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Sustainable Spatial Development in Luxembourg (SUSTAINLUX)

Project Summary

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Against the backdrop of the recent economic and demographic development dynamics and the strong pressure on land resources and provision of infrastructure, the study of sustainable development in Luxembourg is an evaluation of existing planning policy instruments and governance patterns with respect to urban and regional social spatial transformation in the Grand Duchy in general, and of housing policy and transport in particular. Rather than examining sets of indicators or inquiring how to best fill the sustainability gap, this project intends to illuminate problems and conceptual issues concerning urban regions and urban space, and to take a critical look behind governance, and normative orientations in policy making such as sustainable development. This research is generously supported by the CORE program of *the Fonds National de la Researche Luxembourg*, and was conceived in cooperation with the *Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung*, in Leipzig. The project also collaborates with both the *Conseil Supérieur pour un Développement Durable* (CSDD) as well as the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Aménagement du Territoire* (CSAT), who signalled their strong interest and offered practical support. The project will be carried out over a duration of three years (2010-2013).

Luxembourg setting

Since the publication of the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (United Nations 1987: 54), the Agenda 21 that evolved out of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (United Nations 1992), and the Johannesburg Summit (United Nations 2003), various attempts have been undertaken world-wide to bring sustainability closer to reality. Luxembourg, too, followed suit, and sustainable development became a central concept behind urban and regional policy initiatives, with, for example, the publication of the *Plan National pour un Développement Durable* (Ministère de l'Environnement 1999), the *Programme Directeur d'Amenagement du Territoire* (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2003), and the various sector plans that have since emerged that address housing, transport, landscapes and forests, and economic activity. All of these documents

explicitly pronounce and outline specific strategies towards sustainable development as a primary planning goal. Yet, many maintain that things have gotten worse, not better since 1987 (Jordan 2008: 17), and in Luxembourg specifically, contradictory processes are easily observable. These include the rapid growth of outlying municipalities inside and outside of its national borders (Leick 2009: 53; Sohn and Jacoby 2009: 60), the tight private property market and low rental vacancy rates (Beyer 2009: 138), the social and environmental pressures resulting from commuter flows (Becker and Hesse 2010: 2), and the cheap gasoline prices (Thöne 2008: 12; Beyer 2009:138) and the related national footprint (Conseil Supérieur pour un Développement Durable and Global Footprint Network 2010). They also signal that the three-legged-stool of sustainability is still not as evenly balanced as one might prefer.

Regulated at municipal, national, and European levels, Luxembourg's comparably young sustainable development policy grapples with spatial structural changes associated with its post-industrial and prospering tertiary economy, challenges associated by recent demographic changes, and its geographical specificity as a land-locked nation-state in a web of trade, financial, and commuter flows. Of its roughly 500,000 residents, who enjoy relatively short power distances to decision-makers within the political and administrative systems, just over 200,000 are landed immigrants (Statec Luxembourg 2010: 9). On each working day, the City of Luxembourg's population almost doubles in size as commuters from Lorraine, Wallonia, Saarland, and Rhineland-Palatinate enter it to work (Becker and Hesse 2010: 2) – and the city's nodal position, in an ever growing Grand Région at the crossroads that lead to Cologne, Paris, and Brussels, is continually gaining

in importance (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2003: 154-155). These evolutions have had a strong impact at the local level in terms of urban development, by exerting high pressure on the provision of housing and transport infrastructure (OECD 2007: 88; Ministère de l'Intérieur 2003: 173; Innenministerium et al. 2004: 1). They result in conflicting trajectories in terms of land use objectives, the provision of affordable housing, and the preservation of green spaces within the country. The fields of housing policy and mobility thus seem most promising as case studies appropriate to inquire into a more thorough analysis of policy relevance, barriers, and shortcomings of sustainable spatial development strategies.

Critical re-reading of sustainable development

Any study of sustainable spatial development must take into account the breadth of international literature that is critical on the subject (see Krueger and Gibbs 2007). In this respect, there are several points to be noted. First, many schemes are characterised by a simplified Cartesian "container space" that overlook the embeddedness and interconnectedness of cities in larger-scale networks at regional, interregional, or international levels. Second, it is also often overlooked that changes at one political level are deeply embedded in the multi-layer construction of the overall political economic system, thus making local efforts for achieving sustainability extremely dependent on overarching political action, support mechanisms, financial resources, and power. Third, implementation strategies and knowledge production processes have been criticised for their technocratic leanings reflected in the pervasion of much of the sustainable development discourse by environmental engineering and architecture, eco-efficiency or green tech-

nologies, just to name a few. As a consequence, social contexts and respective constraints are often underestimated, overlooked, or worse, deemed unimportant. Fourth, socially produced spaces are necessarily wrought with contradictions, rendering the integration of various dimensions of sustainability a compromise of multiple perspectives, and implementation processes a result of certain value judgments and institutional planning objectives. Fifth, there is a strong competition among policy models and ideological preferences, which delimits the capacity of sustainable development guidelines to gain hegemony. The more or less parallel use of the "Gothenburg" and "Lisbon" agendas of the European Union was a good example of this. The former focussed on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, while the latter primarily aimed at strengthening economic competitiveness.

Architecture of project

The case of Luxembourg is well suited for an analysis in the context of governance because of its size, its multifaceted challenges in spatial development, and its current and future forms of regulation. An analysis of governance structures in Luxembourg can reveal patterns of institutional and governmental decision-making capacities. The project will follow two frameworks in terms of the chronology of the sustainable development in Luxembourg. First, the historical course that put sustainability on the planning agenda of Luxembourg will be examined. Second, the future trajectories that might result from existing and emerging policies will be examined.

Because sustainability is a contested concept, just as it is more prevalent than ever in the discourse, a current research on sustainable development demands in-novative, critical, possibly reflective and iterative research methods. The research method will be designed that both analyzes sustainable development in practice and develops further the concept itself. This approach demands, then, hermeneutic and qualitative methodologies (see Robbins and Krueger 2000; Donohoe and Needham 2009; Creswell 2009; MacMillan and Marshall 2006). In addition to an exploratory literature review and document screening, the methodological design consists of: (1) a discourse analysis to identify the most relevant actors, policy strands, and conflict lines, and to reveal which themes are prioritised, why, by, and for whom; (2) a multi-level approach to understanding the underlying governance and decision-making patterns and related power topographies; and (3) scenario techniques for illustrating potential development trends and for synthesising policy recommendations.

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