Naturally, the planners from the member states and the Commission involved in making the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) were keen on seeing it followed through. Much as its predecessors, the 1997 ‘First Official Draft’ and the 1998 ‘Complete Draft’, the final ESDP contains a chapter specifically devoted to what should happen in future. However, whereas the ‘First Official Draft’ talks about ‘Carrying out the ESDP’ and even about its ‘implementation’, the relevant chapter in the final ESDP document refers to ‘application’ instead. The claim about the ESDP is that, in ‘… its aims and guidelines it provides a general source of reference for actions with a spatial impact, taken by public and private decision-makers’, (CEC, 1999, 11).

This introduction makes three points about ‘application’ generally and the application of the ESDP in particular:

1. When discussing strategic planning documents like the ESDP, it is indeed more fitting to describe their follow-up as the ‘application’ of ideas contained therein rather than as the ‘implementation’ of plan proposals.
2. To facilitate their application, so conceived, strategic planning documents often need to undergo further elaboration, entailing among others the making of new institutional arrangements.
3. As a concept, application relates to ideas in the literature about evaluating strategic planning documents by their ‘performance’ in shaping ongoing action, rather than by the ‘conformance’ of outcomes to intentions stated therein.

The common thread in all this is the recognition that strategic planning documents are far different from masterplans, or blueprints for action.
In elucidating these points, this introduction to the special issue on the application of the ESDP builds on earlier work on the evaluation of strategic planning and on the ESDP and its application (Faludi, 2000; 2001; Faludí and Waterhout, 2002). It begins with a reminder of what the ESDP itself says about its application.

**About the application of the ESDP**

Although the Commission has given essential support, the ESDP has been prepared in a unique form of voluntary member-state cooperation. This relates to the ‘competency issue’ concerning the Community’s role in spatial planning or, as the field is increasingly being described, spatial development policy. As the final paper explains, so far member states have been of the opinion that, although Community policies have spatial impacts, the overall direction of spatial development is not a matter for the Community but rather for member states and/or (depending on their constitutional set-up) their regions. This is why planners from one member state holding the EU Presidency after another took the lead in the ESDP process, putting their stamp on the proceedings and handing the draft over to the next one, until under the German Presidency of 1999 everybody agreed on the final version.

What did the actors involved aim to achieve? As indicated, the makers of the ESDP wanted to provide a ‘frame of reference’ or ‘framework’ for those involved in spatial development to take account of. For some time now, as part of what is called the ‘argumentative turn’ in policy analysis and planning (Fischer and Forester, 1993) the literature talks about the concept of ‘framing’ (Rein and Schön, 1993; Schön and Rein, 1994). ‘Framing’ is what frameworks do—injecting ideas into the proceedings, ordering thoughts and thereby, albeit indirectly, giving direction to action. In so doing, the power of frameworks must not be underestimated. However, frameworks do not impose themselves. Rather, they work on the minds of those who take its messages into consideration. This, then, is what ‘application’ means—ideas stimulating future action to take a particular course, but without pre-empting the decisions of those involved.

As regards the type of actions that it wants to influence, the ESDP points in various directions. Chapter 4, ‘The Application of the ESDP’, distinguishes between the Community, the transnational/national and the regional/local levels, singling the transnational level out as being the most important of the three:

Transnational strategies and programmes help applying sectoral Community policies to the different regions of the EU. They can also support the coordination of Community policies with respective national, regional and local policies. (CEC, 1999, 35)

The text goes into more detail, proposing:

… that the European Commission examine periodically and systematically the spatial effects of policies—such as the Common Agricultural Policy,
Transport Policy and ‘Trans-European Networks’, Structural Policy, Environmental Policy, Competition Policy and Research and Technology Policy—at European level. (CEC, 1999, 37)

Likewise, it encourages member states to ‘regularly prepare standardised information on important aspects of national spatial development policy and its implementation in national spatial development reports, basing this on the structure of the ESDP’ (CEC, 1999, 38). This is an idea coming from Germany where such reports are being submitted to the federal parliament, the Bundestag, on a regular basis.

Chapter 4 also discusses the Community initiative INTERREG IIc. It recommends continuing with project-oriented transnational cooperation for spatial development, which has become INTERREG IIIb. Further recommendations concern cross-border and inter-regional cooperation, the application of the ESDP in the member states and on the Pan-European level and in international cooperation.

All this relates to one of the points this paper wants to make, which is that the application of any strategic document like the ESDP entails further steps, including analyses as well as the making of institutional arrangements.

**Elaboration**

What is immediately evident from the above is that the ESDP does not see itself as a finished, polished product. In the eyes of its makers, the ESDP process should be continuous, entailing among others various types of follow-up. Already early on the ESDP states:

The translation of the objectives and options ... into concrete political action will take place gradually. Initial proposals for the application of the ESDP (...) are presented in Chapter 4 (...) Other options and proposals will require further discussion and fleshing out at European level. This includes, in particular, the exchange of experiences and the monitoring and evaluation of spatial developments. The discussion on the future orientation of spatial development policy in Europe within the Committee on Spatial Development will also have to be continued after the ESDP has been agreed. (CEC, 1999, 12)

Indeed, after agreeing on the final document at Potsdam, the makers of the ESDP met again at Tampere in Finland and adopted an Action Programme consisting of 12 follow-up actions. On some of them, the Commission has taken the lead; with others, groups of member states have taken responsibility. As the final paper in this issue shows, in the meantime many of these actions have indeed been completed with others still being progressed. Beyond this, what this issue demonstrates is that the application of the ESDP has many more facets than the Action Programme foresees.
A more fitting concept

The picture that one gets is indeed that application comprises the dissemination of information and the formation of attitudes and discourses, but without an element of hard-and-fast commitment other than the commitment to continue with discussions and exchanges. One surmises that the makers of the ESDP ‘soft pedal’ on real commitments, possibly because of the ‘competency issue’ as described above.

Chapter 4 of the ESDP addresses this issue, emphasising that, although ‘... no spatial development competence is rooted at Community level, we must ensure that different spatially relevant Community policies do not conflict with or neutralise each other’ (CEC, 1999, 37). At the same time, the ‘... ESDP framework should not be imposed on other policy areas. Its application is entirely voluntary’ (CEC, 1999, 37).

With the application of the ESDP being voluntary, the order of the day is cooperation. This is true of European integration generally. Even in areas where the Community has a policy mandate, the preparation and implementation of policies heavily rely on member state officials and/or outside experts. In this respect the makers of the ESDP expect much from consultations. On the Community and transnational level, consultations have taken the form of transnational seminars held on the ‘First Official Draft’ (CEC, 1997) in 1998 and 1999 (Williams, 2000). On a national level, too, the document was supposed to be the object of similar consultations, although inevitably the way in which this was done varied. As the final paper comments, the Community services have perhaps been most consistent in applying the ESDP, at least to the extent of referring to it at pretty much every occasion offering itself. However, the overall picture of the application of the ESDP, which the papers in this issue are greatly adding to, is that of a process with no clear sense of direction. The diffuse nature of this process will be commented on below.

Fuzziness is not generally appreciated. So to admit that the relationship between a framework document and the outcomes of actions undertaken is fuzzy may be seen as a sign of weakness and something that ideally ought to be rectified. Here the argument goes in the opposite direction. It is suggested that leaving the outcomes of planning somewhat undecided and encouraging others to avail themselves of recommendations as they see fit is appropriate for a strategic planning document like the ESDP. Indeed, it may be the only option. After all, what is the alternative? Is it conceivable for a European spatial planning document like the ESDP to have ‘teeth’, like a zoning plan is supposed to have? Should it allocate funds for certain kinds of policies? Which funds? Those of the Community and/or of the member states? Should it invoke powers of control over, for example, the use of natural and cultural resources? Which powers of control? Those of the Community and/or those of the member states? And, if so, would this not amount to a European masterplan, a blueprint imposed by a remote body trying to shape territories as diverse as those of the member states according to one overall set of principles? Would such an undertaking be desirable or, indeed, feasible?
The answer is of course that strategic planning documents like the ESDP should attempt nothing of the kind. Even if a Community competency for spatial planning or spatial development policy existed, giving direction to thought and action would be all that should and, indeed, could be the ambition of its makers. Witness the fact that Community legislation, too, increasingly takes the form of framework regulations to be filled in by the member states. Actually, although of course not an example of Community legislation, the ESDP may thus turn out to have been a forerunner, a signpost for the shape that Community policies are taking.

‘Performance’ rather than ‘conformance’

This is where the argument about ‘performance’ rather than ‘conformance’ being the appropriate measure of success of strategic plans (Mastop, 1997; Faludi, 2000) is relevant. It says that there are two ideal types of plan. The first is conventionally associated with the notion of a plan as the embodiment of superior intelligence and expert knowledge. This type of plan demands commitment to the implementation of the policies expressed therein. The assumption is that, by virtue of being expert based, they must be considered the best policies. The measure of success is whether the makers of the plan are succeeding in instilling the will in decision takers to make outcomes conform to the intentions of the plan.

In not assuming that it is the ultimate source of wisdom, the other ideal type of plan, often described as strategic, runs counter to the popular notions of a plan as described above. The literature argues for strategic plans to be frames of reference for subsequent decisions, leaving scope for the addressees to mould the plan to fit their situation as they see it. They thereby enrich the plan or policy with their insights, ideally making it their own.

Although requiring labour intensive, subtle forms of research, it is certainly possible to establish the ‘performance’ of ‘plans as frameworks’ as that notion has been defined. The analyst must look at how various messages in the plan document are being invoked or, in the terms of this special issue, how they are being applied in various types of follow-up, including the elaboration and/or the revision of the documents concerned. The papers in an earlier special issue edited by Mastop (1997) provide examples drawn from Dutch research into plan performance. It is clear that since application is a matter of changing attitudes and perspectives, in order to form a considered opinion the researcher needs to invoke a range of qualitative research techniques, from interviews to participatory observation. Also, as in all interpretative research, outcomes can be subject to disagreement.

The papers in this issue

Shaw and Sykes are alone among the authors of this special issue to take a leaf out of the book of this Dutch school of performance research. The other papers pursue different lines of research, thereby enriching our understanding of the
application of the ESDP. However, all authors are agreed on seeing planning as a ‘soft’ but subtle process. They have presented their papers at the ‘Transnational Planning’ track at the XVI Congress of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) held at Volos in Greece on 10–15 July 2002. The editor himself (along with Karina Pallagst, co-author of one of the papers in this issue) has been chairing that track. In this issue he has sought to achieve a geographic and thematic spread, taking in north, north-west and southern Europe and exploring the relation with regional-economic as well as environmental policies. Thus, the issue opens by discussing the Nordic states. The member states of the EU among them are not always the easiest partners and, of course, the spirit of independence is even more manifest in the non-member states Norway and Iceland. Nevertheless, in the paper on ‘Discursive European Integration: The Case of Nordic Spatial Planning’, Kai Böhme shows that the power of networking and of the emergent discourse on European spatial planning is inducing Nordic states to invoke the ‘spatial approach’, or cross-sectoral coordination, as advocated in the ESDP.

Once a reluctant partner, the UK is now in the forefront of the movement for a broader form of spatial planning. David Shaw and Olivier Sykes in their paper ‘Investigating the application of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) to regional planning in the United Kingdom’ lay bare the mechanisms by which national policy seeks to ensure that Regional Policy Guidance Notes apply key ESDP principles. Based on empirical analysis, they come to the view that the ESDP is beginning to be accepted as what it is intended to be—a framework.

At times, Italian planners along with others from southern Europe have looked at the ESDP as representing a ‘north-west European’ agenda. Meanwhile, as Umberto Janin Rivolin shows in his paper ‘Shaping European spatial planning: how Italy’s experience can contribute’, indirect approaches typical for European integration are doing their work. There are changes taking place at all levels of government and administration, and the Community initiative INTERREG is generating its own momentum. A narrow focus on the ESDP and its application would miss these significant developments, Janin Rivolin argues.

Markus Leibenath and Karina Pallagst approach the ESDP from a different angle. In their paper ‘Greening Europe? Environmental issues in spatial planning policies and instruments’, they investigate the extent to which the commitment in Article 6 of the Treaty of Amsterdam to integrate environmental protection requirements in Community policies and activities has taken effect. Good examples are, indeed, the ESDP itself, and the ‘Action Plan for Sustainable Urban Development’, along with their various follow-ups in the form of the Community initiatives INTERREG IIB and URBAN II. Once again, this broadens the focus. Rather than looking at the ESDP and its application in splendid isolation the authors see it as part of a broader stream of policies that mutually influence one another.

The same message comes through in the paper by Sue Kidd, David Massey and Hilary Davies. Its title is ‘The ESDP and integrated coastal zone
management: implications for the integrated management of the Irish Sea’. They discuss an issue that has formed one of the follow-on actions decided upon at Tampere. It is the object also of a Commission Communication. Announcing the intention to launch ‘integrated territorial management’, not just for coastal areas, but throughout the territory of the EU, integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) may be a harbinger of things to come. The authors want to see this approach being applied to one of the regional seas of Europe that is crying out for integrated management, the Irish Sea. At the same time, the authors show that, far from stemming from the ESDP, ICZM has been the object of long-standing discussions at Community level. Thus, rather than the ESDP being applied in ICZM, one can more properly speak of mutually enforcing approaches and arenas.

In the last paper of this volume, the editor discusses ‘Unfinished business: European spatial planning in the 2000s’. This is a revised version of his keynote address at the AESOP conference at Volos. He points out what the other papers in this issue also demonstrate—that the ESDP has been quite successful in shaping the minds of spatial planners. However, with the competency issue as unresolved as ever, the institutional architecture of the ESDP process shows distinct cracks. This gives the Commission reason to believe that intergovernmental European planning of the type practised in preparing the ESDP is a dead end. However, can the Commission do the job? The final paper suggests that it cannot and proposes a package deal, combining the best efforts of the Commission with those of the member states.

**Concluding comment**

Application is not the weakest part of the ESDP. Although not very much in the public eye, the ideas and approaches percolate through and influence the way of thinking about planning in Europe. The purpose of this special issue is to demonstrate this and to encourage more research on the application of the ESDP in a variety of situations. In the fullness of time, this should help not only with increasing our understanding but also with generating the commitment and the resources for the awesome task of European spatial planning to become a permanent element in the process of European integration.

In addition, what the papers also show is the great variety of forms that the application of the ESDP (and one surmises of any strategic planning document) can take. Understandably, spatial planners are fond of thinking of their products as central vehicles for coordination and of their application as the single minded pursuit of goals expressed therein. Inevitably, as the papers in this issue demonstrate, reality is more complex. Thus, Kidd, Massey and Davies show that important concerns are being articulated in various arenas in parallel. Leibenath and Pallagst portray the ESDP not so much as a policy instrument in its own right, but rather as a vehicle for applying other, in their eyes even broader policies to sustain and promote environmental values. Janin Rivolin shows that in the Italian context (and one surmises that this applies in other
contexts as well) the ESDP is but one out of a number of Community policies with impact on spatial planning. For a proper assessment of the state of the art these other policies need to be considered too.

The papers also show the complexity of the process of application. Sometimes, policies are not being applied in a straightforward manner. Rather, they require follow-up actions, with the introduction of strand B of the INTERREG Community initiative to promote transnational cooperation in planning being a good case in point. Also, it is sometimes not the addressees of policies that take the initiative to apply policies. Rather, as the paper by Shaw and Sykes shows, actors other than the responsible decision makers may use opportunities at public consultations and the like to inject considerations derived from the ESDP.

What also becomes evident is the existence of a common approach for opening up and exploring new fields of European policy. The method is nowhere clearly postulated, but the prominence of stakeholder participation, demonstration projects, fair distribution of projects and initiatives throughout the whole of the EU and the use of forums and so forth is obvious. So is the search for images and issues that transcend the borders of nation states, like ecosystems, coastal areas, regional seas, mountain areas and river basins. This is because they require a broader perspective encompassing various member states or parts thereof. And, finally, so is the predilection for concepts that are capable of unifying opposites, like polycentric development.

Thus, the application of the ESDP cannot be seen in isolation. Rather, a range of issues comes into play, relating, as they often do, to the ups and downs of integration as such. Research into the application of the ESDP is thus similar to its object of study. It is a learning process. It will come as no surprise to the reader that preparing this special issue has been an interactive learning experience too.

REFERENCES


