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## 19.1 Spatial Planning and Sustainability: A Bi-directional Relationship

The main goal of spatial planning may be indicated in the achievement of territorial sustainability. This goal defines the general and prospective role of spatial planning in a modern and aware society: spatial planning represents the appropriate institutional, technical and policy context for managing the territorial dimension of sustainability.

Sustainable development in fact, intended as a policy goal, bears different dimensions: the technological dimension, the behavioural (linked to life-styles in affluent societies), the diplomatic (referring to the international strategies to assure cooperation among countries at different development levels, with different development expectations) and the territorial one, referring to an ordered, resource efficient and environmental-friendly spatial distribution of human activities.

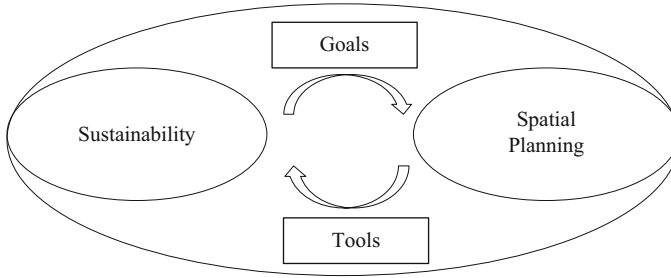
Spatial planning takes care of this last dimension of sustainability, and establishes with the sustainability issue a bidirectional logical relationship (Fig. 19.1); namely:

- sustainability provides the general goal to spatial planning;

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**Fig. 19.1** The sustainability-planning relationship

- spatial planning provides the major institutional context and effective policy tools to attain territorial sustainability, thus strengthening the concept and allowing it to be translated into an effective action.

This bi-directional relationship appears as conceptually sound due to the integrated, multi-sectoral nature of both elements:

- sustainability derives from a positive, synergetic co-evolution of the economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions of the society;
- spatial planning finds its *raison d'être* in the necessary integration of the different policy tools which have an impact on the territory.

## 19.2 The Integrated, Multisectoral Nature of Spatial Planning: Why?

The integrated, multidimensional nature of the sustainability concept provides the first rationale for the necessity of an integrated approach to spatial planning. But other elements push in the same direction, namely:

- the fragmentation of decision-making powers, both in the public and the private spheres, with a diffused presence of veto powers. This fact calls for the necessity of integration and co-operation, both vertical and horizontal, between the different tiers of the public government structures (usually engaged in different policy fields) and between the different departments of the same administration impinging on the territory;
- the evidence of growing problems and concerns in specific territorial contexts, which call for complex, multidimensional interventions: metropolitan development, peri-urban settlement structure, coastal development, development through wide industrial corridors, sensitive environments like mountain areas crossed by international mobility corridors. What really matters is the overall result of an equilibrated spatial development process, not the single dimensions through which such an equilibrium can be reached (infrastructure efficiency, proper land-use, smart development policies).

### 19.3 The Goals of an Integrated Spatial Planning Practice

The main objectives of a strategy of territorial sustainability, to be reached through integrated spatial planning practices, may be identified in the following (Fig. 19.2):

- territorial quality: the quality of the living and working environment; the relative homogeneity of living standards across territories;
- territorial efficiency: resource-efficiency with respect to energy, land and natural resources; competitiveness and attractiveness;
- territorial identity: enhancing “social capital”; developing a shared vision of the future; safeguarding specificities, strengthening productive “vocations” and competitive advantage.

These objectives may be reached through an integrated approach, securing the positive co-evolution of the different subsystems that build up the territorial realm: this means maximising the synergies and the positive cross-externalities from each sub-system and all the others, and minimising the negative externalities. As an example among others: economic development in peripheral areas may be advantageous to the environment if a long term perspective on the use of local natural resources is taken up and if it provides the (public) financial resources that may be channelled towards the betterment of environmental infrastructure; at the same time it may guarantee the permanence of the local population and the strengthening of its production culture and sense of belonging.

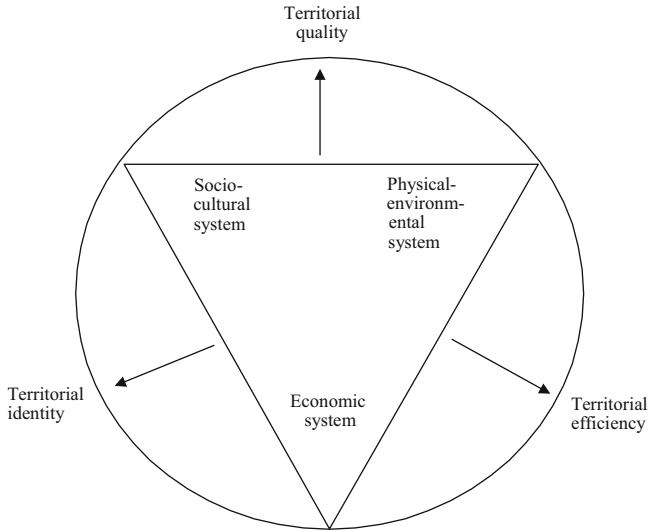
Territorial efficiency, quality and identity represent objectives and values in themselves; any modern society cannot do without them, as they are at the base of local collective wellbeing. But they are at the same time preconditions for local competitiveness and no conflict exists in this sense between the needs of local population and the needs of the economic fabric, at least in the long run.

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### 19.4 New Challenges and New Responsibilities for Spatial Planning

The main challenges facing a renewed approach to spatial planning may be presented as follows:

- helping the re-establishment of a legitimacy of public action, through transparency of procedures, accountability to local populations and proper results on territorial quality;



**Fig. 19.2** An integrated strategy for territorial sustainability. *Territorial quality*: quality of living and working conditions; relative homogeneity of living standards across territories. *Territorial efficiency*: resource efficiency with respect to energy, land and natural resources; competitiveness and attractiveness. *Territorial identity*: enhancing social capital; developing a shared vision of the future; safeguarding specificities, strengthening productive “vocations” and competitive advantage

- overcoming the limits of traditional planning practices, mainly addressed to the design of spatial forms and structures more than to the definition of rules, guiding principles and processes; overcoming the rigidity of traditional procedures and their strict, hierarchical structure in favour of a superior flexibility; favouring the effectiveness of the general process of spatial development more than the conformance to abstract schemes. A general consensus exists about the fact that rigidity has not guaranteed territorial quality, but only position and bureaucratic rents;
- contributing to European integration and enlargement processes, through appropriate physical planning tools;
- rehabilitating the image and the practice of planning in general in eastern European countries, where, after the political transition, a very critical attitude is generally taken-up as a result of understandable but purely political reactions to the ancient regime;
- the limits of opposite and extreme attitudes towards deregulation and liberalisation are now apparent, and call for more equilibrated and modern approaches;
- developing new forms of non-hierarchical co-ordination within the public administration;
- enhancing the development of advanced and effective forms of citizens’ participation to the decision-making process on territorial projects.

## **19.5 The Main Principles on Which a Renewed Spatial Planning Approach May Be Built**

### **19.5.1 The Principle of Horizontal Integration**

This principle defines the necessary integrated nature of spatial planning, in the sense that the consistency of different sectoral policy tools that impinge on the territorial structure has to be crucially guaranteed. In more general terms, we have already underlined the necessity of a unitary and integrated vision of the social, economic, environmental and cultural development processes. But referring more directly to the dimension of physical planning, a different and perhaps more crucial integration emerges: the integration among policy-making processes which affect the territory through sectoral policy tools, namely:

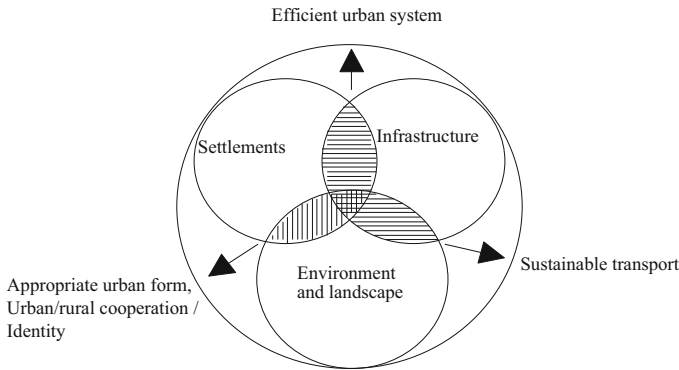
- settlement policies (urban planning, location decisions of large urban functions: shopping centres, fairs, logistic platforms, waste treatment plants);
- infrastructure policies, mainly referring to transport and energy policies;
- environmental policies, putting limits to use of land and natural resources;
- landscape policies.

Only the integration and the territorial consistency of these policies may guarantee the achievement of equilibrated and sustainable processes of territorial transformation, namely (Fig. 19.3):

- sustainable transport infrastructure, well integrated in the landscape and respectful of the integrity of open spaces;
- efficient urban systems, well equipped with mobility infrastructure, both inside and outside the single urban centres, where transport supply (and in particular public mass transport infrastructure) is used to direct the development of the settlement system;
- appropriate urban form, avoiding or limiting the spread of low density settlement structures, which maximise land consumption and private car commuting;
- new forms of rural/urban integration, interaction, co-operation, avoiding traditional land-use conflicts and dependence and enhancing the respective role and identity.

### **19.5.2 The Principle of Vertical Integration**

The principle refers to the necessary cooperation of the different institutional levels of the planning process. The subsidiarity principle provides the logical framework for building a bottom-up planning process, with crucial roles assigned to the lower levels of the institutional structure, but also with specific responsibilities attributed



**Fig. 19.3** An integrated planning approach

to the upper levels. In this regard, in fact, we have to bear in mind the efficiency requirement of any devolution of decision-making responsibility to lower levels of government, explicitly present in the subsidiarity principle; this element necessarily attributes responsibilities and competencies to the supra-municipal level in case of:

- presence of transborder effects of local decisions (environmental externalities on other municipalities; e.g.: the mobility generated by big shopping centres);
- presence of supra-local interests served by wide area projects: typically infrastructure networks or big projects requesting territorial continuity (parks);
- presence of a “network surplus” generated by inter-municipal co-operation and synergy (the co-operation being sometimes the result of spontaneous processes but often requiring a superior co-ordination, some financial incentive or regulatory enforcement).

Wide-area planning is needed for the efficient management of these cases, and the intermediate, third level, government institutions (like provinces, counties or departments) prove effective to perform this task.

### 19.5.3 The Principle of Policy Anticipation

Anticipatory practices addressed to the implementation of an ex-ante co-ordination of decisions instead of an ex-post adjustment to decisions already taken proves a very effective institutional strategy. Spatial planning in particular may achieve important results with respect to sectoral planning if co-ordination with other planning bodies is anticipated, and some assets (land purchases) or tools are prepared beforehand.

### 19.5.4 The Principle of Market Resort

The largest use of market mechanisms should be experimented before resolving to use regulatory practices or turn to public intervention, when public interest is not at risk. “Markets corrected for externalities” may achieve better, wider and cheaper results than regulations; resort to private project financing for the provision of services or infrastructure may save public money for the cases when public intervention is unavoidable; stimulate private creativeness and project proposals may prove more effective than guiding everything from the government. Private/public partnerships may be used in many cases in which private efficiency and public control may merge positively and effectively.

### 19.5.5 The Visioning Principle

“Shared visions” or “concepts” for territories have to be provided, activating the widest participation and public debates; these elements work in fact as catalysts of creativeness for territorial projects, sources of social cohesion and sense of belonging, activators of mutual trust and synergetic attitudes, symbolic guidance for individual behaviour. The process of creation of such visions and concepts through citizens participation and the transparent engagement of vested interests is probably the most interesting novelty in planning practices in the last decade; it may be synthetically conceived as a process of creation of “social capital”, an element which is more and more mentioned in the literature on spatial development as the basic social precondition for territorial success.

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## 19.6 New Styles in Spatial Planning

A new style in developing and delivering spatial planning is necessary to cope with the new challenges and the new goals.

Soft and flexible planning tools are needed, contrasting previous traditional attitudes in favour of rigid and holistic regulatory tools. The growing complexity of territorial processes and the width of global interdependencies; the rising uncertainty on spatial trends and on cause-effect logical chains; the limits of control capability of the public domain, and its fiscal crisis; all these elements call for new planning styles, addressed towards the definition of guiding principles and rules rather than regulations, and more attentive to processes rather than territorial design, open to participation and partnership rather than relying on technocratic imposition.

The modern plan shall become:

- a system of rules;
- an effort to understand and anticipate future territorial trends and effects;

- a general framework for the ex-ante co-ordination of the territorial impact of the multiple public decisions that impinge on a given space;
- a strategic tool, addressed to the activation of the private project-building capability, realisation of synergies between the private and public spheres, orientation of new activities towards shared goals, respect of widely accepted values.

In order to implement this new planning style without jeopardising the sustainability goal, some preconditions are requested and new functions have to be accomplished by the planning authority. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen the evaluation function and to make the evaluation procedure at the same time more effective, authoritative and transparent. This function in fact should complement the entire planning process, intervening in all phases going from the definition of policy goals and strategies to the design of territorial projects; in parallel to the multidimensional nature of the sustainability goal, evaluation should be in a measure to integrate different and sometimes contrasting policy objectives, mediating the interests and the needs of different parts of the local society.

Strengthening of the evaluation capability by the public administration, incorporating and interpreting the values and expectations of the local society, represents the natural counterpart of the wider role attributed to the private sector in spatial development.

Secondly, procedures and tools should be designed and implemented in order to guarantee the openness of the public administration to the citizens' "voice" and effective participation processes. An equilibrium should be maintained between "vested" or organised interests and weak or diffused ones, lacking visibility or communication capability.

Thirdly, in order to implement the necessary co-ordination procedures between different levels and sectors of the public administration, effective decision-making procedures should be designed, limiting hierarchical enforcement tools to a minimum. Relationships between different government levels should be based on consensus rather than power, incentive rather than enforcement, authoritative arguments rather than authority. The collective territorial interest should be more and more defended by shared values and by a strong planning culture, reaching the smallest municipality, rather than through hierarchical veto powers. The latter should be probably maintained, but less and less utilised.