

# Manifesto



## The Contribution of Geography towards the Future of Europe

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EUGEO 2007 was the inaugural meeting of geographers and associated professionals from all over Europe. They joined in preparing a credible vision of an economically viable, socially cohesive, and ecologically robust Europe, and how to get there. EUGEO was organized by the European Association of Geographical Societies, and hosted by the Royal Dutch Geographical Society and the University of Amsterdam.

This Manifesto is the product of three days of research presentations and detailed discussions by the participants and other correspondents. It is aimed at policy makers and planners throughout Europe, and senior officials in the EU Commission. It is also directed to geographers everywhere, and to fellow professionals and civil activists in all walks of life throughout the world.

EUGEO selected six key themes regarding the environmental, economic and social well being of a changing Europe, as its point of departure.

These are:

1. **Standort Europa.** A vision of effective and cohesive competitive European economies.
2. **Revitalizing the city.** A vision of economically, socially and culturally diverse cities that bring together many groups enjoying pleasurable livelihoods.
3. **Diversifying rural societies and economies.** A vision of rural futures that are agriculturally and economically viable, diverse and providing opportunities for new livelihoods.
4. **Friendship with nature.** A vision of a way of living that recognizes the costs and dangers to society of undermining the ecosystem processes which maintain life on this planet, and preparing and adapting to a world where nature is treated as a friend and not an enemy.
5. **Acknowledging Europe's diversity.** Here we talk about a vision of a Europe that enjoys its heritage, its cultural diversity, its regional, and local distinctiveness, and its scope for local differentiation for promoting various versions of sustainable living.
6. **Multi-level governance.** A vision that shares the task of governing at all levels, that recognizes the relationships in multi-national governing, and sub-national governance for viable livelihoods.

This Manifesto will summarize the findings of the research discussions on these topics and chart a way forward for the next EUGEO conference and beyond.

### **Competitiveness: economy...**

Under the label 'Standort Europa' at Risk, this conference – in the wake of the Lisbon Agenda that addressed the objective to strengthen Europe's global competitiveness as a knowledge-based economy – discussed the economic position of Europe in a globalising world. Europe still has a strong position in the world economy, but there is a continuous challenge to strengthen its appeal to the global business community and to remain an attractive place for people and firms to locate and operate. This conference picked up that challenge and addressed the specific perspectives for Europe's comparative advantages over time and in space. It was argued that not all cities are able to opt for similar creative, knowledge and information economy strategies. Different conditions for economic development were addressed, including the technical and knowledge infrastructure, relations between places, other hard and soft conditions and spatial clustering.

The question for Europe typically is: "what are the specific characteristics that give European cities and countries a comparative advantage over other places in the world?" The answer is – of course – hard to give, but likely, more than branding and place marketing are required. In economic geography theories referring to hard conditions, cluster theories and theories focusing on soft conditions have been put forward. With regard to the hard conditions (infrastructure, universities, available labour, tax regimes, etc.) it is difficult to find a comparative advantage that is not also claimed by other regions.

### **... and culture**

However, there are major differences between Europe and the rest of the world, and these differences may be the assets for competitive economic development in the longer run. This conference related the economic competition with issues on social and cultural diversity, richness and uniqueness of European cities and the preservation and exploitation of Europe's cultural heritage and geographical diversity.

European regions and economic clusters are deeply rooted in older structures and development paths, are multi-layered in many ways, which makes them less vulnerable for sudden changes in specific sectors. In contrast, in many very rapidly developing cities in Asia existing cultural heritages tend to be destroyed rather than preserved and the speed of urban development in the new Asia results in almost single-layered modernist cities, which may be highly vulnerable when a new phase of economic restructuring arises. The cultural and more deeply rooted historical developments we find in European urban regions contribute to the set of soft factors that seem to be relevant for economic development. These factors include things like urban atmospheres, urban climates, attractive public and natural spaces and simply 'places-to-be'. This conference addressed the geographic literature that argues that exactly these conditions should be met to enable the development of so-called creative or cultural industries.

### **Territorial identities**

However, Europe is not a homogeneous set of countries and cities. It is a conglomerate of different ideas, traditions, institutions, and identities. Actually, it is not entirely clear what Europe is, and what the outer boundaries are. What we do know, and this was also expressed during the conference, is that cultural diversity is at the heart of the continent and this requires specific European approaches to geographical issues. Much of this cultural diversity is a

legacy – the contemporary use of Europe’s rich and diverse past. This conference raised questions about whose legacy will be preserved. In that respect, the contribution of non-European immigrants to the European heritage is interesting and highly topical in debates about multiculturalism, assimilation, and pluralism. Influences from elsewhere also shape European, regional and local territorial identities, which are grounded in the bonds between people and places, and thus shape the maps of and boundaries within Europe. This conference contributed to the exploration of continuity and change in the territorial identities of Europe and of the perceptions of it.

### **Vital and cohesive cities**

As said, Europe has a rich urban cultural heritage. The city is not generally seen as something problematic. Instead, European cities are mainly still centres of vibrant social, economic, political and cultural life.

However, this is not to say European cities are without problems. In some cities the rapid influx of migrants from developing countries has created tensions on the housing and labour markets and caused questions about integration in society at large. New political and economic regimes sometimes resulted in increasing social inequality, which often is reflected in socio-spatial segregation, which tends to be perceived as blocking social integration as well. Together with urban sprawl, physical decay and social tensions, this triggered questions about how to sustain integrated and cohesive cities, how to reconstruct and regenerate urban districts, and so on.

This conference addressed problems with segregation, integration, affordability, homelessness, lack of cohesion, and also about how these issues could be tackled and strategically governed. Assumptions about increasing levels of segregation and inequality were critically evaluated, as were the presumed effects of socio-spatial inequality and ethnic segregation. A critical attitude in these spheres is an absolute requirement, since there seem to be firm discourses on segregation and segregation effects, which are gaining support among politicians across Europe, but which are hardly based upon detailed research investigations focused on socio-spatial behaviour.

### **A new vital rural Europe**

Counter to the prevailing image that pictures rural areas as declining, problematic, and left behind, this conference revealed that rural Europe should first of all be labelled as dynamic and not all of it is declining; changes in activities and functions are affecting European land use and landscapes; but this is giving rural Europe a new lease on life by generating new sources of livelihood. The conference taught us that both the nature and the intensity of the transformation of Europe’s open space vary widely across the continent. There are problematic developments in some parts of Europe and attention is needed for specific social and age groups in rural areas; but new landscape identity was also recognised as unique selling points, and diversification, new nature, tourism and better accessibility as new strategies for sustainable development.

### **Nature as a friend**

Nature is striking back when wounded. The character of economic development so far has ignored that fact that natural processes are threats when disturbed, and opportunities when recognizes for their true worth. Flooding on coasts and river valleys, overwhelmed drainage which floods property far away from a river following torrential downpours, and forest fires driven by drought and land mismanagement, all cost the economy dear. Even today development is taking place in many hazardous zones, and even more development is locating in future hazard zones where planning and predictive assessment are at odds. This is storing

up big trouble for the future. Designing space and property with nature as a friend and not a possible enemy is a critical economic and social issue.

This conference contributed to a better knowledge of the interaction of natural, engineering, economical and human sciences, but also that planning information is vital in terms of assisting the planning and development processes as well as effectively reducing threats and losses.

The impact of climatic and non-climatic changes will result in changing hazard risk patterns over Europe. This conference has shown that there is a growing attention to European-wide risk assessment techniques and guidelines.

### **New Multilevel Governance**

The intricate political texture of Europe's geospace raises penetrating questions among geographers and planners. Meanwhile, global geopolitical developments affect Europe's position in the world. This interplay concentrates the minds of geographers and planners on continuity and change in the external relations of Europe, specifically with North America, East and South Asia, and Europe's former colonies. Looking outward, the field is at the global scale confronted with questions of hegemony and multipolarity. Certainly towards the East, Europe lacks a clear-cut delimitation. The recent dynamism of European political cooperation has not yet resulted in a stable political configuration. Looking inward, policy-makers have to respond to a very serious challenge, namely that of designing and implementing acceptable, effective and sustainable forms of multilevel governance. The principle of subsidiarity has to be translated in practical terms and to be implemented. Border effects have constantly to be re-assessed at all tiers of government. All territorial relationships are subject to dynamic changes and need to be reconsidered: villages and urban places and the administrative systems with their municipalities, communes and metro-governments; regions versus nation-states; and countries versus the European Union. Another challenge is how to chart and affect the flows of capital and investment in relation to territorial systems. Moreover, as government evolves towards governance, it becomes imperative to chart the position of the numerous stakeholders and to consider the questions regarding the meaning of democracy. All in all, there is a need to find a new form of polity in Europe. The current difficulties in the European system of governance are to an extent the result of its ever increasing complexities.

Geographers and planners have always been interested in the territorial orders in which public policy has to function. It is time that they contribute to the drawing of new roles for public policy in an emerging polity showing a higher degree of privatization and decentralization than used to be the case.

### **Input for research agendas: ways forward**

1. There is a need for more recognition of the specific interrelation between Europe's deeply rooted cultural diversity, heritage and specificity, and the social and economic development perspectives of urban regions.
2. There is a need for more comparative study into the sustainability of urban economic growth in European urban regions and in new booming urban regions in Asia and the USA.
3. There is a need for comparative research aimed at rigorous testing of the path dependence thesis as condition for urban economic development, while including old European cities as well as new Indian, Chinese and American cities
4. Europe should pay more attention to research in which so-called soft conditions for economic development, such as urban atmospheres, residential environments, cultural

- heritage, historical development paths take centre stage together with 'classic' theories; more integral approaches are required both in urban and rural contexts.
5. There should be more international comparative research in rural contexts in Europe to allow for a systematic comparison aimed at what conditions of rural areas best fit what kinds of sustainable development
  6. There are serious doubts as to whether prevailing political and policy discourses are reflections of 'reality'. Therefore, geographical research should critically address these discourses and contribute to its reformulation.
  7. There is awareness that demographic and economic development are firmly related to environmental problems; yet the centre of gravity in research is on mapping, modelling and projecting natural hazards; there appears to be a need for more research in which the social and physical geosciences are more strongly connected with each other.
  8. There is a great need for Europe-wide tuning of risk assessment techniques for the major environmental threats. Also methodologies for handling risks, resulting in policy plans are to be developed. This reflects the "Chain of Safety" viz. pro-action, prevention, preparation, response and follow-up.
  9. European governance has resulted in increasingly fuzzy administrative and political arrangements that very often lack transparency. An important background condition is the growing interdependency of different scales and the limitation of clear hierarchy. This state of affairs should be precisely mapped and assessed e.g. with respect to the quality of policymaking and implementation in different policy sectors.
  10. The geopolitical qualities and disadvantages of a system of multilevel European governance that lacks essential state attributes at the supranational level should be studied. This refers to the way relations in the frontier zones of EU are managed as well as to the roles 'Europe' does play in the wider world.
  11. We should avoid fuzzy concepts, such as territorial cohesion, balanced communities, and rich diversity.
  12. All of these debates require attention in education