

# Linking Discourse and Space: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Space in Analysing Spatial Policy Discourses

Tim Richardson and Ole B. Jensen

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**Summary.** The aim of this paper is to explore how spatialities are ‘constructed’ in spatial policy discourses and to explore how these construction processes might be conceptualised and analysed. To do this, we discuss a theoretical and analytical framework for the discourse analysis of socio-spatial relations. Our approach follows the path emerging within planning research focusing on the relations between rationality and power, making use of discourse analytics and cultural theoretical approaches to articulate a cultural sociology of space. We draw on a variety of theoretical sources from critical geography to sociology to argue for a practice- and culture-oriented understanding of the spatiality of social life. The approach hinges on the dialectical relation between material practices and the symbolic meanings that social agents attach to their spatial environment. Socio-spatial relations are conceptualised in terms of their practical ‘workings’ and their symbolic ‘meaning’, played out at spatial scales from the body to the global—thus giving notion to an analysis of the ‘politics of scale’. The discourse analytical approach moves away from textually oriented approaches to explore the relations between language, space and power. In the paper, we use examples of the articulation of space in the emerging field of European spatial policy. It is shown how the new spatial policy discourse creates the conditions for a new set of spatial practices which shape European space, at the same time as it creates a new system of meaning about that space, based on the language and ideas of polycentricity and hypermobility.

Spaces, then, may be constructed in different ways by different people, through power struggles and conflicts of interest. This idea that spaces are socially constructed, and that many spaces may co-exist within the same physical space is an important one. It suggests the need to analyse how discourses and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are connected with particular spaces (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 1998, pp. 9–10).

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore how spatialities are ‘constructed’ in policy and planning discourses and to explore how these construction processes might be conceptualised and analysed. Our overall argument is that the analysis of spatial policy discourses will benefit from using a theoretical and analytical framework that deals not only with discourses but also with spaces and spatiality. To achieve this, we elaborate a

*Tim Richardson is in the Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S10 2TN, UK. Fax: 0114 272 2199. E-mail: tim.richardson@sheffield.ac.uk. Ole B. Jensen is in the Department of Development and Planning, Aalborg University, Fibigerstraede 11, DK-9220 Aalborg, Denmark. Fax: +45 9815 3537. E-mail: obj@i4.auc.dk.*

theoretical and analytical framework for the discourse analysis of socio-spatial relations. The application of this framework, and the resulting insights into the nature of spatial policy, are illustrated by focusing on the emerging field of European spatial policy. This is a particularly interesting case, because it reveals how new modes of policy thinking, institutional structures and practices are being constructed, challenging those that have evolved in the different EU member-states. The new discourse of European spatial policy is being shaped in a complex milieu of power struggles and contested meanings which extends across Europe and reaches from local to transnational policy arenas.

We begin, then, by briefly outlining the EU's tentative steps towards European spatial policy. We then move on to construct a general theoretical framework of space and spatiality—a *cultural sociology of space* in our terminology—or what Sayer has described as a new spatially conscious sociology (Sayer, 2000, p. 133). Drawing from a variety of theoretical sources from critical geography to sociology, we argue for a practice- and culture-oriented understanding of the spatiality of social life. Such a cultural sociology of space hinges on the dialectical relation between material practices and the symbolic meanings that social agents attach to their environment. Socio-spatial relations are conceptualised both in terms of their practical 'workings' and their symbolic 'meaning'. Social space is thus simultaneously a field of action and a basis for action, on scales from the body to the global. Although our approach emphasises spatiality as an inescapable component of social life, we acknowledge that it is simply one of the factors which need to be analysed to understand social conditions and dynamics. In some cases, it is crucial to this understanding, in others less so.

We then consider how a cultural sociology of space might be operationalised in a way which would be useful in researching spatial policy-making. Following the path emerging

within planning research focusing on power relations (Flyvbjerg, 2000, p. 16), we set out a discourse analytical framework that focuses on how words and actions frame and represent spaces on the basis of certain relations between power and rationality. The non-textual approach to discourse analysis is well equipped to deal with spatiality, by incorporating a dimension of socio-spatial practices, embracing materiality, re-presentation and imagination (Harvey, 1996, p. 322). The essence of a non-textual approach is that it explores the performativity of discourse: how social structures create conditions for thought, communication and action, and how different configurations of power and rationality shape, and are shaped by, policy processes. Analysing language, and analysing practices, become complementary ways of revealing these struggles for control over meaning in policy-making and implementation.

To illustrate how such a non-textual discourse analysis of the cultural sociology of space might be operationalised, we draw upon our earlier analysis of the emerging field of European spatial policy, manifested in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (Richardson and Jensen, 2000; Jensen and Richardson, 2001). In dealing with this example of the construction of a spatial policy discourse, we explore its meanings, practices and rationalities as expressions of not only a new 'politics of scale' but also as a contribution to a nascent European identity.

Finally, we offer some general conclusions on the conceptual effort to bridge spaces and discourse in planning and policy analysis. The message of a theoretical and analytical perspective framed by the cultural sociology of space and the discourse analytical framework thus hinges on perceiving how the spatiality of social life is played out in a dialectical tension between material practices and symbolic meanings at scales from the body to the global. Thus any spatial policy discourse seeking to direct or produce new spatial practices works by means of building

language uses and practice forms expressing specific power and rationality forms. Seen from this perspective, the ESDP both creates the conditions for a new set of spatial practices which shape European space, at the same time as it creates and reproduces a new system of meaning about that space—based on the language and ideas of polycentricity and hypermobility.

## 2. European Spatial Policy: The Making of a New Spatial Policy Discourse

Before exploring the links between space and discourse, we will briefly outline the new field of European spatial policy. This should help the reader to make sense of our subsequent attempts to illustrate the analytical potential of linking space and discourse by returning to analysis of this policy field.

Since the late 1980s, principally under the auspices of its General Directorate for Regional Development (in the beginning named DGXVI, since renamed DG Regio), the European Commission has analysed and charted the spatial and territorial development of the Community with increasing scrutiny. The nature of this engagement has changed dramatically from its early interest in restructuring the Regional Development Fund to facilitate the redistribution of benefits under its cohesion policy. In the 1990s, through Commission initiatives and the work of, amongst others, the Committee on Spatial Development (CSD), the EU progressed a series of initiatives on spatial co-operation in Europe marked by the publication of key policy documents setting out spatial analysis and policy issues at the scale of the EU (CEC, 1991, 1994, 1997). Through these activities, the aims have gradually broadened and become more ambitious: to provide a strategic spatial framework which could draw together many other EU initiatives with spatial impacts (such as trans-European networks, agriculture and environment policy) and to create a spatial vision which could shape the spatial planning activities within and between member-states. This framework and vision are enshrined in the European Spatial Develop-

ment Perspective (the ESDP) (see CSD, 1999). After working through a series of drafts, the final version of the ESDP was adopted by the informal meeting of ministers responsible for spatial planning in the EU in Potsdam on 10–11 May 1999.

Spatial policy-making at the European level necessarily involves concerted integrated working between the different Directorates of the Commission responsible for Regions but also, among others, Transport, Environment and Agriculture. But the Commission itself is merely one actor at this level, working between the European Council and the European Parliament in a hotly contested lobbying environment to move forward the policy field whilst reconciling or mediating between conflicting positions and interests.

The new field of EU spatial policy is not legally based on the Treaties of the European Union. The EU therefore has no formal competence for implementing spatial policy, or for making its policies binding on member-states, which makes the ESDP distinctive. It is carefully framed as serving as a basis for voluntary actions, setting out policy options and even avoiding in its final version the use of proposal maps (after heated debate). It is also titled ‘perspective’ rather than ‘plan’ or ‘policy’, suggesting its indicative status. However, in spite of this apparent lack of teeth, the thinking and vision-making in the ESDP is increasingly guiding European Funding and influencing planning activity across Europe. This particularly applies to the INTERREG programme which, since the mid 1990s, has proved to be the *de facto* mechanism for implementation of the emerging ESDP’s transnational spatial policy thinking. INTERREG IIC (1994–2000) enabled cross-border transnational planning initiatives between national and European levels, working within the context of transnational regions subsumed under the ESDP framework. The new and economically stronger INTERREG IIIB programme (2000–06) explicitly states that recommendations made in the ESDP must be taken into account and that the programme especially

encourages the drawing-up of 'spatial visions' at the transnational level. Alongside EU initiatives like INTERREG, member-states are increasingly integrating the ESDP's language and framing of spatial relations and policy options into planning strategies at national, regional and local levels in a more subtle process of *Europeanisation* of planning systems.

After this brief foray into the field of European spatial policy and planning, we will now move on to discuss the idea of a cultural sociology of space, as the first step in our attempt to link discourse and space.

### 3. Towards a Cultural Sociology of Space

The fundamental assumption of a cultural sociology of space is that analysis must deal with the dialectical relations between socio-spatial practices and the symbolic and cultural meanings that social agents attach to their environments (these two spheres are separated analytically, not as an ontological statement). That is to say, we need to conceptualise socio-spatial relations in terms of their practical 'workings' and their symbolic 'meaning'. This dialectical perspective means that the spatiality of social life is thus simultaneously a field of action and a basis for action (Lefebvre, 1974/91, pp. 73 and 191). To this dialectic relation, we will add a further perspective of the politics of scale.

#### *Spatial Practices*

The first (analytical) dimension of the 'cultural sociology of space' dealing with the coercive and enabling effects of socio-spatial relations on social practices, emphasises not only the material dimension of human agency but also the significance of power. David Harvey stresses that social relations are always spatial and exist within a certain produced framework of spatialities and that this framework consists of institutions understood as "produced spaces of a more or less durable sort" (Harvey, 1996, p. 122). Such spatialised institutions range from territories

of control and surveillance to domains of organisation and administration, creating institutional environments within which symbolised spaces are produced and attributed meanings. In line with the dialectical framework, specific places must furthermore be conceptualised in relational terms.

Henri Lefebvre, among others, has recognised the importance of the production of space through spatial practices

*Spatial practice* thus simultaneously defines: places—the relationship of local and global; the re-presentation of that relationship; actions and signs; the trivialised spaces of everyday life; and, in opposition to these last, spaces made special by symbolic means as desirable or undesirable, benevolent or malevolent, sanctioned or forbidden to particular groups (Lefebvre, 1974/91, p. 288; emphasis in original).

As a part of the cultural sociology of space, flows and mobilities are addressed as a key dimension in understanding material practices in society. The new mobility forms transforming the spatiality of social life contribute to uneven geographical development 'producing difference' at various spatial scales (Harvey, 2000, pp. 75–83). The problem of uneven development in the face of globalisation creates a critical problem in framing policy discourses carrying the idea of balanced development. According to Manuel Castells, the complex dynamics of globalisation can be understood as a dialectical tension between these two forms of 'spatial logic' or forms of rationality (Castells, 1996, p. 378). In line with the work of, for example, Maarten Hajer (2000) and John Urry (2000), Castells sees mobility as the key to understanding these relations. The essence of his conceptualisation is therefore a dialectical tension between the historically rooted local spatial organisation of human experience (*the space of places*) versus the global flow of goods, signs, people and electronic impulses (*the space of flows*) (Castells, 1996, pp. 412 and 423). In the words of Lefebvre

The local (or the “punctual”, in the sense of determined by a particular “point”) does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the regional, national or even world wide level. The national and regional levels take innumerable “places”; national space embraces the regions; and world space does not merely subsume national spaces (for the time being at least) precipitates the formation of new national spaces through a remarkable process of fission (Lefebvre, 1974/91, p. 88).

That is to say that spaces and places are not isolated and bounded entities, but material and symbolic constructions that work as meaningful and practical settings for social action because of their relations to other spaces and places (Allen *et al.*, 1998). In other words

A place is a site of relations of one entity to another and it therefore contains “the other” precisely because no entity can exist in isolation (Harvey, 1996, p. 261).

According to Castells’ analysis, the relationship between the space of places and the space of flows is not predetermined in its outcome. Thus it is an empirical question how this simultaneous globalisation and localisation is played out in the specific environments studied, in our case the nested visions and re-presentations of the spatiality of Europe. So a critical analysis of the re-presentations of space which form the new field of European spatial policy discourses reveals them as attempts to frame spaces in line with a particular ideology of European space, which asserts a new ‘space of flows’ as against a ‘space of places’. Furthermore, the re-presentation of space that is articulated within these discourses of European space is bearing on this tension. A tension that, according to Castells, is the hallmark of our time

because function and power in our societies are organized in the space of flows, the structural domination of its logic essentially alters the meaning and dynamic of places. Experience, by being related to

places, becomes abstracted from power, and meaning is increasingly separated from knowledge. It follows a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threaten to break down communication channels in society ... Unless cultural *and physical* bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading towards life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into differential dimensions of a social hyperspace (Castells, 1996, p. 428; emphasis in the original).

Urry (2000) also points to a deeper understanding of the different social forms of spatial mobilities governing the contemporary socio-spatial relation as a vital dimension of the cultural sociology of space. His work suggests an understanding of places as both sites of co-presence and flows

Places can be loosely understood therefore as multiplex, as a set of spaces where ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce, interconnect and fragment. Any such place can be viewed as the particular nexus between, on the one hand, propinquity characterised by intensely thick co-present interaction, and on the other hand, fast flowing webs and networks stretched corporeally, virtually and imaginatively across distances (Urry, 2000, p. 140).

Turning to the material practices which play a part in the production of spaces, Foucault in particular was very interested in how domains of organisation and administration operated through the power relations embedded in local practices, through the “apparently humble and mundane mechanisms which appear to make it possible to govern” (Miller and Rose, 1993, p. 83). These local practices included

techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and re-presentational forms such as tables ... the inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies (Miller and Rose, 1993, p. 83).

This insight suggests the importance of close attention to the fine grain of the policy process. The focus is turned towards how commonly used techniques of analysis construct particular forms of knowledge, providing legitimacy for particular spatial strategies whilst marginalising other ways of understanding policy problems. The tools and frameworks of policy-making may mask such conflicts, but inevitably they are marked by them.

In these terms, we might conceptualise the emerging field of European spatial policy discourses as an attempt to produce a new framework of spatialities—of regions within member-states, transnational mega-regions, and the EU as a spatial entity—which disrupts the traditional territorial order and destabilises spatialities within European member-states. The new transnational orientation creates new territories of control, expressed through the new transnational spatial vision of polycentricity and mobility. It necessitates new territories of surveillance, manifested in the need for enhanced spatial analysis focusing on new problems at new spatial scales. Significantly, much of this analysis is focused on flows between European regions. These new territories are given life by a variety of more or less formal administrative arrangements and symbolic investments.

### *Symbolic Meanings*

The second (analytical) dimension of the cultural sociology of space addresses how meaning is attached to the spatiality of social life. In other words, it deals with the question of how re-presentations, symbols and discourses frame the cultural meaning of socio-spatiality. By means of a process of 'social spatialisation', social agents appropriate and give meaning to spaces through socio-spatial practices and identification processes (Shields, 1991, pp. 7 and 31). Thus social agents 'appropriate' space in terms of ascribing cultural and symbolic attributes to their environment whilst their spatial practices are simultaneously enabled or restricted by the

very quality of this spatiality. A discursive re-presentation of space prescribes a domain of 'meaningful' actions and thus at the end of the day provides a regulatory power mechanism for the selection of appropriate and meaningful utterances and actions. In the words of Lefebvre, we are exploring the 're-presentations of space'—that is, the

conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived ... This is the dominant space in any society ... re-presentations of space are shot through with a knowledge (*savoir*)—i.e. a mixture of understanding (*connaissance*) and ideology—which is always relative and in the process of change (Lefebvre, 1974/91, pp. 38–39 and 41).

Again, it is possible to see social spatialisation as a major activity in the new field of European spatial policy, as physical spaces are attributed new meanings. In the new spatial vision for the European Union, cities, ports and airports may be represented as key nodes in transnational networks. This process of attributing meaning is contested between actors from the local to the European level, given what is at stake in terms of the perceived link between connectedness and economic competitiveness. Regions may be represented as core, peripheral, urban or rural in the new European geography. And local roads and railways may be represented as segments of international high-speed transport corridors.

Thus the cultural sociology of space with its double focus on material practices and symbolic meanings also coins the question of belonging and identity as a matter of material as well as cognitive processes

The experience of identity remains a combination of fragmentation and symbolic levelling that derives from the media and, simultaneously, the unending search for authenticity which is as dependent on *ma-*

*terial artifacts*, institutions, and localized space as it is on *cognitive processes* of self-integration (Gottdeiner, 1995, p. 242; emphasis added).

Thus the cultural sociology of space also deals with the idea of social identity as a process of constructing meaning on the basis of pre-given cultural attributes (Castells, 1997, p. 6). But, even though social identities can be originated or 'induced' from dominant institutions (such as the EU), they will, in the words of Castells, only become identities insofar as social agents internalise them in a process of individuation. This is important both in the context of the debate over 'Europeanness' and also in the context of 'globalisation', and suggests the need to broaden the debate over the nature of EU spatial policy. Thus

The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations (Castells, 1997, p. 7).

The spatial location of social action is, according to Castells, vital for processes of socio-spatial identification at all spatial scales from the neighbourhood to the transnational and the global. In the case of territorial identity, local environments do not, *per se*, generate a specific pattern of behaviour or identity (this would be a case of spatial fetishism). However, people do resist the process of individuation and social atomisation, and thus tend to cluster in community organisations that often generate a communal, cultural identity over time. But in order for such an identity to come about, a process of social mobilisation is necessary. The basic rationale of the 'network society' is that only the élite inhabiting the "timeless space of flows of global networks" can manage to construct identities on a reflexive and cognitive basis that allows for rational life-planning (Castells, 1997, p. 11). Thus the search for meaning, and thereby identity con-

struction, mainly takes place in the reconstruction of identities around communal principles. Returning to our example, policy discourses of European space can be said to do more than carry with them visions and ideas for the transnational functional co-ordination of activities in space. The ESDP can be seen as both articulating a functional network of regions and nation-states in a competitive global region, as well as injecting a spatial dimension into the discourse of political integration in Europe and thus potentially spatialising the less tangible notion of a European identity.

### *The Politics of Scale*

The third analytical dimension of a cultural sociology of space addresses *scaling*—the ways that spatial practices and the construction of symbolic meanings take place at particular spatial scales. Scaling should not be understood as either an ontological statement on the profound nature of spatiality or once-and-for-all fixed hierarchies of places. What it means is rather to notice the power relations and workings of a 'politics of scale' (Brenner, 1998). Such politics of scale makes the cultural sociology of space sensitive to the way social agents relate to spaces and places in terms of identification. Additionally, these spatialities are seen as either action enabling or constraining as they represent

a range of discourses in which the meaning and identity of political actors are referred to a particular place, a portion of a real space, whether it be a neighbourhood, a city, region, or national territory, and where as a result a certain degree of political closure is effected or at least reinforced (Low, 1997, p. 255).

In other words, social agents are using more or less fixed notions of a spatial hierarchy of nested places in order to navigate reality. In principle the range of scaling extends from the body ('the geography closest in') to the global

The continual production and reproduction of scale expresses the social as much as the geographical contest to establish boundaries between different places, locations and sites of experience. The making of place implies the production of scale in so far as places are made different from each other; scale is the criterion of difference not so much between places as between different *kinds* of places (Smith, 1993, p. 99; emphasis in original).

In the context of European spatial policy, it amounts to seeing the discursive practices of scaling and 'rescaling' from the nested territories of cities and urban regions to the nation-state, the new transnational regions and the European Union. European spatial policy discourses constructed in these multilevel arenas are not only expressions of a new politics of scale, they are framed in the context of globalisation and so explicitly articulate a global–local dialectic, manifested in the interaction of multiple and complex localised practices crossing time and space (Harvey, 1996).

Drawing together the three dimensions of *material practices*, *symbolic meanings* and *politics of scale* in a cultural sociology of space has several important consequences. First, as Harvey expresses it, re-presentations of space not only arise from social practices, they also 'work back' as regulations on those forms of practice (Harvey, 1996, p. 212), thus creating a complex socio-spatial dialectic. In other words, the new spatial visions contained in the ESDP not only express future 'imaginary landscapes', they also 'work' in terms of being vehicles for new forms of transnational policy-making. This seems to be especially important when dealing with the spatiality of everyday life, as a means of understanding both the routines of everyday time-geography (Giddens, 1984) and the dynamics of social and spatial change (Allen *et al.*, 1998).

The development of the Trans European Networks (TENs) and the focus on 'missing links' vividly illustrates this point. TENs originated in the 1980s as a transport and

communications policy, but are prominent in the ESDP as a key component of delivering its spatial (and economic) agenda through the creation of integrated trans-European networks of transport and communications infrastructure. The vision of a Europe without constraint on the physical movement of goods and people is a re-presentation of a symbolic space of integration and cohesion. In order to achieve such a 'frictionless' space, the policy discourse frames the problem of friction in relation to traditional ways of thinking about transport systems, constrained by national boundaries. The language of 'missing links' and 'missing networks', originating in lobbying reports of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT, 1984, 1991), therefore became a means of articulating the critical gaps needed to complete the European infrastructure jigsaw and the need for transnational activity to deliver appropriate solutions. Framing the problem in this way generates a need for new spatial practices which respond to the new 'problem' of transcending nation-state boundaries and physical barriers such as mountain ranges and stretches of water. They also play a part in expressing the new politics of scale by re-articulating the territory of Europe as a transnational polycentric space connected by long-distance, seamless transport networks.

Secondly, this approach to the relation between space and discourse also implies that the concept of power is reflected within the theory. As Beauregard (1995, p. 60) reminds us, the City does not present itself but is rather represented by means of power relations expressed in strategies, discourses and institutional settings. European space can also be understood in these terms. Thus we subscribe to the numerous conceptualisations of planning as an expression of a 'will to order' (among others, see Boyer, 1983; Diken, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Sennett, 1990; Wilson, 1992). The creation of a new activity of European spatial planning can be understood as an expression of a 'will to order' European space, with its emphasis on ideas



such as cohesion and balance which articulate a harmonised Europe.

Thirdly, and as a direct consequence of seeing planning as the ‘will to order’, the concept of knowledge and the social relations governing the various claims to valid knowledge are central to the analysis. As Perry reminds us, we should rather think of planning as a spatial and strategic discourse than as a science or knowledge of space (Perry, 1995, p. 237). Thus, the question is what epistemologies govern the ‘knowledge policy’ in operation. In the words of David Harvey

Discursive struggles over re-presentation are ... as fiercely fought and just as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar (Harvey, 1996, p. 322).

This leads to a view of planning as more than a rhetorical activity, that planning could be seen as ‘world making’ (Fischler, 1995)—not in the sense that plans and visions automatically determine a material and spatial outcome; rather, that such words, signs and symbols become the frame of mind for social agents as well as being the outcome of the historical and contextual conditions under which they are articulated

While sets of meanings of the social imaginary are conceptualized in symbolic languages, these meanings are materialized and become real in all sorts of spatial and social practices, from urban design to housing policy (Zukin, 1998, p. 629).

In other words, social agents ‘appropriate’ space through socio-spatial practices and identification processes. One of the ways that places are given a specific meaning is through the creation of ‘place images’ which imply simplification, stereotyping and labelling (Shields, 1991, p. 47). Brought together collectively, a number of place images forms a ‘place myth’ (Shields, 1991, p. 61). Again, the place images constructed within the new transnational spatial policy discourses can be seen as attempts to realise a new place myth of European space.

Summing up, ‘the cultural sociology of space’ framework is grounded in the dialectical socio-spatial relation. Or, in the words of Andrew Sayer

The spatio-temporal situation of people and resources affects the very nature or constitution of social phenomena. In turn, the effects of actions are influenced by the content and form of their external settings or contexts. The constitutive property of space can work in two ways, often in conjunction: in terms of *material preconditions of actions*, and in terms of their *constitutive meanings* (Sayer, 2000, p. 114; emphasis added).

The basic proposition is that the socio-spatial relation *works* by means of its coercive or enabling capacities for spatial practices. Furthermore the socio-spatial relation conveys *meaning* to social agents via multiple re-presentations, symbols and discourses. Thus the socio-spatial relation on the one hand expresses possibilities and limitations to social actions within the built environment. On the other hand, the meaning and valuation of this relation is constantly negotiated and renegotiated on the basis of social imageries and cultural values. This dialectic tension furthermore expresses a politics of scale in the sense that socio-spatial practices and meanings produce and reproduce spatialities at scales from the body to the global, as in the case of the new forms of socio-spatial mobility.

From this overall theoretical perspective of space as simultaneously a material reality and a cultural sphere of symbolic valorisation, we continue by setting out a framework for explicit analysis of spatial policy discourses.

#### 4. Analysing Spatial Policy Discourse

From this initial discussion of a cultural sociology of space, we now move on to discuss how a discourse analytical framework can allow the concept to be researchable. The particular challenge is to establish a framework which operationalises an analysis of

both the cultural *and* material dimensions of a cultural sociology of space.

The terms *discourse* and *discourse analysis* are the foci of a very heterogeneous body of theory. However, a common feature in many approaches has been their strictly textual orientation. In this way, policy discourse might be understood as the bundle of exchanges which give shape through metaphors and practices to a particular policy-making process or debate (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). Policy documents often become a focus for analysis as they are seen to mirror the changing balance of power between competing discourses (of, say, economic development and social and environmental justice).

So a strictly textually oriented discourse analytical framework might be used to analyse how specific rationalities are articulated, on what grounds and in what institutional settings. However, such a conceptualisation of discourse does not make connections between the texts it analyses and the material places of, say, an actual polycentric urban system. Thus we need a theoretical framework that can grasp material changes in urban space. Put crudely, one could say that the textually oriented discourse analytical framework can be used to study 'how' something is constituted as an object of knowledge formation and planning, whereas theories of socio-spatial transformation are used to study 'what' is created and under 'which' material and societal conditions. Thus, we need also to address the 'object' in question—in this case, spaces and places. This implies that we should grasp the relation between textual discourse and materiality in a dialectical way. In the words of Andrew Sayer

Discourses in society can be performative as well as descriptive because they are embedded in material social practices, codes of behaviour, institutions and constructed environments (Sayer, 2000, p. 44).

What this means is also that the conceptualisation and analysis of socio-spatial practices

and textual discourses of spaces and places must be bridged since

Our insistence on the material and spatial embedding of social relations in no way implies that discursive relations can be ignored, for communicating and representing are of course actions in themselves (Sayer, 2000, p. 183).

In the light of this need to bridge the gap between textual discourse and socio-spatial practices, we adopt an approach to discourse which, drawing from Foucault and Hajer, embraces material practices (see Jensen, 1997; Richardson and Jensen, 2000). Thus a spatial policy discourse will be defined as: an entity of repeatable linguistic articulations, socio-spatial material practices and power-rationality configurations. Accordingly, our analysis of discourse as re-presentations is divided into three (analytical) spheres: language, practice and power-rationality. Thus, a discourse can be understood as expressing a particular conceptualisation of reality and knowledge that attempts to gain hegemony. This 'will to knowledge' attempts to embed particular values and ways of seeing and understanding the world as natural, so that they become taken for granted and slip from critical gaze. It is thus an institutionalisation and fusion of articulation processes and practice forms, which generates new forms of knowledge and rationality, and frames what are considered to be legitimate social actions. This approach is quite different from examining how rhetorical 'discourse' is reproduced in practice. Instead, the analysis focuses on how a policy discourse is manifested and reproduced in policy languages and in policy practices, to try and understand the relations between power and rationality as a new discourse emerges in a contested policy space and possibly attains hegemonic status.

We use the discourse analytical framework as an operational and analytical tool for probing at the ways in which spaces and places are re-presented in policy discourses in order to bring about certain changes of socio-spatial relations and prevent others. Following

this approach, policy discourses can be explored in terms of their reproduction in languages and practices, to reveal their underlying power-rationalities. First, we turn to the expression of policy discourses in language.

### *Language*

According to our approach to discourse analysis, the first step is to explore how particular actions, institutions or physical artefacts, attributes or relations are re-presented in the language of policy documents. In the plethora of new European spatial policy processes, a series of documents charts the progress and shifts in policy-making, the emergence of new ideas, the entwining of strategies, policies and actions. Key documents are fragments of different knowledge-framing processes. Thus different ways of framing 'space' set up different requirements for 'spatial knowledge' to be gathered and analysed in particular ways, to feed and support different spatial re-presentations.

For example, the core ESDP vision is expressed in what might be termed a new language of European spatial relations. It centres on a policy triangle of economic and social cohesion, sustainable development and balanced competitiveness. These objectives are to be pursued through the development of a balanced and polycentric urban system; new partnerships between urban and rural areas; securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge; and sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage (CSD, 1999, p. 11). Each of these terms at the same time carries particular meanings, but leaves room for interpretation, having been first coined and shaped in a gestation process of policy development.

The concept of the polycentric urban system, for example, has taken shape through a series of European Commission studies and reports in the 1990s. *Europe 2000+* (CEC, 1994) develops the notion of socio-spatial 'polycentricity' and growth. In the face of global economic competition, the goal of

creating a more equal economic and social development within the EU's cities is envisioned through the establishment of integrated systems of agglomerations and common actions between large urban centres (CEC, 1994, p. 19). This leads to a notion of a 'polycentric urban system', a notion that is both very central to the discourse but also very vague and polyvalent in itself. The approach builds on the existing densely urbanised and historically strong settlement pattern as the legacy upon which any spatial policy for the urban system must build. The polycentric urban system is seen as a necessary response to environmental, social and traffic problems of increasing urban growth, by enabling horizontal integration and spreading specialisation to a number of urban centres. The ESDP strategies for creating a new polycentric European space include the emergence of 'urban networks', including new integration scenarios for cross-border regions in particular (CSD, 1999, p. 65). Co-operation between cities across borders may not only imply functional and economic advantages, but may also facilitate the vision of a Europe where national borders are criss-crossed by a new urban policy of intercity co-operation.

Another example of the new language of European space is the notion of "dynamic global economy integration zones" (CSD, 1999, p. 20). As an antidote to the traditional growth core of Europe (known as the 'blue banana'), the ESDP envisions that such zones should be created in other regions to imitate and duplicate the prosperous core (CSD, 1999, p. 20). This is in spite of severe problems with traffic congestion, which the ESDP recognises will not contribute to its sustainability objectives. For weaker regions, outside the proposed 'dynamic global economy integration zones', the approach is to widen the economic base and carry out economic restructuring (CSD, 1999, p. 22).

### *Practices*

Analysing key policy documents captures the re-presentation of space in language and re-

veals some of the power relations that contest these re-presentations. This is, however, an inadequate analysis that needs to be placed within the context of a live policy process, where different interests compete for hegemony over the shape of policy and where different spatial visions are contested. Spaces and places do not present themselves, but are rather represented by means of power relations expressed in strategies, discourses and institutional settings. Although some of this is inherent in the text of policy documents, what is required is a broader view of the policy process that focuses on institutions, actions and practices.

So, in the multilevel processes of European spatial policy-making, multidimensional conflicts inevitably arise. Here, we simply outline the nature of some of these conflicts, from the workings of the European spatial policy community to the conflicts between regions and other interests who have a stake in both the visions and the implementation of EU spatial policy.

The institution carrying the workload of writing and distributing the ESDP is the Committee on Spatial Development (CSD), established in 1991. The CSD has the unique status of being a transnational network of civil servants looking at European space from a new transnational perspective. It has thus become an institution that neither national nor EU politicians have full control over. This is not the least due to the 'infranational' character of the CSD. Infranationalism in the EU has been defined as the 'second-order governance' involving commissions, directorates, committees, government departments, etc. (Weiler, 1999). The ways of working tend to be characterised by medium-to-low levels of institutionalisation, have the character of a network, practice an informal style and, last but not least, have a low actor- and event-visibility and process-transparency (Weiler, 1999, p. 275). These ways of working threaten a weakening of political control and increased autonomy being given to the administrative level, implying less control by the member-states and

increased managerialism and reliance on expertise.

Alongside these new spatial practices relating to the ESDP's comitology, the question of implementation of the ESDP's policies has led to a further set of interesting practices. The first of these has been an emphasis on practical actions which are beyond the control of member-states. Given that the ESDP has no legally binding status, it is not surprising that many of the possible actions identified within the ESDP focus on the transnational level (CSD, 1999, p. 35), thus avoiding the resistance of member-states. Since 1996, the transnational INTERREG programmes have been the *de facto* field of implementation of the ESDP rationale and policies. Alongside this direct approach to implementation, the more subtle issue of the Europeanisation of state planning systems is inevitably raised by the existence of the ESDP and the prospect of its gradual embedding in EU policy and law. As a further attempt to institutionalise and legitimise the ESDP's rationale, the Potsdam document proposes that member-states take its policy aims and options into account in framing national and regional spatial policies (CSD, 1999, p. 44). This is a very straightforward message to the member-states that they should 'tune in' to this new Europeanisation of state, regional and urban planning in order to "overcome any insular way of looking at their territory" (CSD, 1999, p. 45). Although certain countries such as The Netherlands and Denmark have already made rapid progress in this direction (Faludi, 1998; Jensen, 1998), the process of Europeanisation of national spatial policy clearly raises questions of divergent interests, agendas and power relations.

Further areas of competition exist between stakeholders—for example, those representing urban and rural interests, between core and peripheral regions, and between cities and regions seeking to occupy key sites in the new polycentric map of European space. One of the most deep-seated tensions in European spatial planning is the divergence between the south European and north European view of the ESDP. Rusca identifies

a characteristic of the distinctive 'southern attitude' as being particularly concerned with the cultural heritage and identity of places, for example (Rusca, 1998). Mirroring this assertion of southern interests has been a move to articulate specific 'Nordic interests' in the ESDP. This is exacerbated by the prospect of EU enlargement, with the spatial vision extending into central Europe.

A further set of spatial practices relates to the reproduction of the new spatial policy discourse. In the words of Andreas Faludi, the success of the ESDP (for example) must be measured in terms of its ability to 'shape the minds' of social agents (Faludi, 2001). As the emerging discourse becomes institutionalised in new spatial practices, including those of spatial analysis, the construction of knowledge forms and fields of knowledge results in boundaries being established between valid and invalid, reasonable and unreasonable forms of knowledge. Such boundaries are vital in institutionalising European spatial planning as a 'rational, science-based policy field' and, at the same time, they act as powerful instruments in the process of marginalising and excluding other forms of knowledge (such as radical environmental considerations or indicators of social equality). As an example of this 'knowledge policy', the recently appointed 'Study Programme on European Spatial Development' (SPESP, 2000) should be emphasised. Apart from stressing a need for more comparable data and more solid knowledge of the spatial development of the European territory, the document introduces an interesting new concept that illustrates the power-knowledge dimension. Thus, in pursuit of a deeper spatial understanding the process must be supplemented with 'infography' (SPESP, 2000, p. 13). Behind this new concept lies a very explicit acknowledgement of the importance of spatial re-presentations that takes a deliberate turn away from 'realistic' description. In recognising the rhetorical and powerful importance of spatial re-presentations, it is said that, in recent years, numerous symbolic re-presentations of the European territory have been created. Often have they presented

mind-catching illustrations, which have served as powerful tools for both shaping attitudes and visualising policy aims. Some images even have become policy icons (SPESP, 2000, p. 13). In the ESDP, infographics are used to articulate the concept of polycentricity.

#### *Power Rationalities*

Discourses frame and represent spaces and places, and thus express a specific power-rationality configuration. In the 'classic' sociological tradition, rationality is understood as the underlying structure of values and norms that governs social actions (Weber, 1978). However, rationality is inseparable from power (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Construed in a productive way, power is here seen as the foundation for social action as well as potential control and coercion (Foucault, 1990). Thus different rationalities—with their distinctive horizons of values and norms that guide social actions—are implicitly acts of power in that they are attempts to govern what sort of social actions are to be carried out and what are not.

Returning to our object of empirical study, the new spatial policy discourses of the European Union, the fusion of the cultural sociology of space and the analytical framework for analysing spatial policy discourses brings out very clearly one of the embedded rationalities. In Hajer's words, this is a spatial re-presentation primarily in terms of the "Europe of Flows" (Hajer, 2000, p. 135). In a policy discourse of a 'Europe of flows', regions and cities will increasingly present their visions as being repositioned and connected to the spatiality of flows. Thus this competition-oriented rationale is by far the most predominant of the nested rationalities residing within the discourse. However, we shall also address the rationalities of sustainable development, social cohesion and European identity-building.

Our analysis suggests that as the discourse of the Europe of flows is articulated and embedded in practice, its 'other' is marginalised. The hegemony of the Europe of

flows can only be understood as a mobility-, competition- and growth-oriented discourse that derives its distinctive identity in opposition to a Europe of places. In other words, the dialectical tension between the two 'spatial logics' is represented in a distinct way in order to draw out the rationale for perceiving European spatiality in terms of flows and mobility rather than its opposite. Ascribing hegemony to the Europe of flows by coining and re-presenting European spatiality in the vocabulary of flows is an act of 'naturalising' the increased urge to be a key player in global economic competition. Overall, the Europe of flows discourse thus enhances the notion of a multispeed Europe in which different 'Europes' are superimposed on one another (Hajer, 2000, p. 144). Furthermore, such a notion clearly contradicts the idea of infrastructure enabling balanced development.

The rationale of sustainable development is thus subsumed into the logic of global competitiveness emanating from the notion of the Europe of flows—this is in spite of severe problems with traffic congestion in the core region, which the ESDP recognises do not contribute to the sustainability objective. So is another key policy issue: namely, that of social cohesion. Cohesion policy is not only the institutionalised hallmark of the DGXVI (DG Regio) from where the ESDP arises. It is also part of the overall notion of picturing Europe as a spatially coherent whole that defines the core of European Union regional policy. Thus, by means of 'cohesion policy', the regional differences are envisioned to diminish, leading the way to a less fragmented territory. As with the sustainability theme, we acknowledge the hegemony of the competition rationale over the goal of cohesion. Framed in the mindset of the ESDP, the issue of competitiveness is the precondition for sustainability and cohesion. Finally, we would suggest that the whole complex of nested rationalities that we find within this spatial policy discourse is to be understood as a contribution to the 'imagined community' of Europe, thus contributing to a framing of European identity

(Jensen, 2001). A very specific example of this contributing effect is found in the idea of using the ESDP as the foundation for a standard textbook on European geography for secondary schools across Europe (Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Urban/Regional Policy, 1999).

Examining the new spatial policy discourse that is articulated in the ESDP, it becomes clear that the relations between these nested rationalities are by no means fixed. Rather, the process, and the ESDP document itself, reflects the balance between plural competing 'power rationalities'. Thus the ESDP spatial policy discourse can be seen as an arena for playing out different and contested views of European space.

## **5. Linking Discourse and Space: Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this paper has been to show the benefit of thinking spatially about spatial policy discourses. Such a claim might seem redundant, but it is part of our critical agenda to suggest an alternative to the aspatial policy analysis of spatial policy discourses. This rests on the assumptions that discourses might be seen as social constructions but also that policy discourses dealing with re-presentations of space must be understood in relation to their spatial 'object'. This is in no way an inclination to a simple correspondence notion of discourse and reality. Rather, we see the importance of understanding discourses of space against the background of a cultural sociology of space that offers a meta-theoretical understanding of the relation between social life and its material surroundings. To this end, we have advocated the perspective of a cultural sociology of space. This approach takes its departure-point from an understanding of socio-spatial relations as both a question of material constraints and enabling capacities, as well as a realm of symbolic meanings and re-presentations at spatial scales from the body to the global.

From our brief forays into European spatial policy, we have illustrated how socio-spatial relations, seen from the perspective of a combined framework of a cultural sociology of space and discourse analysis, can reveal the relations between the languages, practices and power-rationalities of policy discourses. Thus the words, images and languages used to represent and frame European space in the ESDP reflect particular spatial symbolic meanings and representations. Furthermore, such re-presentations of space are a reflection of contemporary material globalisation processes which create the incentive for the European Union to facilitate action in new policy fields such as transnational planning, and policy-making under the INTERREG programme. Ultimately, such spatial policy discourses carry a (not necessarily coherent) mix of rationalities. Three competing rationalities of economic competitiveness and mobility, environmental sustainability and social equity surface in the ESDP, and the first of these is found to be dominant. Furthermore, one could also interpret these new spatial policy discourses as contributing to a general discourse of European integration through the implicit notions of European community and identity.

From our analysis, the possibility of a theoretical and analytical perspective framed by the cultural sociology of space and analysed using a discourse framework hinges on perceiving how the spatiality of social life is played out in a dialectical tension between material practices and symbolic meanings at scales from the body to the global. Thus, any spatial policy discourse seeking to direct or produce new spatial practices works by means of constructing and reproducing new language uses and other practices expressing specific power-rationalities. So if the ESDP means anything, it both creates the conditions for a new set of spatial practices which shape European space and, at the same time, creates a new system of meaning about that space—based on the language and ideas of hypermobility and polycentricity.

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