

Eduardo Pallardó y Margarita Ortega

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SPANISH ROLE IN ESDP WORKING OUT  
PROCESS ”

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Dpto. de Economía Aplicada - Universitat de València  
Av. Tarongers s/n, 46022 Valencia  
FAX: 963828415 - WEB: [www.uv.es/poleco](http://www.uv.es/poleco)

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## **A SHARED VISION OF EUROPEAN TERRITORY: THE SPANISH ROLE IN ESDP WORKING OUT PROCESS**

Eduardo Pallardó and Margarita Ortega

*Territorial Development Department*

*Ministry of the Environment*

**EPallardo@mma.es & mortega@mma.es**

### ***Abstract***

This article intends to explain the Spanish attitude in the ESDP process and also to clear up possible misunderstandings, continuing with an assessment of the most interesting aspects from the Spanish point of view and the pending matters that would need to be tackled by the administration.

The Spanish position along most of the ESDP process has been marked by two contradictory facts: a positive interest in a European shared approach in spatial development and a political reserve, based on three main circumstances:

- The existence of territorial concerns by sharp changes in the political context and economic restructuring ;
- The scarce tradition in spatial planning which in addition became a regional responsibility;
- And a resistance to modify a very specific focus on the use of structural policies, with the opposition to the idea that territorial matters could be taken into account in some way for the allocation of European funds.

Nevertheless, the Spanish position has always been constructive, with the hope of achieving a satisfactory consensus with the other States, and enriching the ESDP discussion process so that it would integrate the different territorial realities of the European area.

So it is that, the Spanish ministerial representation has unreservedly backed both the first official draft of the ESDP, adopted in Noordwijk, and the definitive one, adopted in Potsdam. In the last few years the Spanish position has been much less active.

At present, Spain is facing the challenge to advance more firmly in the line proposed by the ESDP and to achieve a positive contribution from the spatial development and planning policies to the objectives of sustainable development. To this end, a strategic and integrated approach to conception and implementation of policies with territorial relevance, based on cooperation between all political and administrative decision levels, European, national, regional and local, should be encouraged.

## **1. Introduction. The European dimension of spatial planning: an emerging and shared but still somewhat conditioned concept**

Territory has taken on a new strategic value. The reflection process carried out at a European level, particularly in the EU, but also in the Council of Europe, has resulted in the statement of a common and shared vision of the **double territorial and European dimension** in order to make a more sustainable economic development. This statement has also boosted the role of territorial planning<sup>1</sup> and created a significant challenge to mobilise all the agents involved in this activity towards new objectives.

This reflection process, which has taken place over a relatively short space of time, has enabled the formulation of a policy, even despite the lack of competence. It has effectively managed to go beyond the theoretical bases and has been formulated into documents, in particular the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), which are intended to form the basis of a policy for the Union as a whole<sup>2</sup>. The incorporation of the sustainable development focus introduces an additional and exemplary value into the understanding of the future of all policies.

Both the reflection process and the content of the documents themselves have involved a two fold exercise: one that is political and oriented towards practice. Its future will therefore depend largely on the boost given from the complex system of institutions and organisations at which it is directed. Furthermore, it has been carried out with a desire for consensus and with contributions from very different and enriching realities and sensitivities.

The positive assessment of this double territorial and European dimension to make economic development sustainable has been unanimous. However, its translation into operative changes in intervention policies is still uncertain. The process carried out may tell us a lot about this progress, but also about its difficulties.

These notes are intended to explain the Spanish attitude in the ESDP process and also to clear up possible misunderstandings, continuing with an assessment of the most interesting aspects from the Spanish point of view and the pending matters that would need to be tackled by the administration.

## **2. An innovative concept in a complex framework: The starting conditions**

The result of the ESDP is an innovative and strategic concept<sup>3</sup> of territorial interventions in which cities and urban systems and also regional co-operation,

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<sup>1</sup> In view of the ambiguity of this term, “sustainable territorial development” has recently been coined. Ljubljana Declaration. 13<sup>th</sup> European Conference of Ministers responsible for Territorial Planning (CEMAT) of the European Council. Ljubljana, September 2003.

<sup>2</sup> As a result of this process the current proposal of the European Convention introduces the objective of territorial cohesion and its achievement as the joint responsibility of the European Union and the States.

<sup>3</sup> The name given to the ESDP in the different languages, beyond the conventional instruments, speaks volumes: *Perspective* in English, *Schéma* in French and *Estrategia* in Spanish.

especially at the cross-border level play a singular role. It therefore constitutes a renewed framework of reference for territorial and urban planning. On the other hand, it should have an influence on the focus and orientation of sectorial policy instruments. To name but a few, we can highlight the provision of infrastructures, the intermodality and protagonism of the different modes of transport, and the role of agriculture in the new performance of rural spaces.

It effectively seems that the objectives presented by the ESDP are the response to the demands of a territory, such as the European one, which, with its peculiarities and diversity, constitutes the basis for political, economic and social integration and to an increasingly continental scale with the incorporation of new members. Having a common reference base is a key to contributing to the achievement of this from each area and using every instrument. The final result will not depend so much on the design of new instruments as on the capacity to simultaneously integrate the specific demands of the different territories with global demands – which are increasingly continental – under the common denominator of their European interest.

Despite this positive interpretation, it may be felt that the advances have not been as significant as expected. A certain level of frustration may exist in view of the apparent slowdown after the euphoria of its formulation in the informal council of Lieja in 1993, or since its official launch in 1999, in Potsdam. In reality, practical results are still few and far between in comparison with other community policies.

Without going into great depth, we can say that the process was begun under conditions that were not so much unfavourable as, at least, heterogeneous:

Firstly, territorial, and to a lesser extent, environmental concerns, were practically non-existent in the initial constituent Treaties. When reference was made to them, it was always subordinately to the economic consolidation and growth processes of the member countries. However, if there is something that should be highlighted in the process, it is the advance in coining the territorial dimension of development. Evidence of this is that the Constitutional Project drawn up by the European Convention incorporates “territorial cohesion” as an objective (article 3) and as a shared responsibility (article 13).

On the other hand, significant differences existed between Member States with respect to their political, instrumental and administrative traditions. There was also a diversity of definitions and a lack of practical tradition. Therefore the first common goal was to uncover the demand in order to progressively and cautiously channel it, always being aware of the importance of consolidating each subsequent step towards its full implementation. In fact many of the States valued both the “product” and the “process”. As a result, the adaptation of the institutional and legal framework and the orientation of the instruments is still a long way off, despite the symbolic efforts made by practically

all States. To this we can add the uneven development –which is not free from uncertainties– of the “regional factor” as a pertinent scope for territory planning.

Finally, and paradoxically, even given the key role of the European Commission -the current Regio General Directorate, an authentic engine in the production of the ESDP as a guarantee of the succession of the different presidencies that have lead the process-, one of the main obstacles has been precisely the deeply rooted tradition of some sectorial Community policies such as the transport policy, but especially the regional policy. In fact, many States, and not just the Spanish one, have tried at all times to manifest the essential differences between regional policy and spatial planning<sup>4</sup>.

### **3. The Spanish position in the process: Contradictions between interests and political reluctance.**

There may be an excessively biased interpretation of the Spanish position in the process. As we have said, one of the most positive aspects of this process has been the possibility, for the first time ever, of comparing positions from political and economic realities with very different backgrounds and bringing together very different sensitivities (the incorporation of the Nordic countries is worth highlighting in this respect). Neither is it incidental to compare the different composition of State representatives in the Spatial Development Committee: the double presence of representatives of the ministries responsible for structural funds and spatial planning.

The Spanish participation during most of the process (particularly until the launching of the First Official Draft of the ESDP in Noordwijk, in 1997) was determined by three specific factors, linked to the indicated aspects, which, to a greater or lesser extent, are merged in it:

**Firstly, the existence of a good basis regarding territorial concerns.** In effect, in the case of Spain and during the eighties, there had been a change in the approach to urban and territorial planning, motivated, among other things, by the territorial and urban effects of the economic crisis and the subsequent restructuring of the productive systems with less vulnerable models adapted to the peculiarities of the territory. This coincided politically with the establishment of democracy, which was realised through the 1978 Constitution –administrative decentralisation and the creation of the Autonomous Communities– and with the subsequent granting of new territorial responsibilities to the regions and municipalities. Consequently, it also coincided with the design of new instruments to cope with the demands provoked by economic and

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<sup>4</sup> In September 1994, at their meeting in Leipzig (Germany), the Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning of the EU approved the document “Principles for a planning policy for European territory”, which established the policy objectives of the ESDP. As well as highlighting the support by territorial planning of sustainable development and economic and social cohesion in Europe, these Principles underlined the voluntary nature of application and the respect for the competencies of existing institutions as well as for the principle of subsidiarity.

social changes that brought with them important transformations in the relationship between economic activity and space. Specifically: the criteria of localisation of activities and the requirements of qualification for spaces.

This renovation included a considerable effort in proposals and plans and an abundance of documents<sup>5</sup> with two main elements: the need to build a new territorial policy adapted to the new administrative organisation in Spain, and the urgency of re-planning and co-ordinating the policies with a greater territorial content –provision of infrastructures, regional incentives and, in short, public investments– in order to face the effects of the new economic order, particularly because of the increasingly powerful and dynamic changes in the localisation of productive activities on the territory and the new urbanization patterns.<sup>6</sup>

**Secondly, the scarce tradition of spatial planning, which became a regional responsibility.** In Spain, there was no tradition of spatial planning instruments. Some precedents were the first focuses of territorial content in the works of the last Development Plan and the inclusion in the Land Use Act of 1975 of the Territorial Co-ordination Master Plans, which were not put into practice when this competency was granted to the Autonomous Communities.

During the eighties, on the basis of the Statutes of Autonomy, it was the Autonomous Communities that proceeded to draw up legislation and design the first territorial planning instruments. However, the process was not easy as it required the introduction of new approaches to very firmly rooted policies such as urban planning or sectorial policies managed at a national or regional level.

At the beginning of the ESDP process there are still a limited number of approved spatial planning plans. However, the implementation of the early plans and the fact that discussions have taken place in the regional parliaments is highly valued. Despite the fact that many of these new instruments have an integrated focus, they lack, except for a few experiences, references to the European framework and its possible links with the new programmes to be developed in accordance with the structural funds (Regional Development Plans of the Objective 1 regions, PDR) and to relationships with neighbouring regions. Due to their technical conception, they are slow in formulation, which means that they cannot be configured as fast, flexible and effective strategies for the new role that the ESDP will require.

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<sup>5</sup> *El Territorio de los 80*, contains the main reflection documents prepared by the former General Directorate of Territorial Action and Town Planning. Ministry of Public Works and Town Planning, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Public Works and Town Planning had taken on the responsibilities of the former Ministry of Development Plan. The General Directorate for Territorial and Town Planning Action, as its name indicates, favoured a more effective integration between territorial planning and economic incentives.

In accordance with the constitutional mandate, some advances had been made by the State towards a more territorial approach of the policies<sup>7</sup>. Spatial planning went from being considered the “exclusive” responsibility of the Autonomous Communities, to being considered a responsibility “shared” with the State, as the important territorial role played by the latter’s sectorial policies were recognised<sup>8</sup>.

**And thirdly, a resistance to modify a very specific focus on the use of structural policies.** In effect, the beginning of the creation of the ESDP coincided with an increased level of consensus and conviction at a national level –among both the national and regional economic authorities– regarding the content of the instruments for the use of structural funds, especially the PDR’s, following the recent incorporation of Spain into what was then the European Economic Community (1986).

In this context, the position of the Spanish administration was based on a series of arguments. Firstly, it was admitted that the development of this matter at a European level responded to impulses from different realities and traditions in the conception and instrumentation of the territorial policy. In any case, it was justified by the specific intervention demands and priorities derived from the most important problems of the different territories. These priorities, supported by the corresponding political, economic and social groups, had in some way defined new objectives for territorial policy, which were materialised in the first PDR’s. Their content implied the reinforcement of some of the main sectorial policies, especially the provision of transport and services infrastructures, which were considered the vertebral element of the Spanish territory.

On the other hand, two large currents could be perceived as apparently contradictory foci when formulating a common policy at a European level; they responded to two simplified realities of the level of development and integration in the Community as a whole. One the one hand, the “central countries”, with problems deriving from agglomeration and congestion as negative result of their economic growth. And on the other hand, the “countries” that did not present these kinds of problems, at least not in a general way throughout their territory. This was the case of the “periphery countries” - both from a physical point of view and, above all, from an economic point of view-, which were characterised by a lower level of development and often also presented considerable territorial imbalances and specific problems such as generalised deficits in all kinds of infrastructures and problems in the management of natural resources. In short, specific comparative disadvantages in addition to their lower level of economic development. This would be the case of Spain (and also Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Italy and, to a lesser extent, France).

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<sup>7</sup> The Shore Act (1988) and the Waters Act (1985) should be highlighted.

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the Constitutional Court has established the obligatory nature of agreement on various occasions (particularly in STC 40/1998 on the relationship between port planning –state responsibility – and territorial and urban planning).

In addition, to take account the confirmation of the concentration phenomena seemed to reinforce the idea that “territorial development” would be related exclusively to large built up areas recognising them as “spaces of efficiency”, while the weaker and rural areas would be related as spaces for contributing to the environmental balance.

For these reasons, the aforementioned choice of sectorial policies was reiterated. On the basis of the Spanish experience, it was affirmed that decisions adopted with criteria and objectives from the sectorial policies had been more decisive for territorial development than decisions adopted from voluntary positions to deal with the transformation of the space via spatial planning instruments. This was attributed to the shorter tradition and more recent culture of application of these instruments, with few examples of their implementation. It was also argued that this conclusion could be extended to a large number of the EU countries.

Despite all this, a specific territorial development unit with the rank of State Secretariat was created at an institutional level, in the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Environment<sup>9</sup>. Particularly noteworthy among its first achievements are the territorial focus of the Infrastructure Master Plan<sup>10</sup> and the works for some sectorial plans such as the National Hydrological Plan.

The creation of the ESDP actually opened up a close, concerted but informal, collaboration with the Autonomous Communities. This will be maintained throughout the process and was proposed as the basis for a possible sectorial conference or another formalised mechanism for institutional co-ordination, which, so far, has not taken place.

The Spanish position in the process can therefore be summarised as a contrast between a positive assessment of the conceptual framework of the territorial dimension and a certain resistance to modifying the frameworks that had recently been established for sectorial policies, while in a certain way considering the incorporation of this territorial focus in its application, a focus which has been progressively lost over last few years.

#### **4. Some specific arguments of the Spanish Position**

The previous section talked about the general ideas that marked the Spanish position in the ESDP preparation process. To complement this, the next section gives greater details of some of the arguments defended by the Spanish Administration in the discussions. In no case was this participation doubted. On the contrary, the fact that it held a specific position made it possible for it to openly defend its arguments and guide its participation to offer a vision from the reality of our territory.

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<sup>9</sup> This State Secretariat had previously been called Territorial “Concertation” Secretariat, making reference to an obligatory demand of spatial planning: the co-ordination and agreement of sectorial actions.

<sup>10</sup> The Infrastructure Master Plan (PDI) (1991-2007) incorporates the Spanish territorial model as the first chapter, and sets the basis of some territorial strategies that were never elaborated.

- **Disagreement, in principle, with the existence of community responsibility in territorial planning**, and yet decisive support for the examination of subjects and the analysis of possible directions, particularly for Community policies. In 1995, it was effectively confirmed that, in accordance with the priorities in the framework of the initiated process, a first important achievement would be to ensure that the sectorial policies with greatest territorial effect in force in the Union constituted the first tool for achieving territorial objectives. Furthermore, it was proposed that these policies be assessed from the point of view of the effects that they were having on the transformation of the European territory, so that, as a result of the said assessment, the pertinent corrections could be introduced into their design thereof. It was also proposed that the regional policy be specifically considered among these policies. This argument has become a clear point of consensus, to the point that it is one of the main tools for the European Commission works such as the Second Cohesion Report.
- **Interest in the institutionalisation of the Spatial Development Committee**, as a common body to favour participation and achievement of objectives by consensus; a criterion that was also supported in its day by the regions. This position was reiterated, unlike the reservations on the procedure and content of the Europa 2000 and Europa 2000+<sup>11</sup> studies produced by the Commission.
- **Emphasis of the specific problems of the Spanish territory**, focused on what could be called “the Mediterranean character” and the “Periphery situation”. The most significant matters emphasised were basically:
  - **the strategic consideration of water resources**, as an insufficiency of natural resources, opposed to the consideration thereof as an exclusively environmental component.
  - **the heighten of various modes of transport and the insufficiency of the economic profitability approach of infrastructures**, as they did not consider their peripheral character and factors associated with lower densities and greater distances between urban centres, or the importance of modes such as the air or maritime transport.
  - **the existence of weak and depopulated spaces in rural areas**, which added difficulties to the management of extensive natural and cultural resources; in short the lack of alternatives and the impossibility of immediately transferring

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<sup>11</sup> With respect to the Europa 2000+ study, the Spanish administration sent the Commission some remarks, most of them were accepted. It maintained that it responded to an approach from the position of the central countries with demonstrated ignorance of some of the main problems of the newer EU countries (the future of rural areas, an understanding of the environmental problems, in particular that of water, expressed especially with regard to contamination with no reference to the demands for regulation to solve the problems of scarcity, which were very obvious at that time).

favourable results obtained in the rural areas of central countries to Spain; and, finally,

- **de-industrialisation and the effects of the de-localisation** derived from the European integration process.

In summary, the Spanish position along most of the ESDP process has been marked by a certain reserve with respect to the fact that territorial matters could be taken into account in some way for the allocation and distribution of European funds.

In this sense, emphasis was placed on the fundamental need to consider, with respect to the funds, the territorial problems, lacks and imbalances faced to a greater extent by “cohesion countries”, and to differentiate them from the problems derived from growth, such as congestion. It was felt that these latter problems could be tackled in the affected areas on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. from national, regional or local policies.

Apart from that, it must be reiterated that the Spanish position has always been constructive, with the hope of achieving a satisfactory consensus with the other States, and enriching the ESDP discussion process so that it would integrate the different territorial realities of the European area, in terms of both objective characteristics and more subjective interpretations or “ways of seeing” the respective territories. Since the Spanish presidency (the second semester of 1995), the most difficult aspects are being overcome.

The informal council of Madrid<sup>12</sup> (1995) incorporated some additional criteria for the valuation of territories into the definitive ESDP, including some of the elements supported by the Spanish representation. What were then called the “Madrid Criteria” were extended during the Italian (1996) and Dutch (1997) presidencies and were incorporated into the final ESDP document as criteria for the assessment of territorial and regional development. In fact, these criteria were considered basic analysis factors in the first programme of studies on the ESDP launched by the Commission<sup>13</sup>.

So it is that, the Spanish ministerial representation has unreservedly backed both the first official draft of the ESDP, adopted in Noordwijk, and the definitive one, adopted in Potsdam. In the same way, the central administration has been very active in the diffusion of principles and the actual ESDP document among the autonomous and local administrations, as well as among experts and universities. This attitude has also been reflected in its decisive and positive incorporation in INTERREG initiative projects, with particular attention to the regions.

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<sup>12</sup> Balance of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union. Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Environment, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Study Programme on European Spatial Planning. Final Report. Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing. Bonn, 2001.

However, it must be recognised that, in the last few years -which correspond at a Community level and in most of the member States to the start up phase of the ESDP and the debate on its evolution and development in the future- the Spanish position has been much less active. In this sense, it is significant that Spain has been the last country to ratify the approval of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) constitution and put the corresponding national structures into action.

### **5. New perspectives and lines of action**

At present, the ESDP has managed to advance significantly towards the achievement of the clear objective of the valuation of “territory” as an important element in the design and execution of European policy. It is the instrument and also the result of a broad discussion that has brought to light elements of strategic importance for the development of the European continent and for the recognition of the role and responsibility of the regional and local authorities and institutions in sustainable development<sup>14</sup>.

In short, the ESDP suggests an innovative treatment in a series of aspects linked to territorial and urban development practice:

- A new logic, or the need for a global, rather than a one-dimensional vision of the development involved when considering the growing relationship and interdependence between the territorial processes and decisions of the competent authorities.
- The importance of the new scales of intervention that exceed the conventional limits of traditional policies. Partly due to the obligatory relationship of actions with the environment in which they take place, especially in cities, the importance of city networks, and the appearance of other sub-regional, inter-regional or trans-national scales.
- A new focus of the use of conventional instruments due to the consideration of multi-sectorial action strategies, which correspond to a vision that must be integrated with new innovative management models.
- The means of intervention and government, with the prioritisation of voluntary co-operation and complementation as a starting point for seeking better solutions, as well as new ways of understanding decentralisation and participation.

In this way, it may come to have a real influence on decisions that affect the development of the European territorial structure at the various levels.

What is effectively driving the ESDP is a change of focus with regards to territorial management methods, including public investment policies. The ESDP is a message

sent by territorial planners to the other political and operational spheres whose actions have a significant influence on territorial planning, in the hope of finding innovative ways to conceive and implement their action strategies. A similar change, with the adoption of what some authors call a “new territorial culture”, is not obviously an option in the short term.

However, there are some encouraging elements. The focus and proposals of the ESDP are already being put into practice, even if this is not being done homogeneously in all European territories, nor even at times within a country, as is the case of Spain.

In our country, apart from the EU level actions and initiatives, such as the aforementioned ESPON programme or the INTERREG initiatives, the most active subjects in the last few years in the incorporation of ESDP criteria and proposals have been the Autonomous Communities. Their territorial planning instruments have used various models, priorities and criteria by virtue of the broad authority granted to them by the Spanish Constitution. They give progressively more relevance to key concepts of the ESDP such as the sustainability of territorial development, the territorial articulation of each region in the national space and in the framework of the main European subspaces, polycentrism, and the balanced consolidation of urban systems and development corridors<sup>15</sup>.

The application experiences of the ESDP are still incipient, and in Spain we may well have progressed more slowly than in other Community countries, especially with respect to the consideration of the ESDP in political spheres other than those of territorial and urban planning. In order to advance more firmly in the line proposed by the ESDP and maximise the potential contribution of territorial planning to the sustainable development objectives, a plan of action should be encouraged by the responsible administrations, containing the following points:

- More active incorporation into European programmes and initiatives, prioritising the territorial dimension of their objectives, conception and execution
- The progressive application of this new territorial focus to the conception and implementation of policies that have an influence on territory.
- The adaptation of administrative structures to the new requisites and scales.
- The resolved implementation of the principle of voluntary co-operation.
- And, finally, the maintenance and deepening of research –both theoretical and applied– as well as the systematic assessment of territorial tendencies and results of actions that are being implemented.

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<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Pallardó *El ESDP: ¿Hacia un nuevo enfoque de las políticas territoriales en la UE?* Cuadernos Económicos de Granada Magazine nº 10, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Territorial Strategy of Navarre, Territorial Planning Guidelines of Castilla y Leon, Territorial Planning Plan of Andalusia, for example.