

From Planning Control to Growth Management - Evolution of the National Spatial Planning Framework in DK

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SUMMARY

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Abstract

The 1950s marked the birth of comprehensive planning in Denmark, when a number of socio-spatial challenges emerged as a result of the country's rapid economic growth. These challenges were eventually addressed by the administrative reform of 1970 and the following planning reform implemented from 1970 until 1977. The reforms established an integrated planning system aiming to achieve spatial coordination through a hierarchy of plans occurring at multiple scales and a certain degree of horizontal and vertical integration of policies across sectors and jurisdictions. Since then, Denmark has been associated with the comprehensive-integrated tradition of planning systems and policies (CEC, 1997, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the transformation of the Danish National Spatial Planning Framework, which has been exposed to substantial reorientations resulting from a structural reform that modified the geographies of inter-governmental arrangements back in 2007. Since then, a series of structural and operational shifts concerning planning tasks and responsibilities have

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led “comprehensive-integrated” tradition and both the steering and strategic roles of national-level planning have been largely superseded by a more “flexible” planning style fit to promote specific sectoral agendas. While the legacy of land-use planning is still embedded at the local level under curbing spatial coordination capacities, it could be argued that spatial planning in Denmark currently faces a state of crisis at national and especially regional levels – particularly when compared with the domain’s former clout and capacities.

Following the 2015 general election the new centre-right government decided to transfer national planning functions and responsibilities from the Ministry of the Environment (Miljøministeriet) to the Danish Business Authority (Erhvervsstyrelsen). This was done in the midst of an on-going political debate over ‘simplifying’ the Planning Act to facilitate more economic growth.

In this light, Danish spatial planning continues to align with prevailing neo-liberal minded government agendas and thereby ends up reflecting the ideologies and interests of the government in place. In contrast with the social welfarist objectives of the 1970s, these governmental preferences have indirectly caused that spatial planning be regarded more as a cost than an asset. Accordingly, it is evident that the Danish planning domain has progressively lost political clout and the focus is changed towards facilitation and management of economic growth.

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