

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS' WHITE PAPER ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Comments of ECTP-CEU

Introduction

The Committee of the Regions adopted the White Paper on multilevel governance in its plenary meeting of 17 June 2009.

Together with regional and local authorities, associations and other stakeholders, the ECTP-CEU as the association representing spatial planning and spatial planners in Europe, was invited to comment on the White Paper. More specifically the general consultation asks for the views about the way multi level governance can best be implemented.

Hereunder the comments of ECTP-CEU with regard of the white paper are formulated.

General

In general terms, the ECTP-CEU agrees with the principles as set out in the White Paper. Multilevel governance is indeed a requirement for sound coordinated development. Without such constructive cooperation between tiers of government, effective governance is hardly possible. In practice, efforts of the one layer can be frustrated by actions of the other layer. Multilevel governance is also felt to be the way in which subsidiarity can be respected within the existing division of powers. Involvement in policy making processes and projects of participants of other tiers of government, results according to experiences in a multitude of spatial planning projects, in better mutual information and more understanding between levels. As a result approval, support and problem solving will require decreased procedure time and the process will be more cost effective.

Comments

Background of our reaction is that we agree on the White Paper's text that: "*The activities carried out by the Committee of the Regions and the recommendations are based on the Treaties, but nevertheless reflect the prospect of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which enshrines the territorial dimension, notably territorial cohesion, as part of the process of European integration and strengthens the mechanisms of multilevel governance*" (page 4).

With regard to the approaching general support of the Lisbon treaty, the White Paper on Multilevel Governance is preparing for the new situation. ECTP-CEU supports this action.

That “*multilevel governance no longer takes a sectoral approach, but rather a territorial approach to development strategies...*” (page 14) should, according to current spatial planning practice, not be limited only to development aid but should also apply to spatially organising Europe so that: “*The White Paper’s recommendations will therefore aim to match the Community’s ambitions more closely to the practical and diverse management and planning situations faced by local and regional elected representatives when implementing major Community policies.*”

On page 23 the White Paper states that “*implementing territorial cohesion as a Community objective is therefore fundamental for the future of common policies.*”

The ECTP-CEU supports the White Paper’s recommendation that the Territorial Impact Analysis should become standard practice. Also the recommendation that each major Community strategic reform should be accompanied by a regional action plan is welcomed.

On page 17 the White Paper recommends: “*establishing appropriate tools to support participatory democracy, particularly in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, social agenda, Gothenburg Strategy and development of local agenda 21 mechanisms, which are participatory and integrated mechanisms developing long-term strategic plans.*”

The ECTP-CEU wants to comment that the application of those tools are part of the criteria that are applied in the European Urban and Regional Planning Awards scheme that ECTP-CEU is running for over 15 years (and which’ ceremony will be most probably hosted in 2010 by the Committee of the Regions).

It is clear that ECTP-CEU considers itself as being the appropriate partner for many of the actions envisaged in the White Paper by the Committee of the Regions.

With regard to the request of this consultation to express views about best ways to implement multilevel governance, the ECTP-CEU regrets that spatial planning has not explicitly been mentioned as the field in which this modern approach can be applied in an optimal way. The spatial planning practice, including consensus building towards common agreed visions, is a most appropriate field carried out by numerous regions and municipalities which requires integrative solutions and cross level cooperation. Preparing plans for future territorial developments by designing scenarios aiming at mutual gains for the stakeholders is increasingly practiced. A proper planning process is one that seeks long term solutions, wide participation and accurate information. No matter at what scale the planner is asked to intervene, what remains fundamental is the ability to identify the strengths and opportunities of a particular territory. Next to balancing the interests of all relevant actors and selecting the best scenarios for development, every proposed spatial intervention should always fit in the wider context and should offer possibilities for elaboration into concrete projects. Multilevel governance is therefore one of the crucial components of spatial planning practice.

It would be good if the Committee of the Regions adopts and supports these activities, carried out by the planners of their regional and local members explicitly. Capitalising on these activities and supporting them by involving spatial planning in envisaged actions of the Committee of the Regions, like seminars, awards schemes and the recommended experimental funding would be most appropriate.

Conclusions

As formulated at page 16 of the White Paper, the Committee of the Regions “*will strive to work in partnership with the European associations of local and regional government.*” The ECTP-CEU recommends extending this envisaged action to the European association of spatial planning and planners, the ECTP-CEU.

When the Committee of the Regions envisages to undertake: “*to develop a sustained approach for collaboration with relevant networks at local and regional level, which foster interconnection and interaction in European society between the political, economic, associative and cultural spheres, and take account of the best participation practices at local and regional level*” (page 17), then ECTP-CEU recommends to be qualified as a relevant association for close cooperation.

ECTP-CEU initiated a variety of activities which are in line and supportive to several actions envisaged in the White Paper. ECTP-CEU would be happy to support and closer cooperate in related actions of the Committee of the Regions.

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JCV 25/11/2009