Soft Space Planning in Cities unbound

vehicle for effective strategic spatial planning or neoliberal transformations?

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Soft Space Planning in Cities unbound: vehicle for effective strategic spatial planning or neoliberal transformations?

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Abstract

This paper analyses contemporary experiments of building governance capacity in new soft spaces in Denmark through processes of spatial strategy-making. The paper argues that new soft spaces are emerging in Danish spatial planning, which set out to promote more effective forms of strategic spatial planning. The Danish case of soft space planning demonstrates how Danish soft spaces at subnational scales fail to fill in the gaps between formal planning structures and provide the glue that binds formal scales of planning together as promised in the soft space literature. This raises a number of critical questions about whether the normative arguments in the soft space literature are unfounded, or whether the significance of soft spaces is simply overrated in the planning literature. Furthermore, it is argued that critical attention needs to be paid to the prevalence of soft spaces in spatial planning, and how their obsession with promoting economic development at the expense of wider planning responsibilities support contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

1. Introduction

In the planning literature there has been an increased interest in the new 'soft spaces' emerging in British spatial planning as a consequence of contemporary processes of state re-territorialisation, rescaling and devolution (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009, 2010; Haughton et al., 2010). This paper argues that soft spaces underpinned by some of the same characteristics are also emerging in Danish spatial planning as a consequence of the changing governance structures implemented as part of the structural reform in 2007. However, whilst the soft space literature highlights soft spaces' important role in filling the gaps between formal planning structures and processes, providing the 'glue' that binds the formal scales of planning and governance together (Haughton et al., 2010), the Danish soft spaces do not seem to deliver these promises. There seems to be little evidence of soft spaces acting as vehicles for more effective forms of strategic spatial planning in the Danish case. While the empirical observation of the prevalence of soft spaces in spatial planning is a significant contribution to the planning literature, this paper suggests that the normative theorisation of soft spaces' significance in spatial planning might be overstated and perhaps even unfounded, as the authors themselves find that only a "few of the claimed local delivery successes appeared to stand up to detailed critical scrutiny" (Haughton et al., 2010, p.243). Instead soft spaces seem to provide convenient and legitimate platforms for disregarding the wider planning responsibilities of sustainable development in the pursuit of economic development. This is an issue that the soft space literature recognises:

"... for all the work on sustainable strategies, we would argue that none of the new spatial planning systems has achieved any success in subverting or reworking the balance of political emphasis between economic, social and environmental objectives" (Haughton et al., 2010, p.246),

This paper argues that we should not only understand the new soft spaces as important vehicles for improving the effectiveness of spatial planning. In fact soft spaces seem to do little work in this regard. Instead we need to pay critical attention to how the prevalence of soft spaces acts as vehicle for promoting contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

The planning literature highlights how the activity of strategic spatial planning has changed significantly over the last half century (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2007; Salet & Faludi, 2000). The traditional assumption that spatial planning takes place within pre-defined boundaries inserted in nested governance systems is under pressure from new relational spatial understandings arguing that new spaces of flows (Castells, 1996) do not necessarily fit existing bounded administrative units or planning frameworks (Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2010). Specific attention has been paid to how processes of globalisation significantly reshape spatial structures of society promoting *cities without limits* (EURA Conference, 2011) or *Zwischenstädte* (Sievert, 2003). Drawing on a relational understanding of spatial planning, strategic spatial planning has been reinvented as means to build governance capacity across an increasingly fragmented governance landscape (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2007; Salet & Faludi, 2000). Healey (2007, p.269) conceptualises the activity of building governance capacity as the mobilisation of collective action across various webs of relations connecting formal and informal forms of governance, networks and arenas.

Under the label of new regionalism, Europe has experienced great experimentation with building governance capacity through formal metropolitan governance arrangements in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s (Heinelt & Kübler, 2005; Salet et al., 2003). However, the success of these experiments remained often limited in places without significant institutional histories on which these experiments could draw (Albrechts et al., 2003; Salet et al., 2003). Instead attention has been paid more recently to new informal soft forms of governance and soft spaces emerging in British spatial planning in-between formal scales of planning, representing important vehicles for policy

integration, policy delivery and promotion of more effective forms of strategic spatial planning (Haughton et al., 2010).

The Danish structural reform in 2007 resulted in an increasingly complex and fragmented governance landscape without clear hierarchies or divisions of tasks between formal planning scales (Sørensen et al., 2011). The boundaries of the new administrative regions, created as part of the structural reform, did not match the contours of the two emerging urban regions articulated in the national planning report the *'New Map of Denmark'* (Ministry of the Environment, 2006). As a consequence the Danish Ministry of the Environment initiated new episodes of strategic spatial planning aiming at building governance capacity at the scale of these new soft spaces. This paper analyses these episodes of soft space planning at subnational scales in Denmark. The paper explores how these planning episodes contribute to building governance capacity at new scales in an increasingly fragmented governance landscape. In particular, the paper is concerned with these soft spaces' work in filling in the gaps in contemporary planning systems and governance structures as a means to promote more effective forms of strategic spatial planning. Furthermore, the paper investigates the agenda-setting in soft spaces and its implications for promoting particular forms of strategic spatial planning.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the theoretical foundation for the paper is laid out, highlighting the emergence of soft spaces in spatial planning as a consequence of processes of state re-territorialisation and rescaling, and the implications of soft spaces for spatial planning. Second, the cases of soft space planning at the scale of the two metropolitan regions in Danish spatial planning are presented. Following from this a synthesis of the planning episodes provides a point of departure for a critical discussion on the Danish experience of soft space planning. Finally, the concluding section provides reflections on how soft spaces risk supporting contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

2. Soft space planning as governance capacity building

This section sets out the theoretical foundation for the analysis of contemporary episodes of soft space planning aiming at building governance capacity at subnational scales in Denmark. First, the section discusses how the emergence of soft spaces in spatial planning can be understood as a consequence of contemporary processes of state re-territorialisation and rescaling. Then the implications of soft spaces for spatial planning are addressed through a discussion of soft spaces' role in building governance capacity across formal scales of planning, and the agenda-settings in soft spaces' role in promoting particular forms of strategic spatial planning.

2.1.The emergence of soft spaces in spatial planning

Geographical scales were traditionally understood as territorial containers arranged in nested hierarchies, determining the geographical boundaries of state spatial strategies and state spatial projects. Much of recent state theory breaks with this understanding of spaces and scales as fixed entities, stressing how state spatial configurations are actively produced and reproduced through socio-political struggles (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b). The reproduction of state spatiality takes place through processes of re-territorialisation and rescaling in a search for new 'scalar fixes' (Brenner, 2004a) or 'spatio-temporal fixes' (Jessop, 2000). The state theory literature highlights how the evolution of state spatiality is strongly path-dependent, shaped by political geographies established through time, producing a complex patchwork of former and contemporary geo-historical structures and socio-political struggles (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b). Processes of re-territorialisation and rescaling do not entail simple redistributions of powers from one scale to another, or the total disappearance of some scales as they are superseded by others. Instead a more complex picture of

state spatiality emerges in which different scales and spaces coexist rather than being organised in nested hierarchies.

In this increasingly complex and fragmented governance landscape no single actor or scale has the power or capacity to shape the spatial structures of society on their own. Policy delivery becomes highly dependent on effective coordination between various policy sectors across various scales. This has led to much discussion on the state's role in spatial planning. Some theorists have argued that contemporary processes of re-territorialisation and rescaling have led to a 'hollowing out' of the state (Jessop, 1997), whilst others highlight how the state continues to play a dominant role by promoting new state spaces as key sites for economic development and policy making (Brenner, 2004a). Similarly, it has been noted how the state continues to shape new institutional forms and strategy-making processes at lower scales by setting out the rules of these experiments. Rather than a 'hollowing out' of the state, we seem to be witnessing a transformation of how the state seeks to pursue its aims, increasingly characterised by the state acting as metagovernor of processes of 'filling in' at subnational and regional scales (Jessop, 2003; Goodwin et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2005).

It is in this context that we can begin to understand the new soft forms of governance emerging in-between formal scales of planning in the UK (Haughton et al., 2010) and beyond. In the UK much attention has recently been paid to how contemporary processes of state re-territorialisation, rescaling, and devolution have been paralleled by emergence of new 'soft spaces' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009, 2010; Haughton et al., 2010). These soft spaces take multiple forms and fulfil multiple tasks, but are generally referred to as important spaces for economic development, policy integration and delivery (Haughton et al., 2010). They emerge often as a mix of top-down functional spaces for subnational planning and economic development promoted by the state and more ad hoc and informal bottom-up arrangements (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, 2010;

Haughton et al., 2010). Haughton et al. (2010) argue that the new soft spaces represent some of the most innovative practices of spatial planning today, as they fill in the gaps between formal planning structures and processes, providing the 'glue' that binds the formal scales of planning and governance together (Haughton et al., 2010). In line with Healey's (2007) conceptualisation of governance capacity building referred to earlier, we can understand soft spaces as important sites for building governance capacity in an increasingly fragmented and complex governance system.

2.2. The implications of soft spaces for spatial planning

There are some important overlaps in the planning literature between the theorisations of soft spaces and the new forms of strategic spatial planning theorised by Albrechts, Healey and others. Drawing on these bodies of literature, this section discusses two important issues for shedding light on soft spaces' implications for spatial planning. First, the section discusses soft spaces' role in building governance capacity across formal scales of planning and promoting more effective forms of strategic spatial planning. Then it is suggested that agenda-settings in soft space might promote particular forms of strategic spatial planning.

The soft space literature engages with the normative British state project of spatial planning, which promotes a particular form of spatial planning primarily concerned with devolution, effectiveness, policy integration and policy delivery (Davoudi & Strange, 2009; Haughton et al., 2010; Morphet, 2011). The soft spaces are shaped by New Labour's pragmatic view on spatial planning, focusing on 'what works' in terms of implementation and policy delivery (Allmendinger, 2011). A similar concern with action and implementation can be found in the planning literature's theorisations of strategic spatial planning. According to Albrechts (2004, p.752): "Strategic planning relates to implementation. Things must get done!" However, consideration is also paid to the considerable

timescale it takes for spatial strategies with their supportive storylines and metaphors to generate mobilising forces that enable them to travel across the governance landscape, gradually allowing them to penetrate governance practices and become sedimented in governance cultures (Healey, 2007). Building governance capacity through spatial strategy-making is understood as a long-term process, which might not reflect the highly unstable and contested nature of soft spaces.

At times these efforts to shape planning practice through building governance capacity might not be supported by existing institutional arrangements. Spatial strategies of earlier periods might be experienced as irritating constrains, hampering new strategic initiatives, and as a consequence this forces strategic thinking to move away from formal arenas into particular alliances or actions of strategic actors (Healey, 2007). This search for new opportunities for creative thinking and breaking away from pre-existing working patterns by working outside the formal requirements and rigidities of statutory planning is what characterises soft space planning (Haughton et al., 2010). In this way soft spaces can be understood as particular episodes of strategic spatial planning aiming at destabilising existing governance practices and planning cultures, or at least supplementing and complementing these practices and cultures in significant ways. However, even when strategic thinking moves away from formal planning arenas, maintaining links between informal and formal spatial strategy-making plays an important role in building political legitimacy and deploying public resources for these activities (Healey, 2007).

Inserting new soft spaces into an increasingly congested governance landscape and building close links to formal planning arenas is prone to contestation. Allmendinger & Haughton (2009) stress how soft spaces seem to be more productive when they overlap with institutional areas. Without these overlaps there might be a considerable "loss of development momentum and a deficit of resources and consensus" (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, p.626). Whilst Haughton et al. (2010) seem rather optimistic about soft spaces' future role in spatial planning, others remain more

pessimistic highlighting the continuous tensions and clashes between soft forms of governance and formal planning arenas, as the latter continue to play the predominant role in shaping decision-making processes and planning practices (Brownill & Carpenter, 2009; Greenwood & Newman, 2010). This raises important questions about soft spaces' role in building governance capacity across formal scales of planning and promoting more effective forms of strategic spatial planning.

I now turn to the issue of how agenda-settings in soft space might promote particular forms of strategic spatial planning. The planning literature highlights how strategic spatial planning is a highly selective process, oriented towards specific issues that matter to the actors involved in the strategy-making processes. Spatial strategy-making consists of filtering and sorting processes in which actors fight for policy attention (Healey, 2007). The selection of critical issues to work on is therefore a very delicate matter, which often requires the prospect of win-win situations (Albrechts, 2001, 2004). The agenda-setting in soft spaces is thus a crucial aspect for successful and effective spatial planning. The planning literature suggests that policy agendas related to economic development and investments in transport infrastructures are more likely to be promoted over issues of distribution of growth in spatial strategy-making, as the latter issue is deeply embedded in spatial politics (Albrechts, 2001; Dühr; 2007; Hajer, 2000; Harris & Hooper, 2004; Jensen & Richardson, 2003; Salet et al., 2003; van Duinen, 2004; Zonneveld, 2000). Furthermore, as soft spaces actively seek to avoid the formal requirements and rigidities of statutory planning in order to facilitate development and create competitive advantage, there is a potential risk that this is done at the expense of wider planning responsibilities related to social justice and environmental aspects of sustainable development (Haughton et al., 2010). As mentioned in the introduction, Haughton et al. (2010) found no evidence of soft spaces subverting or reworking the contemporary political emphasis on economic development over social and environmental objectives. This paper argues

that critical attention needs to be paid to how agenda-settings in soft spaces support contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning. This section has raised two important research questions for the analysis of soft space planning in Denmark:

- How do soft spaces contribute to building governance capacity across formal scales of planning and promote more effective forms of strategic spatial planning?

- How does agenda-setting in soft spaces support contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning?

3. Soft space planning in Denmark

This section analyses contemporary Danish experiments of building governance capacity in new soft spaces and its implications for spatial planning through the two questions set out in the previous section. Before turning to the two cases of soft space planning presented in this paper, contemporary transformations of the Danish governance structures resulting from the structural reform in 2007 are briefly discussed.

3.1. The context: changing scales and governance structures

Like many European countries, Denmark has recently experienced comprehensive processes of state re-territorialisation and rescaling of planning powers. Whilst these processes traditionally are understood as a consequence of globalisation processes (Brenner 2004a, 2004b), the Danish structural reform seems to follow a different rationale (Andersen, 2008). Danish research on the reform stresses how the reform lacked a clear logic (Andersen, 2008), and best can be understood as

a number of more or less irrational and coincidental decision-making processes (Mouritzen, 2004), in which the outline of the reform was sketched well before identifying the problems the reform was intended to solve (Bundgaard & Vrangbæk, 2007). The reform can thus best be understood as the liberal and conservative government's attempt to signal political vigour, whilst at the same time dismantling large parts of the public sector, hereunder spatial planning.

On the national level, a series of changes were implemented in the Ministry of the Environment, hereunder abolition of the Agency for National Spatial Planning, decentralisation of the Ministry of the Environment into national environment centres, and creation of a more sector-oriented Nature Agency, which amongst other things also became responsible for national spatial planning. On the regional level, the counties and the Greater Copenhagen Authority were abolished, reducing the Danish planning system from a three-tier to a two-tier system. Instead five new administrative regions were created with the primary task of running the public hospitals. The regions were also given the task of preparing new non-regulatory regional spatial development plans aiming at encouraging local economic development. The new regional plans were supported by newly established regional growth forums consisting of public and private stakeholders. The majority of the regional planning powers were transferred to the municipalities, which were merged into larger units to accommodate these new tasks.

The division of tasks between the regional and municipal scale in terms of spatial planning is not clear cut after the reform, as the intended content and function of the new regional spatial development plans remains rather vaguely formulated in the planning act. In an attempt to prevent the new administrative regions from developing a significant role in regional development planning, Local Government Denmark created new platforms for cross municipal coordination and policy making at the scale of the administrative regions. These new municipal contact councils act almost as counter platforms to the formal regional planning arenas, and have as such become important

political platforms for continuous municipal contestation of the administrative regions' role in spatial planning (Sørensen et al., 2011).

The scale of the new administrative regions, and as such the regions' role in spatial planning, has also been contested by planners in the Ministry of the Environment. The regional administrative boundaries do not match the emerging contours of the two metropolitan regions, articulated in the ministry's *'New Map of Denmark'* (Ministry of the Environment, 2006). The new administrative regions are therefore not regarded as appropriate scales for spatial planning. Instead the Ministry of the Environment has initiated new informal episodes of spatial strategy-making at the scale of the two metropolitan regions, turning these into new soft spaces for spatial planning. These new soft spaces are at the same time regarded as important platforms for the state to maintain influence on municipal planning and ensure that local growth ambitions are not prioritised at the expense of wider planning commitments. With regard to the Greater Copenhagen Area and Zealand metropolitan region, the Ministry of the Environment had already prepared a spatial plan for the Greater Copenhagen Area as part of the structural reform. An informal spatial strategy-making process was therefore initiated at the scale beyond the Greater Copenhagen Area aiming at preparing a regional spatial framework for the municipalities located outside the Greater Copenhagen Area. In the Eastern Jutland soft space an informal spatial strategy-making process was initiated at the scale of the metropolitan region.

This brief discussion highlights how contemporary processes of state re-territorialisation and rescaling in Denmark have resulted in an increasingly complex governance landscape in which the formal planning hierarchy has been replaced by a variety of more equal scales of planning, within which relationships are continuously negotiated. In this new highly decentralised spatial configuration no single tier has decisive planning powers. The new soft spaces in Danish spatial

planning can be understood as attempts to build governance capacity across formal scales of planning in this increasingly fragmented governance landscape.

The rest of this section analyses experiments of building governance capacity at the scales of the two new soft spaces in Danish spatial planning. The analysis is informed by document analysis of key planning documents, together with 18 in-depth interviews with national, regional and municipal planners involved in soft space planning or strategic spatial planning in general. The interviewees were asked specific questions about the nature of soft space planning in Denmark, and its wider implications for spatial planning.

3.2. The Greater Copenhagen Area and Zealand: supplementing the 'Finger Plan' by soft space planning

The Greater Copenhagen Area has a strong tradition for spatial planning at the regional scale going back to the first 'Finger Plan' from 1947 and various metropolitan institutions and arrangements, whilst spatial planning beyond the municipal level in the rest of Zealand mainly has been limited to statutory county planning. As part of the structural reform, the planning authority for the Greater Copenhagen Area was rescaled to the Ministry of the Environment, which laid out a spatial framework for the Greater Copenhagen Area in the legally binding national planning directive *'Finger Plan 2007'* (Ministry of the Environment, 2007). Under the auspices of the Greater Copenhagen Authority initial discussions had already surfaced on potentially expanding the spatial framework for the Greater Copenhagen Area to accommodate growth pressures, however as the 'Finger Plan' had been under serious contestation in the preparation of the structural reform, the Ministry of the Environment decided to limit the 'Finger Plan 2007' to the scale of previous spatial frameworks (Interview, national planner, 2009).

Instead the Ministry of the Environment initiated an informal spatial strategy-making process intended to supplement *'Finger Plan 2007'* by an additional spatial framework for the municipalities located outside the Greater Copenhagen Area. This initiative was seen by the administrative region of Zealand as an important supplement to the regional spatial development planning, and therefore the region took an active role in shaping the foundations for the process by proposing to adjust the scales of the soft space to fit the region's administrative boundaries (Interview, regional planner, 2010). As a consequence 17 municipalities were included in the strategy-making process, six of which were already being regulated by *'Finger Plan 2007'*.

Rearranging the boundaries of the strategy-making processes had a number of advantages in terms of linking the strategy-making process to formal arenas of policy-making. The administrative region of Zealand became actively involved in the process, as it saw clear synergies with its regional spatial development strategy. More importantly rearranging the scale of the strategy-making process meant that scalar synergies were developed with the municipal contact council, which became an important political platform for discussions on key issues in the strategy-making process. The council was continuously updated on the progress in the strategy-making process, and in return gave a clear mandate to the municipal representatives in their continuing discussions with the Ministry of the Environment. As a consequence political legitimacy was maintained throughout the strategy-making process.

The dominant spatial issue in the Greater Copenhagen/Zealand soft space was a matter of linking transport planning and urban development planning in order to develop a sustainable urban region. The urban development in the Greater Copenhagen Area had for decades been regulated through the 'Finger Plan' ensuring a strong connection to the public transportation system. A similar point of departure was taken for the strategy-making process outside the Greater Copenhagen Area. The aim here was to develop a spatial framework that would support future state investments in

transport infrastructure. The municipalities and partly the region were keen to use the strategy-making process as a platform to lobby for future investments in transport infrastructure discussed under the auspices of the municipal contact council.

The Ministry of Transport and Energy and the Danish Transport Authority saw their role in the strategy-making process as merely informing the municipalities about the ministry's planning approach, when new investments in transport infrastructure were taken into consideration. The Ministry of Transport and Energy did therefore not regard the strategy-making process as an appropriate scale for negotiating future transport infrastructure investments, as these were to be taken at formal planning arenas. A planner from the Danish Transport Authority explained:

"It has not been a dialogue project about big infrastructure investments. It has been a dialogue project about creating common consensus about the overall principles for urban development. But it is clear that what is the focus in the municipalities among the regional and local politicians, that is, of course how many national investments you can attract to a particular area." (Interview, ministry transport planner, 2010, author's translation)

In addition the strategy-making process remained the Ministry of the Environment's process, rather than a joint cross-ministry effort in linking two important policy areas. As a consequence the municipalities continuously contested the Ministry of Transport and Energy's limited role in the process. Discussions on a future spatial framework also remained informal, as the municipalities would not commit to restricting their future urban development without being offered something in return. A municipal planner involved in the strategy-making process stressed that:

"… the idea was that the partners committed themselves to this. And that includes also the state. And the state has really not, they have been part of the project [...] but the state has not contributed with a binding agreement on then we also support this. They don't do that. They

contribute with what has been approved beforehand. It is clear that the municipalities are not

interested in saying okay, then we commit ourselves to do this, but we do not know whether

the state will contribute with anything, and that upsets the balance." (Interview municipal

planner, 2010, author's translation)

As a result the prospect of a win-win situation was only partially developed, as links were not fully

developed between the soft space and formal planning arenas for transport infrastructures. The

travelling capacity of the core ideas in the spatial framework therefore depends on how these ideas

resonate with the municipal planning and local political agendas without being supported by any

greater incentive from the top.

3.3. The Eastern Jutland urban ribbon: building governance capacity at competing scales

While the case of the Greater Copenhagen Area and Zealand was a matter of supplementing the

'Finger Plan' by an additional spatial framework for the rest of Zealand, the challenge in Eastern

Jutland was to build governance capacity at a new scale from scratch. Eastern Jutland was for the

first time articulated as an urban region in the Ministry of the Environment's 2006 national planning

report, which highlighted an emerging functional conurbation along the urban corridor from

Kolding to Randers with more than one million inhabitants (Ministry of the Environment, 2006).

The proposed urban region transected not only the boundaries of the new administrative regions, it

also encompassed two former counties around which extensive municipal cooperation had been

built up over decades. In the northern part of the urban region, Denmark's second city Århus and

its surrounding municipalities had built up a tradition of informally cooperating around spatial

planning issues. In the southern part of the region, six municipalities had embarked on an extensive

municipal cooperation project going back to the early 1990s, making up what in Denmark is

referred to as the 'Triangle Area'. The cooperation has advanced to a level where the municipalities

in 2004 produced a common spatial framework for their municipal planning and in 2009 prepared a

common municipal plan (The Triangle Area, 2009). These former and contemporary political-administrative structures continued to play an important role in shaping the municipalities' sense of belonging in the strategy-making process, which often clashed with the state's new spatial logic of an urban ribbon defined by travel-to-work patterns and transport infrastructures.

The first part of the strategy-making process focused primarily on building a new regional identity for Eastern Jutland based on a number of spatial analyses identifying key characteristics of the Eastern Jutland soft space. As a consequence the scope of the strategy-making process was expanded well beyond the Ministry of the Environment's initial set up and its policy area. Just as in the strategy-making process in Region Zealand, the Ministry of the Environment remained responsible for the Eastern Jutland strategy-making process with only limited participation from the Ministry of Transport and Energy, and as a consequence these ministries' policy areas continued to shape the remaining part of the strategy-making process. The second part of the process became thus mainly concerned with linking transport planning and future urban development.

As in the case of Region Zealand, the Ministry of the Environment's main concern was to prepare a spatial framework for the soft space, whilst the municipalities saw the process as an important platform to lobby for state investments in transport infrastructure. However, as in Region Zealand, the municipalities in Eastern Jutland experienced that the Ministry of Transport and Energy did not regard the soft space as an appropriate scale for negotiations on future investments in transport infrastructure. In addition the municipalities found it more challenging to agree on which investments in transport infrastructure to prioritise over others, compared to their colleagues in Region Zealand. The lack of consensus on future transport infrastructures was partly rooted in the historical divided between the northern and southern part of the region. This divide was further reinforced by the municipal contact councils in which very different investments in transport infrastructure were being discussed. Put briefly the Eastern Jutland soft space aimed at improving

north-south transport links according to the spatial structure of the urban region, whilst the municipal contact councils were more preoccupied with developing east-west transport links following the administrative regions' spatial structure. As a consequence the Eastern Jutland soft space remained a competing platform for regional policy-making rather than supplementing formal policy-making arenas. A municipal director highlighted how the Eastern Jutland soft space was being outcompeted by more formal governance arrangements.

> "But where are the resources? Well, where is there a formal organisation, some people employed, a politically elected leader who can invite to meetings and things like that? That is in the regions. It is not in the Eastern Jutland urban ribbon. There is no secretariat. So you need some formalisation. […] that is the exciting in […] the discussion of formal fixed cooperation forums contra ad hoc, how significant is it? And I would say that the creation of the regions is significant in the way that the municipal contact councils are also organized according to the regions. That is, I meet for example regularly with my colleagues [in other municipalities], the mayors meet regularly. Well, there are some connections, where you get to know each other, you network. It is easier to build a network through this way than across the regional boundaries." (Interview, municipal director, 2010, author's translation)

The case of soft space planning in Eastern Jutland illustrates how the boundaries of former and contemporary formal planning arenas continue to shape the spatial politics of soft spaces. The Eastern Jutland soft space was laid out to break with the existing spatial structures by providing a new spatial logic. However, as no close links were developed to formal planning arenas, the soft space remained highly contested and unstable.

4. Building governance capacity in soft spaces

This section synthesises the findings from the two cases of soft space planning in Denmark. The section discusses to what extent soft spaces act as vehicles for more effective forms of spatial planning, and how they risk supporting contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

4.1. Soft space planning: vehicle for more effective forms of spatial planning?

Contemporary processes of state re-territorialisation and rescaling in Denmark have resulted in an increasingly complex governance landscape in which the state's role in spatial planning has generally been weakening (except in the Greater Copenhagen Area), regional planning has become more diffused and development oriented, and municipalities are increasingly forced to collaborate at the regional scale through the new municipal contact councils. This new spatial reality has led to a number of new experiments of building governance capacity through episodes of informal spatial strategy-making at new scales, reflecting what in the planning literature has been referred to as soft space planning (Haughton et al., 2010).

The planning literature highlights how soft spaces act as important vehicles for policy integration, policy delivery and more effective forms of spatial planning, as they fill in the gaps between formal planning structures and processes, providing the 'glue' that binds formal scales of planning and governance together (Haughton et al., 2010). However, in the Danish cases of soft space planning only little evidence was found of significant forms of governance capacity being built or strong links between formal scales of planning being established as a consequence of soft space planning. The episodes of soft space planning were particularly disappointing in terms of promoting an integrated approach to urban development and transport planning. The soft space planning episodes remained largely the Ministry of the Environment's invention with only limited participation from

the Ministry of Transport and Energy. As a consequence the silo mentalities between the ministries were simply transferred into the soft spaces. The soft spaces did indicate stronger links being built between the Ministry of the Environment and the municipalities, however it remains unclear to what extent these links go beyond the formal cooperation on statutory planning, e.g. the national environment centres' supervision of municipal planning.

The episodes of soft space planning seem to be most significant in terms of fostering dialogue and cooperation among municipalities, in particular when synergies were created with the municipal contact councils. The Danish cases of soft space planning demonstrate how existing geo-historical structures and socio-political struggles established through time (Brenner, 2004a) play a significant role in shaping contemporary experiments of building governance capacity across formal scales of planning. Soft space planning in Region Zealand sought inspiration from and could lean on decades of experiences of strategic spatial planning at the scale of the Greater Copenhagen Area. Whilst adjusting the scale of the soft space to the boundaries of Region Zealand created a messy process where six of the participating municipalities were already regulated by the *'Finger Plan 2007'*, the reworking of the scale turned out to be productive for developing synergies with the municipal contact council. These scalar synergies proved to be crucial for building political legitimacy and initial governance capacity in the soft space.

Similar scalar synergies were not developed in the case of Eastern Jutland, as the Eastern Jutland soft space was designed to transect the regional administrative boundaries in search for more appropriate scales of spatial planning. The new spatial logic sat out to overcome a historical divide between two strong coalitions, a divide that was being reinforced by the new administrative regional boundaries. The Eastern Jutland soft space was inserted as a new competing scale to the administrative regions and municipal contact councils and remained as largely a state invention. As no strong connections were developed between the soft space and formal planning arenas, the soft

space was gradually being outcompeted by the municipal contact councils, which developed into being the more important platforms for cross-municipal strategy-making and transport infrastructure lobbying.

The evidence from the Danish cases of soft space planning suggests that experiments of building governance capacity in new planning spaces are most successful when these are closely linked to formal institutional arrangements. If soft spaces set out to challenge contradictory formal scales or overcome political geographies established through time, they are more likely to be contested and thus unable to fulfil their purposes. Haughton & Allmendinger (2009) reached a similar conclusion in the Thames Gateway, highlighting how coincidence between functional and institutional areas is important for focusing resources and building consensus. However, in general there seems to be little evidence of soft spaces acting as important vehicles for policy integration, policy delivery or promoting more effective forms of strategic spatial planning.

4.2.Soft space agenda-setting and implications for spatial planning

The planning literature highlights how effective agenda-setting and selection of key issues for spatial strategy-making are crucial for successful and effective spatial planning (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2007). Often strategic spatial planning requires the prospect of win-win situations to bring key actors together, and as a consequence spatial strategy-making tends to be more concerned with promoting economic development and investments in transport infrastructure than distributing growth (Albrechts, 2001; Salet et al., 2003).

The Danish cases of soft space planning tried to combine both agendas by aiming at strengthening the links between urban development and transport planning in order to promote sustainable urban development at subnational scales. The strategy-making processes clearly held the prospect of win-

win situations, as by concentrating their future urban development around key nodes in the public transportation system, the municipalities would create a greater population base and economic incentives for future state investments in the public transportation system. However, as the episodes of soft space planning remained the Ministry of the Environment's initiative with only limited participation from the Ministry of Transport and Energy, the state's agenda-setting in the soft spaces were dominated by the Ministry of the Environment's policy area of primarily land use planning, focusing on distribution of future urban development. As a consequence the municipalities experienced the processes as state initiatives aiming at restricting the municipal latitude in terms of spatial planning. As the municipalities did not want to commit to restricting their urban development without getting investments in transport infrastructure in return, the spatial frameworks prepared remained informal and voluntary. The episodes of soft space planning are therefore expected to have limited influence on statutory spatial planning.

The municipalities used the soft spaces to promote a different set of agendas. The municipalities regarded the soft spaces as important lobby platforms for investments in transport infrastructure and promotion of economic growth. Some municipalities even saw the soft spaces as an opportunity for lobbying for fewer restrictions on urban development. A municipal planner in Eastern Jutland said:

> "… seen from my perspective the problem in Eastern Jutland is […] if we both have to live up to the principles on that we cannot build in OSD areas [special drinking water areas], we should focus on density close to the stations, […] we cannot build on the open land, and of course we cannot build in preserved areas. If we have to live up to all those principles then it is basically impossible to build, unless there is some kind of weighing out of what counts the most. Is it the OSD, or is it that you cannot build on the open land, or what is it?" (Interview, municipal planner, 2010, author's translation)

Here we begin to see how soft space planning seeks to promote economic development by working outside the formal requirements of statutory planning and indeed begins to question some of the wider planning responsibilities associated with land use planning. These concerns are also reflected in the planning literature. Haughton et al. (2010, p.241) note that there is a danger that soft spaces "might be used to mainly sidestep wider responsibilities, not least those relating to the social justice and environmental aspects of sustainable development."

Healey (2007, p.280) concludes that

> "To the extent that corporate economic interests have the resources to drive partnerships to achieve major urban development initiatives, and to the extent that politicians and technical policy communities buy into their agendas, then concerns for environmental well-being and distributive justice may be displaced into the background of policy attention."

In the light of what we have seen in the Danish episodes of soft space planning, it is argued that critical attention needs to be paid to how soft spaces, and in particular the agenda-setting in soft spaces, supports contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

5. Conclusions

The paper seeks to contribute to the recent debate on the emergence of soft spaces in spatial planning in planning literature (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009, 2010; Haughton et al., 2010). This literature claims that soft spaces act as important vehicles for policy integration and policy delivery, promoting more effective forms of strategic spatial planning. This paper argues that new soft spaces are emerging in Danish spatial planning, as a consequence of the changing governance structures implemented as part of the structural reform in 2007. However, in the Danish cases of soft space planning only little evidence was found of significant forms of

governance capacity being built or strong links between formal scales of planning being established as a consequence of soft space planning. In fact there seems to be little empirical evidence at all of the achievements of soft spaces in the planning literature. While the empirical observation of the prevalence of soft spaces in spatial planning remains a significant contribution to the planning literature, the normative theorisation on soft spaces' significance in spatial planning seems to be overstated and perhaps even unfounded.

This paper suggests that soft spaces may provide convenient and legitimate platforms for disregarding the wider planning responsibilities of sustainable development in the pursuit of economic development. Critical attention needs to be paid to how agenda-setting in soft spaces promotes particular forms of strategic spatial planning, primarily concerned with economic development and investments in transport infrastructures. The Danish experience demonstrates how the soft spaces turned into little more than platforms for transport infrastructure lobbying. Further research is needed to analyse how the prevalence of soft spaces influences statutory spatial planning. This paper argues that there is at least a risk that soft spaces turn into vehicles for promoting contemporary neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning.

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