

## **Book Review**

**Stead, D., Geerlings, H. and Meijers, E. (eds.)**

***Policy integration in practice: The integration of land use planning, transport and environmental policy-making in Denmark, England and Germany***

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### **1. Introduction**

Policy integration, i.e. the co-ordination of policies by different levels of government and government departments, has received growing attention at a time of growing interdependency between countries and regions yet increasing fragmentation of responsibility, sharpening goal conflicts and diverging interests between countries, regions, government agencies and public, semi-public and private stakeholders and the emergence of new, over-arching policy challenges, such as climate change and energy scarcity.

A book on the state and future prospects of policy integration in three critical areas of policy making, land use, transport and environment, is therefore more than welcome. The book reviewed here aims at exploring the necessary conditions for integration between the three policy fields and the mechanisms or tools that may support policy integration from a sustainability perspective. The book presents results of a study funded by the Netherlands Agency for Energy and the Environment as part of their Regional Transport Performance research programme. It is the work of an international team of researchers led by editors associated with the OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies at Delft University of Technology and the Faculty of Social Sciences of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

### **2. Summary of the content**

The book is divided into three parts:

- The first part gives an overview of key issues, methods and concepts of policy integration and the growing literature on the subject.

- The second part presents three country reports on the practice of policy integration in land use, transport and environmental planning in three countries, Denmark, England and Germany. For each country the existing government framework and relevant efforts to achieve integration between the three policy fields are reported and demonstrated by a regional case study: the greater Copenhagen region in Denmark, the region of Canterbury and Peterborough in England and the city of Freiburg in Germany, drawing on national and local policy documents and interviews with regional experts and policy makers.
- The third part summarises the experience in the three countries, complements it by information on policy integration at the European level, and discusses necessary conditions for policy integration to work and methods and instruments to facilitate it. A final chapter draws conclusions from the theoretical analysis and the three country reports.

The authors conclude that despite the growing attention paid to policy integration and the many claims that it has been achieved, the concept remains fuzzy and that there is therefore often a mismatch between rhetoric and reality. The urban-regional level offers the greatest opportunity for policy integration between land use, transport and environmental planning but it often fails because responsibility for land use, transport and environmental policy lies at the local level. Other barriers are financial (e.g. the division of costs between different departments or regions, psychological (e.g. when there is reluctance to work with other professions and departments, technical (e.g. differences in skills, tools or training), organisational (e.g. distrust or lack of communication) and competition (e.g. between different organisations or professions). However, there are also good examples of successful policy integration based on methods and instruments, such as impact assessment, target identification, benchmarking, best practice and visioning and implementation studies. However, informed decision makers able to communicate and implement policy in a clear, open and transparent way are the most important element of successful policy integration.

### **3. Assessment**

The overall impression of the book is that of a painstakingly thorough and detailed collection of material. The theoretical analysis is largely based on English-language literature from policy, organisation and management science and gives a good overview on concepts and definitions, conditions and barriers and costs and benefits of inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination. The country reports present fascinating accounts of the forces for and against horizontal and vertical co-ordination in the three policy fields, each shaped by the particular political framework, perception and culture and the succession of governments and policy documents of the respective country. One might ask why these three countries were selected – maybe because their planning systems and planning cultures are similar to that of the Netherlands. The addition of the European dimension in the third part of the book is a very useful completion of the picture.

However, given the wealth of material collected it is regrettable that little effort was made by the editors to systematically compare the experience in the three countries and extract general principles from them that can be transferred to other countries. In this context it would have been exciting to confront the experience in the three case study countries with that in the

Netherlands, which despite some deregulation in recent years probably still has the most advanced and effective spatial planning system in Europe.

Such a comparative analysis would probably have shown that the success of policy integration does depend not so much on policy documents, appeals for co-operation or changing power constellations but is mainly a function of existing conflicts in goals and stakeholder interests. The most obvious goal conflict today is the fundamental contradiction between economic growth, spatial equity and environmental sustainability. If, for instance, cities and regions are forced to compete against each other for tax-paying firms and inhabitants, self-constraint for environmental reasons built on voluntary co-operation has no chance – not because the actors are ignorant or lack good intentions but because they have no choice.

However, the country reports contain little information on these *structural* (as opposed to *procedural*) barriers to policy integration in the three countries. The focus on procedural aspects of policy integration at the expense of structural aspects may be explained by another deficit of the volume, that it nowhere discusses why policy integration is important. The chapter titled "The importance of policy integration" derives the importance of policy integration from the fact that it has been mentioned as important in a large number of policy documents at the European and national level. But there are at least four reasons why integrated strategies are better than piece-meal single measures:

- Cities and regions are complex *systems* in which all elements are closely interrelated: policies in one domain (policy field or spatial area or level) affect most others, and this interconnectedness is increasing through globalisation and European integration and is particularly true for land use, transport and the environment.
- Poorly or co-ordinated individual measures may counteract each other, whereas the effects of integrated, co-ordinated measures may reinforce each other, i.e. be larger than the sum of the effects of individual policies if implemented separately.
- Only by co-ordinated, comprehensive strategies goal conflicts, such as the conflict between economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability, or conflicts between the interests of different regions, can be resolved in a democratic and transparent way.

This is not to say that procedural aspects are unimportant. But for making policy integration possible, governance structures must take account of the increasing interconnectedness of policy fields and cities and regions across all levels. But the trend goes into the opposite direction: in many EU member states, including the three case study countries, government responsibilities are being shifted to lower spatial levels under the flag of subsidiarity or devolution, cities and regions are encouraged to compete against each other instead of practising co-operation, and public functions are outsourced to profit-oriented private companies. Policy integration, i.e. horizontal and vertical co-ordination, is left to informal, voluntary forms of co-operation which rarely leads to binding commitments or agreements and with continuing goal conflicts and incompatible interests is likely to have little effect on policy.

The book fails to draw this kind of more fundamental conclusions from the rich material of the three case studies and so leaves the reader without a clear recommendation of where things should go. This is regrettable as in the face of new challenges, such as climate change and energy scarcity, long-term, comprehensive and coherent strategies will become more important than ever.

Notwithstanding this reservation, the book provides useful reading for students of planning and public policy as well as for policy makers involved in the organisation of decision proc-

esses at the national, regional or local level who are aware of the growing need for policy integration and look for examples of good practice.