategic spatial planning'. Along the same lines, Haughton et al. (2013: 222) have noted how soft spaces only seem to allow for demands to be voiced, which 'do not question and disrupt the overarching framework of market-led development'. Spatial planning in soft spaces become depoliticised strategy-making processes, in which conflicting or political sensitive issues are removed or superficially glanced over in the name of promoting economic development (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). In this way, soft spaces are governed by a strong neoliberal governmentality of what is considered 'necessary' policy agendas. This post-political planning condition is nicely captured by Haughton et al. (2013: 232) stressing that 'this new form of neoliberal governmentality has reworked the nature of planning itself'. Allmendinger and Haughton (2009a) argue that soft spaces have contributed to an opening up of the professional boundaries of spatial planning, which in term have become fuzzier. Spatial planning has developed into a discipline of (much) more than merely land use regulation and managerial approaches. However, at the same time the policy repertoire of spatial planning has seemingly become narrower, focused primarily on promoting economic growth. We argue that this change in the nature of planning can be interpreted as a change in planning culture.

Contemporary reworkings of the planning cultures in Western Europe seem to be characterised by two dialectic processes of opening up and blurring the professional boundaries of spatial planning, whilst spatial planning at the same time is subjected to neoliberal governmentalities promoting a narrow set of policy agendas. It is these dialectic processes, we explore in the case of the Danish business regions, in order to develop an understanding of how these spaces contribute to transforming the Danish planning culture. Here, we are primarily interested in the assumptions, values and cognitive frames among those 'doing planning' – what are planners, politicians and other key actors in planning 'taking for granted' (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009). Attention to such aspects may further reveal the contextuality and rationalities of key actors and the changing professional boundaries in soft spaces, including potentially important aspects of 'roll-with-it neoliberalisation'. Hence, in studying soft spaces we also bring special attention to situation-specific expressions of policy communities and cultures in the business region (Hansen, 2011).

### **3. The emergence of soft spaces and a new planning culture in Denmark**

In this section, we outline the context within which the emergence of business regions in Denmark must be understood. Adopting the terminology from Brenner (2004a, 2004b), we argue that Denmark has experienced three rounds of spatial restructuring in the last three decades, and that the emergence of business regions can be understood as a result of the most recent process of spatial restructuring, in which third generation glocalisation strategies have been prepared at the scale of city regions.

The emergence of urban entrepreneurialism in Danish spatial planning is often associated with the implementation of the Danish Planning Act in 1992, in which the aim of spatial planning was changed from promoting 'equal' development to 'appropriate' development. In Harvey's (1989)

terms, the 1992 Planning Act marked a shift from urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism. As part of the shift, the national government began to promote the capital city of Copenhagen and the Øresund Region as the new privileged spaces for urban development, investments in infrastructures, and concentration of economic activities. This reterritorialisation became the government's answer to the economic challenges that Copenhagen (and south Sweden) was facing at the time (Olesen and Metzger, 2017). We interpret the Øresund Region as a product of what Brenner (2004a) identifies as glocalisation strategies round I, and the first soft space in Denmark rooted in policies of promoting economic development and competitiveness.

The second round of spatial restructuring in Denmark rooted in glocalisation strategies, we associate with the implementation of the Governance Reform in 2007, and the wide range of spatial strategies that emerged as a consequence of the reform. The reform was implemented to introduce a more efficient governance structure, in particular within the public healthcare sector. However, the reform also led to significant reterritorialisations in terms of spatial planning, as the middle-tier of the planning system was abandoned and regional statutory land use planning decentralised to the municipalities (Galland, 2012; Hansen, 2009, 2018). As part of the reform, new larger regions were established with limited planning powers. Instead the regions were to prepare regional development strategies, which were more in alignment with the contemporary neoliberal discourse of promoting regional economic development (Næss, 2009). As part of this reorientation of spatial planning, the national government encouraged municipal and regional actors to adopt a more proactive and cooperative planning style in relation to regional growth and development (Hansen, 2009), hence aligning the purpose of planning across scales into a regional growth agenda. This focus became even more apparent in 2014, when regional development strategies were renamed into 'regional growth and development strategies'. In order to support regional development, various governance networks (public and private) were established at the regional scale, including regional growth forums and cross-municipal platforms for representation of municipal interests (Hansen, 2018). The explosion in the number of networks and platforms for representation of regional interests has in a Danish context been interpreted as a turn towards a pluricentric governance model (Pedersen et al., 2011; Sørensen, 2014).

Many of the new networks were constructed with a point of departure in the formal regional administrative boundaries established in 2007. They were therefore not always considered appropriate platforms for strategic spatial planning. This led to a national interest, already from the initial phases of the implementation of the 2007 reform, in promoting functional urban regions for strategic spatial planning, in an attempt to 'fill-in' gaps in the Danish governance landscape (Olesen, 2011, 2012). The Danish government was in particular keen to promote Eastern Jutland as Denmark's second metropolitan area. This was partly a response to the rather one-sided focus of promoting growth in Copenhagen for more than a decade, and partly as a result of the realisation that the newly formed regional boundaries did not correspond well to the 'functional urban region' in this part of Denmark. As regional planning was under strong attack at the time, the process of preparing a spatial strategy for the Eastern Jutland urban region developed into a contested affair, played out between conflicting planning rationalities rooted in regulation and growth promotion, respectively (Olesen and Richardson, 2012). At the time, it was already evident that strategic planning in the soft space of Eastern Jutland was driven by a strong neoliberal agenda, actively seeking to redefine what it meant to prepare spatial strategies at the regional scale (Olesen, 2012).

We argue that Danish spatial planning has recently entered a third round of glocalisation strategies, which include city regions around second-tier Danish cities. This round of spatial

restructuring is not the result of reterritorialisations promoted through planning reforms or in other ways inspired by the national level. We interpret the current round of reterritorialisation as the manifestation of a wider growth-oriented planning culture, which has been underway since the early 1990s. Danish spatial planning has now entered the phase of roll-with-it neoliberalisation, in which the promotion of growth, competitiveness and economic development have developed into taken-for-granted (if in practice not the only) goals of regional planning in Denmark. As a result, the second, third and fourth biggest cities in Denmark have upscaled their strategies to the city region scale, and created ‘business regions’ in collaboration with surrounding municipalities. Copenhagen has followed suit and rebranded the Øresund Region as ‘Greater Copenhagen’. On the contrary to earlier rounds of spatial restructuring, the promotion of business regions is primarily a municipal project, with limited national and regional interference, although the regional level has been accepted as a member of the business region in several cases. Table 1 summarises the three rounds of spatial restructurings rooted in glocalisation strategies in Danish spatial planning.

**Table 1: Spatial restructurings in Denmark from 1990-2016**

	Time	Soft space	Rationality
Glocalisation strategies round I	Early 1990s	The Øresund Region	Promoting the competitiveness of Copenhagen and the Øresund Region in the context of increasing European competition
Glocalisation strategies round II	Mid-2000s	Eastern Jutland	Promoting a second growth area in Denmark and functional urban region for strategic spatial planning.
Glocalisation strategies round III	Mid-2010s	Aarhus Business Region, Business Region North Denmark, City Region Funen, Greater Copenhagen	Promoting competitiveness and economic growth in and around the four biggest Danish cities.

#### **4. The emergence of business regions in Denmark**

In the third round of glocalisation strategies, a number of cross-municipal networks have emerged at the scale of city regions in Denmark. These networks identify themselves as ‘business regions’ or ‘city regions’, inspired by similar regional networks in the other European cities. The label of ‘business regions’ (in English) has specifically been adopted with inspiration from city-regional governance networks in other Nordic countries. In the general, the processes of constructing the Danish business regions seem to have been driven by an outward looking perspective, where inspiration has been taken from a range of city regions, including Amsterdam, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Manchester, Stavanger, Stockholm and Tampara.

In this section, we examine the driving forces behind the construction of business regions around the four biggest cities in Denmark, as well as the nature of the strategy-making that take place in these spaces. Our analysis builds on document analysis of strategies, visions, policy documents prepared at the auspices of the business regions, together with the regions’ official webpages. We understand the various policy documents and webpages as important sites of region building, conveying important clues about the values and rationalities of the business regions. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the project manager(s) of each

business regions, with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of the driving forces behind the construction of the business region in each case.

#### *4.1 Business Region Aarhus*

Cross-municipal collaboration in the Aarhus city region has a longer genealogy. Since 1994, several municipalities, with the second largest Danish city Aarhus at the centre, have formally cooperated on business development activities. In 2010 Business Region Aarhus was formed, as it was recognised that there was limited local political support for the national government's initiative to facilitate cross-municipal cooperation at the scale of the larger urban region of Eastern Jutland (Olesen, 2011, Olesen and Richardson, 2011, 2012). Hence, the creation of Business Region Aarhus marked a significant shift in Danish spatial politics, in the sense that the new region was constructed from below with a point of departure in local political agendas (rather than national spatial strategies). Since, the business region has expanded significantly. Today, it is made up of 12 municipalities, amounting to a population of around 960,000 inhabitants (Business Region Aarhus, 2016b).

Business Region Aarhus defines itself as 'a political community of interests' (Business Region Aarhus, 2016a: 3), and is perhaps best understood as a cross-municipal network organisation working for promoting growth and economic development in the Aarhus city region. More specific the aim of the organisation is to improve the conditions for business development in the region, and increase the region's competitiveness and visibility in a national and international context. This is also the focal point in the region's most recent strategy from 2016, entitled 'Eastern Jutland is working for Denmark' (Business Region Aarhus, 2016a). In the strategy, the business region outlines a number of goals that it seeks to realise towards 2018. First and foremost, the region wants to strengthen its position as the main growth area in Denmark outside Greater Copenhagen. One of the key issues addressed in the strategy is the need to expand the region's existing motorway corridor from four to six lanes. The business region has in recent years acted as the main lobby platform for attracting national investments in transport infrastructure to the city region.

Furthermore, a substantial part of the strategy is dedicated to marketing and branding efforts in order to attract businesses, residents and tourists to the region. In addition, an English webpage ([www.businessregionaarhus.com](http://www.businessregionaarhus.com)) has been set up, targeting international businesses, expats and a highly-educated workforce seeking to relocate to the region.

#### *4.2 Business Region North Denmark*

Business Region North Denmark was formally launched in 2015 and is made up of 11 municipalities and the North Denmark Region. The region has a total population of around 600,000 inhabitants and is based around the city of Aalborg, the fourth largest city in Denmark. A key motivation for establishing the business region was an analysis in 2014, by all municipalities in the region, showing that municipal expenses would increase significantly until 2020. This led the mayors and heads of municipal administrations, as well as the North Denmark Region, to agree that joint action had to be taken to increase the municipal income, primarily through attention to business life, attracting investments and talents, and job creation.

The main goal for Business Region North Denmark is to stimulate economic growth and attract jobs to the region. The region has identified five focus areas: tourism, infrastructure, international collaboration, business development and job creation, and qualified workforce. In comparison to

the other business regions, greater emphasis is put on the tourism industry, as the region is more rural and its economy more dependent on tourism than the other business regions.

Strategy-making in Business Region North Denmark has materialised in the document 'Strategy – and action plan 2015-2016' (Business Region North Denmark, 2015). The strategy sets out the main goals for the business region within the five focus areas outlined above. In addition, the document highlights the importance of promoting synergies between the municipalities' independent growth strategies and the Region North Denmark's Growth and Development Strategy. The business region stresses the importance of functioning as a shared political platform for the public authorities in North Denmark, the municipalities and the region, in an attempt to lobby and influence national level policy-making with a unified voice, in particular concerning transport and IT infrastructures.

An important aspect related directly to spatial planning is the up-front attention to coordination between the business region and strategy-making at regional and municipal levels. This has resulted in a common chapter on development in North Denmark in the regional growth strategy as well as in all 11 municipal spatial strategies (Hansen, 2018).

#### *4.3 City Region Funen*

City Region Funen has a population of around 450,000 inhabitants and was established in 2013. It consists of 9 municipalities, including Odense, the third largest city in Denmark. Geographically, the region consists of the island of Funen, except the municipality of Middelfart, which for historical reasons has been part of another cross-municipal organisation in Eastern Jutland (the Triangle Area) for many years. City Region Funen was established with the ambition to strengthen the position of the region in national spatial planning. Funen, and especially the city of Odense, claims that it has largely been ignored in national spatial policies, in particular in the 2006 and 2010 national planning reports. The aim of creating City Region Funen has been to articulate Funen as a functional city region and to articulate Funen's strategic position on Denmark's 'growth-map'. City Region Funen has therefore not adopted the business region label.

In City Region Funen's 'Strategy Funen 2014-2017', the overall focus is to create and strengthen the spatial frameworks necessary for growth (City Region Funen, 2014). Furthermore, the strategy explicitly mentions the ambition of creating a coherent urban region, being both an active part of the Greater Copenhagen region as well as becoming more tightly connected with West Denmark. More specifically, the region focusses on transport and digital infrastructures and on becoming a test laboratory for new green technologies and solutions for future global challenges (City Region Funen, 2014).

As was partly the case in North Denmark and Aarhus, City Region Funen has the objective to produce a shared spatial strategy. However, the region is more ambitious and intends to let this strategy function as the overall spatial framework for strategy-making at municipal level. This special attention to spatial strategies is also made clear through the intention to focus on 'principles for interaction and development between cities. Including development of a common strategy for a coherent development of the cities' (City Region Funen, 2014: 3). This is remarkable in a Danish context of business and city regions, as it seems to reinvoke, into regional policy, some of the planning mechanisms that were removed from the new regions formed in 2007.

#### *4.4 Greater Copenhagen*

'Greater Copenhagen' is perhaps best understood as the new marketing brand for the Øresund Region. Greater Copenhagen was launched in 2014 as a marketing platform for municipalities and regions on the Danish side of the Øresund Strait, who increasingly had become disappointed with the stagnating development of the Øresund Region. The brand of the Øresund Region was no longer perceived as adequate for promoting the region internationally (Olesen and Metzger, 2017). The Swedish partners were included in January 2016 and the organisation was formally renamed as 'the Greater Copenhagen and Skåne Committee' - in everyday speech 'Greater Copenhagen'.

In many ways, Greater Copenhagen has adopted the Øresund Region's vision of creating a friction-less cross-border region, in particular in terms of overcoming institutional and national borders. In comparison to the Øresund Region, less emphasis is put on region building and cultural integration. Instead, Greater Copenhagen has developed a narrower policy agenda, focusing on generation of economic growth and attracting international businesses and talents to the region. In the first years of its existence, a particular effort has been dedicated to building up the brand of 'Greater Copenhagen'. The marketing efforts have been highly professional and streamlined both internally and externally. The Greater Copenhagen's webpage features for example a 'tool box' (in Danish only), where municipalities can download the logo, a design manual, photos and templates for marketing purposes.

In terms of strategy-making, Greater Copenhagen is still in an early phase. Its vision towards 2020 'We are Greater Copenhagen' is a two-page flyer setting out the region's overall goal of being 'an international node for investments and knowledge on the level as the most successful metropolises in Europe' in 2020 (Greater Copenhagen, 2016a: 1). Furthermore, the vision identifies internationalisation, attracting international businesses, investments, tourists and highly educated workforce as its main goals, alongside creating a coherent labour market and an attractive business climate. As part of its aspiration of becoming an international node, Greater Copenhagen has also prepared a transport charter, a policy document advocating for the need for substantial investments in transport infrastructure in the region, including the ongoing expansion of Copenhagen International Airport, high speed train connections via the future Fehmarn Belt link, and additional links across the Øresund Strait (Greater Copenhagen, 2016b). Table 2 summarises the main characteristics of the four business and city regions.

**Table 2: The main characteristics of the four business and city regions**

	Business Region Aarhus	Business Region North Denmark	City Region Funen	Greater Copenhagen
Established	2010	2015	2013	2014
Number of municipalities	12	11 + Region North Denmark	9	46 (DK) and 33 (SE) + the Capital Region, Region Zealand and Region Skåne
Population	960,000	600,000	450,000	3,900,000
Key priorities/goals	- Main growth area outside Greater Copenhagen - Attracting businesses and	- Tourism - Infrastructure - International collaboration	- Economic development and growth creation - Attracting residents	- Marketing and branding - International node for investments and knowledge

	residents in knowledge based industries - Investments in transport infrastructure -Tourism	- Business development and job creation - Qualified workforce	- Transport infrastructure - Digital infrastructure - Green technologies and energy planning	- Attracting investors, tourists, businesses and talents - Integrated labour market - Creating an attractive business environment
Strategic documents	Strategy 2016-2018	Strategy and action plan 2015-2016	Strategy Funen 2014-2017	'We are Greater Copenhagen' (vision 2020)

## 5. Business regions as spaces of neoliberal experimentation

In this section we elaborate on our understanding of the Danish business regions as spaces of neoliberal experimentation. First, we discuss the nature of the business regions by outlining their main shared characteristics, and by placing the emergence of the regions in the context of spatial restructuring and neoliberalisation. Second, we explore the politics of the business regions and discuss how the strategy-making practiced here may contribute to transforming Danish planning culture.

The emergence of business regions at the regional scale around the biggest cities in Denmark reflect a general European trend towards city regionalism. The new business regions are perhaps best understood as hybrids or assemblages, fusing municipal practices of business development and job creation, branding and marketing, transport infrastructure lobbying, spatial development, and upscaling these practices to the regional scale. The business regions constitute a response to globalisation pressures, and represent an illustrative case of globalisation as reterritorialisation in the classic Brennian understanding (Brenner, 1999). Furthermore, the business regions can be seen as political reactions to the lack of overlap or coherence between the economic geographies of functional urban regions and the political-administrative units of the same areas. Since 2010, there has been an evolving municipal recognition of the need to join forces and create more 'appropriate' geographies.

Municipalities have increased in size; however, they are still of irrelevant size in relation to business location dynamics (Interview Region of North Denmark).

The business regions should first and foremost be understood as reterritorialisations and rescalings of local political growth agendas, following the logic of 'together we are stronger' in the competition with others. The municipalities increasingly believe that business regions represent appropriate and necessary political spaces for articulating local-regional development interests and bringing these interests to the regional scale, where they are thought to have more weight. This indicates an increasing local political acceptance of regional economic dynamics and a move away from local protectionism (Interview City Region Funen). Some even characterise the business regions as 'a wake up call' (Interview City Region Funen), or the result of 'a burning platform' (Interview Greater Copenhagen). In this sense, the business regions represent a rescaling of the classic inter-city competition policy agenda to the scale of city regions, a kind of regional entrepreneurialism.

...if you want more than to just survive, you have to join forces. So, we have emerged from a need for critical mass and a need for collaboration. Hence, collaboration as a necessity. We are under pressure internationally, and if you are to compete internationally, well then you will have to look beyond your own nose.” (Interview Greater Copenhagen)

With the history of experiments with strategy-making at regional scales in mind (Olesen and Richardson, 2012), it is interesting to note that the recent construction of business regions has predominantly been directed from the municipal level and rather ad hoc, in contrast to earlier more coordinated initiatives from the national government. In the previous city region building processes, the state’s role became particularly contested after the 2007 reform, as the state pushed for setting up voluntary urban development principles between municipalities in order to reduce urban sprawl in regional contexts (Olesen, 2011; Olesen and Richardson, 2012). Despite the emphasis on voluntary mechanisms, the municipalities were not prepared to accept new cross-municipal agreements until a few years later, from 2010 and onwards, when growing perceptions of the need to accept a relational geography at the regional scale gained a stronger foothold. In this context, the business regions can be understood as new soft spaces, in which the municipalities have adopted their own policy rationalities, centred primarily on growth and business development, with no or little interference from state. The business regions do therefore not constitute new state spaces in the understanding of spaces constructed “from above” by the state. In fact, the business regions are not even recognised by the state in the most recent national spatial strategy from 2018 (Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs, 2018). This could be an indication of a diminishing role of the state in the production of soft spaces.

The business regions are perhaps best understood as driven by ‘iterative relationships between top-down and bottom-up impulses (Allmendinger et al., 2015: 221). As in many other European soft spaces, the emergence of business regions in Denmark can be understood as a bottom up responses to governance reforms, driven by municipal agendas of influencing national policy-making. In fact, one of the business regions’ primary purposes has been to influence national spatial policies and infrastructure investments. In conjunction with the ad hoc characteristics of the building of the business regions, the strategies towards the state emerge as the result of increasingly conscious efforts to build networks and alliances. All four regions clearly state the need for more coordinated and professional lobbying towards the state.

...our collaboration is orchestrated in order to create more striking power, simply towards the state (Interview City Region Funen).

It is a recognition that if you do not join the neighbour ... then nobody will listen to you (Interview Aarhus Business Region).

We become increasingly professional in creating alliances and in standing together in setting the agenda of what is considered most important (Interview City Region Funen).

The construction of the business regions should be understood as part of an ongoing struggle between the national level, formal regions and municipalities about who has the power (and authority) to decide on regional development issues inside regional spheres. In fact, one of the main driving forces behind the construction of the business regions has been to protect municipal interests at the regional scale. The business regions can be seen as attempts to sidestep and contest the development efforts of the formal regions in an attempt to increase municipal power on regional development agendas and regional policy. However, in other cases (Region North Denmark

and Greater Copenhagen) partnerships have been established between the formal regional authorities and business regions, in order to reinforce and supplement regional development efforts.

In this context, it is also interesting to note that the business regions seem to be filling in some of the gaps at the regional scale in terms of spatial planning – a task they previously have been reluctant to take up despite pressures from the state (Olesen, 2012; Olesen and Richardson, 2012). Both Business Region Aarhus and City Region Funen are in the process of preparing principles for spatial development, intended to guide future statutory municipal planning (Interview Business Region Aarhus; Interview City Region Funen). All business regions, with the exception of Greater Copenhagen, have prepared joint municipal statements about their commitment to the business region, which are to feature in the municipalities' spatial strategies. In this sense, the business regions aspire to play an important role in strategic spatial planning in the future at both regional and municipal scales. This shift in municipal perceptions should partly be understood as an increased awareness of the importance of spatial planning across municipal borders and of the potential role of spatial strategies in creating competitive conditions for business development. Moreover, it is partly, the result of a transformation in the nature of strategic spatial planning, which increasingly is being reoriented to 'fit' local growth aspirations (Olesen, 2014).

What is striking in this context is that the business regions, despite their historical-geographical differences and varied approaches to spatial planning, seem to be structured by very similar local-regional policy agendas. As illustrated in table 2, there are profound similarities between the regions' key objectives, which are focused on the 'creation of economic growth and jobs' (Interview Greater Copenhagen), 'business promotion initiatives' (Interview Business Region Aarhus), 'attracting more businesses, more investments and more talent' (Interview Business Region North Denmark), as well as better infrastructures. In this sense, the business regions can be understood as products of their time – as an outcome of and a response to wider extra-local forces of neoliberalisation and as an institutionalisation of growth-first planning policies. The struggle between competing planning rationalities, which dominated previous strategy-making experiments (Olesen and Richardson, 2012), does not seem to be present (or relevant!) in the business regions. It is in this sense that we argue that the business regions constitute new spaces for experimenting with new forms of neoliberal strategy-making.

The business regions are also an illustrative case of how the boundaries of spatial planning as a discipline have become fuzzier and ambiguous, and that the field of strategic spatial planning has expanded to include a range of different issues, most prominently in this case, the creation of jobs and business development. Although being particularly dominant at the scale of business regions, this is a development trend that is affecting all scales of planning in Denmark. Recently, this reorientation of spatial planning has been institutionalised further, as the aim of spatial planning in the new Planning Act has been expanded to also include the aim of 'creating good conditions for business development and growth' (Danish Planning Act, 2016, §1, see also Olesen and Carter, 2018).

However, at the same time as we are witnessing an expansion of the field of spatial planning, the policies adopted appear remarkably similar. The business regions may be different in terms of size, geography, growth potentials, organisation etc., but they are all more or less influenced by the same politics of job creation and business development. We argue that this narrowing down, of what are considered important and relevant issues to address in spatial planning, constitutes a 'businessification' of spatial planning, that is, a reorientation of the primary (and at times the only) goal of spatial planning to serve and provide optimal conditions for business development, job

creation and economic growth. In the new era of 'roll-with-it' neoliberalisation, these are the key performance indicators on which spatial planning will be measured, evaluated and considered relevant or not. In this sense, the Danish business regions represent an illustrative example of how variegated forms of neoliberalism manifest themselves in time and space, partly building on previous rounds of glocalization strategies, and partly transforming the planning culture by providing a new mind-set, together with new values and benchmarks for planning.

Strategy-making at the auspices of the business regions should not only be understood as isolated neoliberal experiments of new forms of strategic spatial planning, as well as examples regional lobbyism towards the state. The business regions' strategies are increasingly also intended to inspire and structure strategy-making and statutory planning at municipal level, with written statements being prepared which are to be inserted directly into its members' municipal spatial strategies. We thus expect the experimentation with neoliberal strategy-making at the scale of business regions to have significant effects on strategy-making and statutory planning at lower scales, as business development and job creation policy goals are infused into municipal planning, installing these as taken-for-granted and 'necessary' goals of Danish spatial planning. In this sense, strategy-making in the business regions, together with a greater focus on business development and job creation in general, will have significant impacts on the Danish planning culture in the years to come.

## **6. Conclusions**

We interpret the emergence of business regions and city regions as the result of recent spatial restructurings and reterritorialisations associated with the institutionalisation of roll-with-it neoliberalisation in Danish spatial planning. In contrast to earlier rounds of spatial restructuring in Denmark, the business regions have been constructed from below as rescalings of local-regional growth ambitions. The business regions are perhaps best understood as hybrids or assemblages, fusing municipal practices of business development and job creation, branding and marketing, transport infrastructure lobbying, and spatial development, and upscaling these practices to new regional soft spaces, with the aim of adding more political weight to local-regional growth agendas.

We interpret the new business regions as important political spaces for representation of municipal interests in the continuous scalar struggle with the state and the formal regions about who has the power (and authority) to dictate regional development agendas. In this sense, the business regions represent municipal glocalisation strategies aiming at filling-in gaps at the regional scale, resulting from the governance reform in 2007. The business regions' cry for recognition in national spatial policy-making represent in this context an important symbolic milestone for the municipalities in the process of region building.

Following Allmendinger and Haughton (2009a), we interpret the business regions as important spaces for reworking the nature of Danish spatial planning. We understand these reworkings as being shaped by two dialectic processes of opening up and blurring the professional boundaries of planning, whilst at the same time narrowing the scope of planning to a few policy agendas centred around the creation of economic growth. The business regions constitute in many ways the institutionalisation of growth-oriented regional spatial planning, which has been in the making since the 2007 reform. In this sense, the business regions are symptomatic of a new Danish planning culture at the regional scale, centred around policy agendas of economic growth, job creation and business development (Hansen, 2018).

However, at the same time, the business regions also constitute important political spaces for transforming the Danish planning culture more widely, as spatial policy-making at the auspices of the business regions is intended to influence and structure spatial strategy-making at both national and local scales. At the local scale, business region strategies might provide the necessary legitimacy for municipal growth strategies or local development projects, as the significance of these can be upscaled to a regional context. In this sense, we can understand the business regions as vehicles for a neoliberalisation of strategic spatial planning across scales of governance (Olesen, 2012).

The struggles between contested planning rationalities reported from previous strategy-making experiments in soft spaces in Denmark (Olesen and Richardson, 2012) have been superseded by a new market based logic installing business development and job creation as 'sensible' and the 'necessary' policy agendas (Haughton et al., 2013). We interpret this 'businessification' of strategic spatial planning in Denmark as part of a wider development trend in society, in which spatial planning increasingly is being streamlined in the context of neoliberalisation and post-politics (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Haughton et al., 2013). How the 'businessification' of spatial planning will manifest itself across scales of governance in Denmark remains to be seen. The new focus on 'creating good conditions for business development and growth' in the Planning Act bears witness to a new planning culture in the making, where planning is seen as a facilitator of rather than a barrier to economic growth (Olesen and Carter, 2018). Whilst this reconfiguration of planning might contribute to rebuild the trust in planning itself in an increasingly planning sceptic political environment (Tait and Hansen, 2013), it also promotes a new planning mind-set (or governmentality), in which job creation becomes an undisputable planning goal in its own right rather than a means to an end (e.g. social welfare). We argue that such a rationality represents a significant change in Danish planning culture, and is a clear indication of the hegemonic status that neoliberal ideology have gained in Danish society.

We argue that future research on state restructuring and the production of soft spaces needs to play closer attention to how reterritorialisations contribute to rework the boundaries and mind-set of planning, significantly transforming planning cultures, and how the dynamics involved in such processes are shaped by extra-local forces, as well as context specific policy agendas.

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