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Learning from Abroad: The European Approach to Smarter Growth and Sustainable Development

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This paper was written by Eric J. Siy for the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities.^{1, 2} The Network is pleased to release this paper to help further the understanding of and contribute to learning from international approaches to smarter growth policies and sustainable development. An earlier draft of this paper was shared by the author at a conference on U.S. and European approaches to spatial planning in September 2004.

Praise for *Learning from Abroad*

“At a time when cities and towns across America are struggling to curb the impacts of sprawl and grow healthier communities, *Learning from Abroad* provides vital perspective and fresh ideas. By looking to the progress of Europe, U.S. interests can gain clearer understanding of a powerful approach dedicated to achieving results. *Learning from Abroad* offers a thorough introduction to that process and the potential it holds for bringing about lasting solutions.”

-Robert Yaro, President
Regional Plan Association
New York

“Drawing on a well-chosen selection of the vast range of sources, *Learning from Abroad* gives a surprisingly vivid and accurate picture of European spatial planning in its various manifestations. A U.S. readership can draw inspiration from it in efforts to conceptualise an American Spatial Development Perspective, reflecting the need to accommodate a vastly expanding population. European planners in turn will be fascinated to learn that their approaches, the shortcomings of which they are only too aware of, should be looked at as exemplary.”

-Andreas Faludi
Professor of Spatial Policy Systems in Europe
University of Nijmegen
The Netherlands
Editor of *European Spatial Planning* (2002), Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

“The future well being of our local communities is increasingly dictated by wider political and economic forces. It is therefore increasingly important that local planning is strengthened in the ways it relates to the many changes that are taking place at State and Interstate levels. The European Union has addressed this challenge through a range of initiatives which Eric Siy’s research provides valuable insight into and will help those in the U.S. who are facing similar challenges of global competitiveness, social polarization, and environmental threats.”

-Vincent Goodstadt
President
Royal Town Planning Institute
Glasgow, Scotland

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Preface

Uniting any community anywhere in the world is the desire to achieve and sustain quality of life, “our collective hope for [a] society in which we are supposed to have more—not just things, but more community, more peace, the healthiest children, and the cleanest environment.”³ Indeed, these are the core values of smart growth, and of sustainable development, which link advocates across continents. Mounting threats to quality of life—pollution, crowding, traffic, economic decay, and, of course, sprawl—are similarly unbounded and must be overcome for hope to survive.

In search of solutions, this paper looks beyond the borders of the United States to the promising work of the European Union (EU) and four of its member states. Detailed case studies of the EU, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom are accompanied by brief case descriptions of Denmark and Sweden that focus on progress at the municipal level. From transnational to local, common to all are societal and institutional commitments to quality of life that predate the smart growth movement in this country. Better understanding of these approaches can be instructive to the United States, Canada, and any nation concerned for the future.

The locations selected are by no means the only ones doing important work. U.S. and European experts offered numerous other suggestions—countries, regions, sub-regions, and cities—including France, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, the Baltic Sea Region, Northern Ireland,

Lyon, and Milan.⁴ Based on the input received, and on independent research, it is safe to say that Europe is home to the greatest concentration of dynamic and innovative actions in the world. From such fertile ground, this paper seeks to cultivate growing interest in the progress of other places. With references, endnotes, and web links that go beyond the locations profiled, it opens the door for more expansive study of international best practices and the value they may hold for smart growth.

“A life of quality is a life of opportunity...the opportunity to take our future in our own hands and shape it to our will.”⁵ The dedicated efforts profiled on these pages embody this spirit, providing inspiration and hope.

Introduction

Sprawl’s expanding tentacles have reached beyond inconvenience and aggravation to become a documented public health threat. Reading like a Surgeon General’s warning, a *New York Times* headline declared: “Suburban Sprawl Adds Health Concerns, Studies Say.”⁶ As reported, an increasingly auto-dependent society was now tied directly, though not surprisingly, to serious health risks affecting millions of Americans. Increased weight and higher blood pressure are the apparent consequences of a pattern of development that has become an epidemic in its own right.

A related study featured in the same *Times* article contrasted the United States with Europe, where development policies favoring pedestrians, not cars, are well-established. The punch line:

“European countries with the highest levels of walking and cycling have much lower rates of obesity, diabetes, and hypertension than the United States. The Netherlands, Denmark, and, Sweden, for example, have obesity rates only a third of the American rate, while Germany’s rate is only half as high. Moreover, the average healthy life expectancies in those four countries are 2.5 to 4.4 years longer than in the USA, although their per-capita health expenditures are only half those of the USA.”⁷

Even more remarkable than the findings is the relative simplicity of the policies behind them, including: better facilities for walking and cycling, urban design sensitive to non-motorists, traffic calming in residential areas, and restrictions on motor vehicles in cities. Radical by current U.S. standards perhaps, but ultimately practical and effective when it comes to human health.

In a globalizing society, the implications of such striking differences are enormous, particularly given Europe’s standing as the largest economic competitor of the United States.⁸ European countries see sprawl as “the source of increasing inefficiency in transport and energy networks, as well as consuming land and natural resources.”⁹ Deliberate choices to avoid sprawl and enhance livability are delivering benefits that will favor Europe without similar commitments being made in this country.

Already, the effects of a widening policy gulf are being felt. Stiffer environmental controls in Europe are translating into onerous and expensive demands on American companies doing business there.¹⁰ Resolved to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth,”¹¹ European nations are working to secure quality of life for the long-term.

The strategic backbone of Europe’s ambitious plans is a public policy framework aimed at “decoupling” economic growth and environmental pressures, in a complex political environment with multi-sector participation. Integral to this endeavor are systems of land-use planning and growth management aimed at achieving “a balanced and sustainable development.”¹²

U.S. and EU: Shared Aims, Differing Actions

Embedded in the European Union’s overall approach, and in the actions of pioneering member states (including the four profiled here), are policy objectives that closely parallel those now being advocated in the United States. As concluded in another study of sprawl’s rising costs, “Regions wishing to improve their quality of life should consider taking steps to reduce sprawl and promote smarter growth.”¹³ With this study in hand, Smart Growth America issued the following policy recommendations:

- Reinvest in neglected communities and provide more housing opportunities;
- Rehabilitate abandoned properties;
- Encourage new development or redevelopment in already built up areas;

- Create and nurture thriving, mixed-use centers of activity;
- Support growth management strategies; and
- Craft transportation policies that complement smarter growth.¹⁴

With years of work on each of these fronts, the EU has already adopted a strikingly similar set of policy aims “of particular importance to the sustainable development of towns and cities.”¹⁵ Europe’s longstanding experience in translating aims into actions can provide valuable lessons that may help others from having to learn them the hard way. (A summary of lessons illustrated in this paper is found on page 20.)

Planning for the Future: Profiles of Europe

European influence on American planning has a rich history dating back at least to the visionary work of Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 1800s. In more recent times, however, little has been done to capitalize on Europe’s evolving efforts to accommodate and control modern development.¹⁶ Because of the localized nature of context (in this case political and legal), the relevance of European achievement has been undervalued by contemporary American society. Given the enormity of today’s challenges and Europe’s aggressive moves to confront them, the time has come for a new era of transatlantic learning and exchange.

A Macro View: The European Union

Compared to the United States, the 25 member states of the European Union are home to many more people living on far less land.¹⁷ Growing pressure on this limited space has made the EU an unrivaled innovator, striving to require

growth that contributes quality rather than quantity to its landscapes. Nowhere is this activity more pronounced than at the level of the European Union itself where deliberate steps are redefining the roles of member states and, in the process, setting a new course for the future.

As emphasized in *Europe 2000: Outlook for the Development of the Community’s Territory*, “planning in relative isolation is no longer possible”—whether by a community or an entire country.¹⁸ This trend is reflected in each of the examples considered here. Like much of the world, patterns of land use and development in Europe are increasingly shaped by the actions of other countries. This is necessitating greater cooperation among member states as well as the development of new systems capable of responding to and managing these trends.

By first looking to the European Union as a whole it is possible to gain a feeling for the “complex and ongoing process of political and institutional restructuring”¹⁹ now underway, one that impacts the actions of all member states. Integration and enlargement of the EU are driving this process which, in effect, is aggregating the contributions of individual member states and creating a whole new level of problem-solving potential.

Accompanying Europe’s integration is a steadfast desire to retain the multi-national diversity that is at once the region’s hallmark. How and where Europe develops its cities, towns, and countryside determines to a large extent whether the necessary balance can be struck. As profiled below, much has already been done—by individual countries and localities—to preserve the character of communities and rural landscapes, but, until recently, without a

larger coordinating framework to ensure widespread progress and a shared sense of purpose.²⁰

A Unifying Strategy for Progress

The need to unify Europe while keeping it a cultural mosaic provided the rationale for the European Spatial Development Perspective or ESDP, a joint policy statement of member states and the European Commission, the body responsible for EU legislation.²¹ Adoption of the ESDP in 1999 was the product of a decades-long effort that builds upon the accomplishments of member states.

Recently described as the “Rosetta Stone of European spatial planning,” the ESDP provides a detailed and widely supported vision for transitioning the entire EU region toward “sustainable spatial development.” In considering its implications for American planners, Robert Yaro of the Regional Plan Association writes:

“With the adoption of the ESDP, North America’s largest competitor in the global economy is now utilizing planning to advance its economic and transportation advantages, improve its quality of life, and reduce inequities among its sub-regions. These innovations should open a range of new possibilities for American planners, causing us to consider rethinking how we plan for metropolitan areas, natural resource systems and larger urban regions.”²²

Spatial Planning vs. Smart Growth

Though not an exact equivalent of smart growth, European spatial planning focuses on many of the same growth and development issues. In fact, as defined below, it offers a more thorough treatment of these concerns and, arguably, a more comprehensive means for addressing priority needs.

“Spatial planning refers to the methods used largely by the public sector to influence the future distribution of activities in space. It is undertaken with the aims of creating a more rational territorial organization of land uses and the linkages between them, to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment, and to achieve social and economic objectives. Spatial planning embraces measures to coordinate the spatial impacts of other sectoral policies, to achieve a more even distribution of economic development between the regions than would otherwise be created by market forces, and to regulate the conversion of land and other property uses.”²³

By comparison, the meaning of smart growth is typically more open-ended and, thus, subject to interpretation. For example, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) defines smart growth as “development that serves the economy, community, and the environment. It provides a framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they grow.”²⁴

Like zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans in the United States, a spatial plan establishes the basis for

regulating development. However, whereas U.S. zoning ordinances are most often locally controlled, “European equivalents are subject to approval by state or regional authorities whose control is exercised reasonably and consistently by showing that local spatial plans fit into a broader pattern of planning.”²⁵ This built-in measure of consistency and connection to a larger set of common objectives is crucial to achieving meaningful progress.

In contrast to European actions, the vast majority of smart growth programs in the United States “lack a real spatial planning element that could delineate and map growth centers and growth corridors, conservation areas and infrastructure strategies.” Given these concerns, it remains to be seen whether such programs can “fundamentally alter the patterns of metropolitan sprawl that are undercutting both urban and rural regions” in the United States.²⁶

European Spatial Development Perspective: The Fundamentals

In deference to national sovereignty and the established principle of subsidiarity,²⁷ the ESDP is not a legally binding master plan for Europe, but rather a comprehensive set of policy guidelines, objectives, and options to guide the “balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union.”²⁸

Incorporating the experiences of member states, the ESDP seeks to establish a continuum of initiatives, from local to transnational, aimed at three core objectives:

- The development of a balanced and polycentric urban system and a new urban-rural relationship that recognizes interdependence and

fosters partnership (seeking to counter over-development in the core of Europe and under-development of peripheral regions);

- Securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge; and
- Sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage.

Within the ESDP these items are divided into their respective elements and then aligned with specific policy options. Implementation requires extensive horizontal and vertical collaboration as well as reorientation of national spatial development strategies toward accomplishing the three objectives.²⁹

Formal roots for ESDP adoption can be traced back to the European Conference of Ministers Responsible for Regional Planning, or CEMAT, created by the Council of Europe in 1970.³⁰ In continuing to break new ground, CEMAT updated and expanded its planning charter in 2000 with the publication of “Guiding Principles for the Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent.” The principles are similar to and reinforce the ESDP, but cover the broader geographic area that encompasses Council of Europe membership.³¹

ESDP Accomplishments

While it remains too soon to gauge cause-and-effect accomplishments, the ESDP has fostered unprecedented cooperation on a continental scale. This is considered essential to realizing the document’s primary aims.³² Critical to the ESDP’s widespread acceptance is the common language it has created for developing and applying mutually supportive spatial strategies. Even though voluntary and non-binding, the ESDP serves as a

strategic platform and framework for generating results. This reflects an overall trend, especially in the last decade, where “informal EU activity in spatial planning has been almost as significant as that that might have existed if the EU had been awarded formal planning powers.”³³

The ESDP has prompted “political will and legitimacy” by member states, influencing the “development of planning policies, financing of projects, interregional cooperation, and policy implementation.”³⁴ ESDP activities also feed directly into Europe’s broader, and even more ambitious, plans to implement sustainable development.³⁵

Better perspective on the vision embodied in the ESDP—and the compass bearing it provides for the entire European Community—can be gained through closer inspection of member states and their work to bring this vision to life. One of the great resources making it possible to conduct a coherent, country-by-country analysis is the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies that profiles individual nations.

The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies

Completed by the European Commission in the late 1990s, the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies provides a portal to understanding the planning practices of member states and their effects. The Compendium identifies several major concerns that are “finding their way into the spatial planning policies” of many countries and are especially relevant to this investigation. These include: environmental protection and sustainability; controlling and balancing growth; integrating policies; and partnerships.³⁶

As summarized, environmental protection and sustainability are at the center of spatial planning debates across Europe and, as will be seen in the examples below, are having an increasing effect on policy decisions. Though the environment has been high on the agenda for many years, the broader issue of sustainability is requiring wholesale redefinition of themes and problems to be addressed. It is also forcing coordination of disparate policy areas in order to address the environmental, economic, and social implications of growth.

In line with ESDP goals, controlling and balancing growth are policy objectives shared by a majority of European countries. Urban renewal and the revitalization of urban areas in decline are prominent policy themes. Urban growth control policies are being strengthened in direct response to rising demand and the need to contain suburban expansion. To set the stage for an “urban renaissance,”³⁷ policies and programs that consolidate growth are another common trend. This includes increasing densities in some urban areas and working to make cities more livable. The City and Environment project of the Netherlands described in the next section offers a good example of how this is being done.

Going hand-in-hand with these trends is an overall increase in the integration of policies, particularly as they apply to land use, transportation, and the environment, as well as to cultural heritage, tourism, and economic development. Again, the goal is to balance competing demands that together determine quality of life. Comprehensive policies are increasingly outcome driven, emphasizing the pathways to solving difficult problems rather than becoming mired in administrative process.

Finally, partnerships that join sectors to address complex spatial issues are a fast-spreading occurrence. This includes creating more opportunities for public participation in all phases of policy development and implementation. Conflicts among different constituencies persist, but the existence of specified goals and objectives in many countries has created a structural context for resolving disputes and staying on track.

A closer look at four leading member states gives a clearer picture of Europe's far-reaching approach to smarter growth. Though the experiences of each are distinct—lending vital diversity to larger spatial development goals—commitment to quality of life is deeply shared. This combination of diversity and commonality goes to the heart of how Europe is positioning itself to become a sustainable society and why North American interests should take heed.

The Netherlands

One of the chief proponents of a “pan-European” strategy and a significant contributor to the European Spatial Development Perspective³⁸ is the Netherlands. Widely regarded as “the world's flagship of national spatial planning,”³⁹ the Dutch are equally renowned for their vigilant efforts to establish a sustainable society.⁴⁰ Of particular importance to U.S. interests struggling to contain sprawl is the premium placed on maximizing the appeal of cities for living and working while minimizing dependence on cars. Indeed, the Netherlands enjoys the highest number of bicycles per capita in the EU (more than one per person) and a well-established network of bike lanes and paths linking cities to surrounding communities.

The country's vulnerable location and small size have been primary motivators for the strategic innovations that have drawn international attention. Densely populated and urbanized, the Netherlands offers a microcosm of the problems facing many places. In fact, with 986 inhabitants per square mile, the entire country almost qualifies as a metropolitan area based on the definition used by the U.S. Bureau of Statistics of 1,000 persons per square mile.

Borne of the need for intensive water management and land reclamation—more than a quarter of the country is below sea level—spatial planning in the Netherlands dates as far back as the Middle Ages. It began at the local level and grew to include regional and national planning during the 20th century. One enduring and visible result is the sharp divide that continues to separate city and countryside in some parts of the country, especially low lying areas.⁴¹

With so much history has come an expanding array of agencies, plans, decrees, reports, legislation, and covenants all aimed at securing the nation's future. Nonetheless, according to their latest National Environmental Policy Plan: “The quality of the living environment in the Netherlands is under pressure...caused by increasing mobility, and different combinations of living, infrastructure and working.”⁴² This same statement could apply to almost any country. Setting the Dutch apart, however, is an integrated means of response that most countries have yet to even discuss let alone put in place.

The present system is grounded in Article 21 of the Dutch Constitution that stipulates: “public authorities shall endeavor to ensure a good quality of life in the Netherlands, and to protect and

enhance the living environment.” The authorities referred to include national, provincial, and municipal governments, forming the basis for extensive vertical and horizontal coordination, a defining feature of the system that has been vital to its progress.

The Spatial Planning Act

In 1965, adoption of the Spatial Planning Act by the Dutch Parliament gave structure to the roles and responsibilities of government. The measure was designed to ensure that spatial development occurred in an integrated way.⁴³ Though amended in 1985 and 1994, the underlying principles of the Act still hold. Key provisions include:

- A plan-led system of statutory planning at national, provincial, and municipal levels of government;
- Legally binding local land-use plans requiring the approval of provincial government and subject to comments from national government;
- The ability of higher levels of government to intervene in the planning activities of lower levels, including direct intervention in local land-use planning by national government; and
- Extensive consultation, administrative and public, in every planning procedure.⁴⁴

These measures have enabled the high degree of cooperation that characterizes the system. Influencing lower level actions even more than laws are the “golden strings of government finance.” In contrast to the chronic problem of “unfunded mandates” imposed on U.S. towns and counties, in the Netherlands 85 percent of local and provincial income flows from national coffers.⁴⁵

Following passage of the Spatial Planning Act, a basic tenet of Dutch policymaking has been the “concentration of urbanization.” This longstanding priority has produced a steady stream of measures to create thriving, healthy communities with quality housing, efficient and convenient public transport, recreation opportunities, and protected open space. With varying degrees of success—based largely on prevailing political interpretations—the tenet has been upheld.

Direction and Innovation: National Planning Documents

National government sets the direction and parameters of what is to be achieved through periodic Spatial Planning Reports prepared by the interdepartmental National Spatial Planning Commission. First published in 1960, the latest report—the Fifth National Policy Document (NPD) on Spatial Planning—was released in 2001, but, due to early elections, was not approved by Parliament.⁴⁶

The Fifth NPD was intended to continue efforts to secure spatial quality, but in the larger and more diffuse context of a “network society” characterized by “high mobility... and the interweaving of city and countryside.” This emerging pattern is fundamentally altering spatial dynamics, posing new challenges for a system that has vigorously sought to maintain a clear distinction between urban and rural.⁴⁷ It has only heightened the complexity of devising policies that can “combine quantitative space requirements with quality gains.”⁴⁸

As described in the Policy Document, “Spatial conditions ought to contribute towards a social, healthy life for everyone... Spatial policy must therefore

be robust and flexible, must be kept intact when space pressures are high or low, and must promote the best possible spatial quality. It is important that it is clear exactly where something is possible and permitted, and where it is not. That is why choices regarding the quality and quantity of the demand for space are required.”

Three intervention strategies were called for to meet this challenge: *intensifying land use*, especially in urban areas; *combining uses* [integrated development], especially in rural areas; and *transforming spaces* in urban and rural areas. The latter would include “restructuring residential districts in the city, rezoning dilapidated business [parks], reusing railway sidings... .”

At the time of this writing, however, the fate of the Fifth NPD remains unclear. Sweeping changes in government that occurred in 2002, combined with a dramatic downturn in the economy, prompted major revisions. In April 2004, the new administration submitted a revised policy document to Parliament. In a significant departure from the earlier version, the goal of stemming development is superseded by the need to address a persistent housing shortage throughout the country. Implementation details and the ultimate impact of this policy shift remain to be seen.⁴⁹

Despite changing politics, groundwork for the latest report was laid by its predecessor, the Fourth National Policy Document of 1990 that placed a high priority on environmental needs. Spatial development will continue to be influenced by this document until at least 2010, thus its provisions need to be understood, especially given the extent of their influence, in the Netherlands and beyond.

Central to the Fourth NPD is the goal of concentrating development in already heavily developed regions including ports and the famed “Randstad Holland,” a crescent shaped ring of cities that surrounds the nation’s “Green Heart.” The latter is emblematic of what the Dutch have been striving to accomplish. Conceived in the 1950s, protecting the centrally located Green Heart from encroaching development while encouraging urban growth remains a priority objective to this day.

Compact Cities

The Fourth NPD promotes “compact city” development as a strategy for containing growth while enhancing quality of life and economic competitiveness. This approach has provided an internationally recognized model, the criteria for which include:

- Keeping development within a minimal distance from major city centers;
- Good accessibility for bicycle and public transport;
- Superior amenities for pedestrians, bicycles, and public transport;
- Mandatory mixed use development that combines residences, recreation, and work;
- Reduction of automobile traffic;
- Extensive networks of green open spaces for recreation and nature within urban regions;
- Siting that concentrates high intensity uses (industry, offices, hospitals, etc.) around railway stations and major transportation nodes while limiting availability of parking to compel use of public transportation; and
- Solid financial backing, both public and private.⁵⁰

Complementing the criteria for compact cities are policies that restrict the development potential of large rural areas, expand public transportation options, subsidize urban renewal, and redevelop cleaned up brownfields. All of these efforts taken together are likely contributors to the health and safety benefits cited in the introduction to this report.

As recognized by other European nations, “The concept of the ‘compact city’ now dominates the debate on improving the quality of urban life in the cities of the European Union.”⁵¹ Although in Dutch political discourse the term compact city has lost its appeal, a key means for controlling the spread of development throughout Europe comes through the “recycling” of already urbanized land.

Encouraging signs of the potential for similar actions in the United States come from a growing body of research that recognizes “Compact development is the antithesis of sprawl.”⁵² Dutch progress, and the progress of fellow member states, add substance to this message and can be used to help create the impetus for improved policies.

Among the innovations flowing from the compact city agenda in the Netherlands are “urbanization covenants” with all major metropolitan areas and provinces. Set up in 1994, the covenants function as “package deals” providing targeted subsidies for integrated development within designated urban regions. This activity is combined with enforced restrictions on development outside metropolitan areas. According to authorities, three-quarters of all prospective housing production to the year 2010 is expected to be situated in these regions.⁵³

City and Environment

To help solve the inherent problems of creating compact cities, the City and Environment project was established by the Dutch government in 1993. Of greatest concern are environmental limitations—standards for noise, air and soil quality, and external safety—that must be overcome for cities to be desirable places to live. This is especially true in difficult locations such as areas around railway stations or inner-city industrial parks. By targeting these areas and coming up with creative ways to make them more livable, urban development potential expands as quality of life improves and pressure on green space is reduced.

The City and Environment approach engages all relevant parties in a process aimed at tackling specific issues at their source. Innovative solutions are then developed through an inclusive dialogue that promotes broad support. Proposed actions typically conform to existing law, but, subject to government approval, may deviate from regulations if doing so can produce better results. Of the 25 localities currently in the program only two have acted on this option. (In both cases, to better address chronic noise problems.) Use of the option requires compensation from the participating municipality for any negative consequences that may result. As prescribed, taking this step “should always benefit the quality of life in the area and result in a more economic and efficient use of space.”⁵⁴

Still in its pilot phase, new Dutch law will soon allow all local authorities to participate in the project, in both urban and rural areas. In addition, provincial governments will be granted the authority to approve individual local actions.

Broad attraction to the City and Environment project comes from its capacity to reach tailor-made solutions for problems in a particular location. The strategy establishes an open, less rigid atmosphere deemed more conducive to resolving what may otherwise remain intractable issues with no interest benefiting. The project is credited with reducing noise, improving air quality and safety, increasing developable space, cleaning up contaminated soils, and more.

Key to realizing the goals of sustainability, the City and Environment project fuses spatial planning and environmental needs to reinforce shared policy goals and achieve optimal results. In fact, on a global scale, the project puts into practice the “sustainable city” objectives of Local Agenda 21 as established at the United Nations Earth Summit in 1992.⁵⁵ It offers a model approach for cities in any country with the necessary flexibility enabling relative ease of transfer.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite best efforts in the Netherlands, a growing body of analysis and criticism suggests that the system in place may not be equipped to curb mounting pressures and achieve the desired spatial quality.⁵⁶ Much of this concern is directed at the difficulty of adapting to the network society that has quite literally created a moving target. While current approaches may be questioned, there remains general support for the established goals of Dutch planning. Discussions center on how best to meet these goals—evolving the system for an evolving society. The current debate, as has been true throughout Dutch history, will no doubt spur new innovations from which others can learn.

The United Kingdom

With a “mature and rigorous system of *Town and Country Planning*,” the United Kingdom stands as another international leader in controlling land use. From highland to coast, a tradition of stewardship is revealed over 100 years of deliberate action. As its name implies, town and country planning places strong emphasis on land management and on the role of local governments which are granted considerable flexibility in managing development demands. These features have special significance for the United States where sprawl continues to devour open space and local authorities usually have the last word. Much can be learned from how the British system has reinforced local control and why it is now regarded as a logical vehicle for pursuing sustainable development in the UK.

Specifically, town and country planning refers to the body of law authorizing control of land use through regulation and defining the terms of implementation. As recognized in the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies, through town and country planning: “...the UK has vigorously pursued a general policy of urban containment and protection of the countryside, protecting the amenity of existing development, the retention of the built heritage and valued landscapes, and tackling the decline of the inner city.”⁵⁷

In the UK today, however, severe spatial pressures challenge a planning apparatus that has built its reputation on maintaining the character of the countryside. Bounded by the sea, the United Kingdom faces an increase of as many as 4.4 million new households by 2021.⁵⁸ Compounding the problem is a “counter-urbanization cascade” that, like the United States, has more people commuting greater distances,

by car rather than by public or non-motorized means. As is true in the Netherlands, however, an established system of legal, regulatory, and planning measures places the UK in a better position to solve these problems and continue leading by example.

Like the Netherlands, the United Kingdom has been a champion of the European Spatial Development Perspective, influences from which are increasingly apparent in government policies. The UK has also made sustainable development a high profile concern launching numerous initiatives in the past several years. The stated purpose of these efforts: “ensuring the quality of life of future generations.”⁵⁹

Unlike the Netherlands, however, the United Kingdom does not have a national spatial plan, nor does it possess the integrated policies and infrastructure considered fundamental to sustainable development. Though a unitary state with central law and policy set by Parliament, the UK encompasses four countries—England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland—requiring separate formulation of policies for each. This complex structure has produced a system of land use controls unique in the European Union and the world.

A Brief History

The origins of town and country planning can be traced back to the 19th century. At that time, health problems arising from population growth and overcrowding prompted aggressive intervention by government (worth noting given the health implications of sprawl in the United States). New programs improved sanitation, safety, and town design. They also helped create a general sense that

“many of the necessary elements for a healthy condition of life...” were being secured.⁶⁰

Enactment of the Housing, Town Planning Act in 1909 marked the start of a centralized and forward-looking approach to controlling the impacts of growth and development. Century-old arguments on the need for action resonate even today:

“If we go on in the next fifteen years abstracting another half million [acres] from the agricultural domain, and we go on rearing in green fields slums... posterity will blame us for not taking this matter in hand... .”⁶¹

Government efforts would continue in this spirit over ensuing decades, but the watershed event in British planning history was enactment of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. In one broad stroke, this measure took control of development throughout the United Kingdom. It effectively “nationalized development rights and their associated values,” required planning permission by local authorities for almost all development, and directed those authorities to produce development plans that specified where building would occur. The Act also gave rise to a coordinated system for handling the many related matters—of administration, landowner compensation, nature conservation, and economic development—deemed integral to success.

At its core, town and country planning sought to strike a balance between centralized authority and local discretion, a feature that remains largely unchanged to this day. While European and U.S. approaches generally “eschew flexibility,” discretion is embraced by the UK “because it enables the planning system to

meet diverse requirements and the constantly changing nature of the problems... .”⁶² This becomes increasingly important as more countries face the complex demands of a mobile society.

Discretion comes from the fact that the planning framework established by the Act is flexible. While national legislation requires formal development plans from local governments, these plans are not legally binding and allow for flexibility in addressing development issues on a case-by-case basis. Built into the system, however, are “procedural checks and balances which significantly restrict local authorities’ freedom of action.” These include close scrutiny of individual development plans and the ability of central government to object to any plan not complying with national and regional policy.⁶³

As an added means for ensuring compliance, the preparation of “structure plans” became a requirement in the late 1960s. Produced at the county level, these plans created a new tier between central and local authorities offering strategic direction on completing local development plans. Structure plans set out broad land use policies to be applied over a 15-year time horizon.⁶⁴

Recognizing the interdependent nature of the planning process, the town and country system requires consultation among all parties involved in local planning decisions. Included in this procedure are measures to help ensure fair treatment. If warranted, appeals to higher authorities can be made by any of the parties involved. Formal intervention by central government does not often occur, but, as discussed below, the number of objections to local plans has risen dramatically in recent years.

Green Belts

One of the best known innovations of the town and country system is the “Green Belt” policy established in 1955. Described as “the first article of the British planning creed,” green belts provided a straightforward strategy for containing urban expansion. The policy was first introduced in the form of a government circular to local authorities (a common device still used today) suggesting they designate green belts around their towns to check growth and preserve community character. The idea quickly caught on resulting in widespread creation of green belts from London to Aberdeen.⁶⁵

Studies show that green belts have been effective in curbing sprawl and preventing the physical merging of cities and towns. Yet research also indicates that the policy may be prompting patterns of commuting and development that straddle or “jump” green belts, leading to greater travel distances and car use.⁶⁶ Despite this concern green belts remain tremendously popular.

Guiding Implementation

Enhancing the ability to reach and engage all regions of the UK is the Planning Policy Guidance Note or PPG. Following the general scheme of central government overseeing local implementation, PPGs convey and refine national policy. Since first published by the UK’s Department of Environment in 1988, more than two dozen Notes have been issued on a wide range of pressing topics.⁶⁷ The PPGs are credited with improving the consistency of policy application throughout the United Kingdom. High rates of compliance are attributed to the desire of local authorities to avoid costly appeals by

developers who could otherwise cite inadequacies of local plans.

The PPGs function as frontline directives providing the means for rapid response to emerging priorities. For example, concern that green belts may be having a negative impact on commuting patterns and accompanying development was the subject of the second Note in the PPG series published in 1995. As specified in PPG2, green belts are intended “to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.” The next Note in the series, PPG3 (issued in 2000), provided detailed directions for accomplishing this objective.

Green Belts to Green Cities

Complementing green belt policy and closely tracking the rationale for the Dutch compact city, PPG3 stresses the need to maximize reuse of already urbanized lands. Not only is this viewed as a key tool for “saving the countryside” from mounting demand for new housing, it is regarded as a defining feature of sustainable development.⁶⁸

Driving efforts to recycle urban lands was a political pledge made by the newly elected Labor Government in 1997. Promised were sharp reductions in development pressure on rural areas by channeling 60 percent of new housing into already built-up urban areas. An Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Richard Rogers was established to work out the details, and to do so in the “broader context of promoting a renaissance of the cities.”⁶⁹ The task force released its seminal report, “Delivering an Urban Renaissance,” in 1999, recommendations from which provided the basis for PPG3.⁷⁰

Simply titled *Housing*, PPG3 specifies development options that must be exhausted before greenfields are targeted. These include:

- Using previously developed sites within urban areas;
- Exploiting fully the potential for the better use and conversion of existing dwellings and non-residential properties;
- Increasing densities of development in existing centers;
- Releasing land held for alternative uses, such as employment; and
- Identifying areas where, through land assembly, area-wide development can be promoted.

Concomitant to these provisions, local authorities are also asked to initiate “urban capacity” studies, replacing “housing land availability studies” as the primary tool for assessing development potential. In a related vein, all large-scale development proposals of five hectares or 150 dwellings now require consultation with central government before proceeding.⁷¹ Taken together, these actions underscore a commitment, on multiple levels, to confronting the challenge of new development, and to employing strategies that build upon the goals of town and country planning.

Expanding Expectations

More by necessity than by design, larger matters encompassing much more than land use are being worked into the current growth control system. According to researchers, “Criticisms of the weaknesses of environmental planning, the sustainable development agenda, and the need for more policy integration have led the government to promote a wider scope for development plans.”⁷² For example,

government guidance in PPG12 (2000) seeks to have local development plans function more as one-stop-shops for handling environmental, economic, and social considerations contributing to sustainability.⁷³ While there is a certain logic to “building out” the role of town and country planning doing so threatens to undermine its intended purpose.

Further complicating the planning environment in the UK is a continuing trend toward regionalization and devolution of authority that sees more powers being delegated to its four member countries.⁷⁴ Among other actions, this has produced a system of Regional Planning Guidance intended to help decentralize the process with “a broad development strategy for the region(s) over a fifteen to twenty year period.”

Regional Planning Guidance has also become a principal means for contributing to the broader objectives of the European Spatial Development Perspective. This stems from growing awareness that “a significant European dimension” is needed for the UK’s planning goals to be realized.⁷⁵ It is also a direct response to the ESDP itself, in which regional and local authorities are identified as “key players in European spatial development policy.”⁷⁶

Evaluation and Evolution

In the midst of such great change, evaluating the performance of town and country planning is a daunting task. Even without accounting for the transnational perspective, few studies have been conducted to assess overall performance of the system. Analysis of specific policies and policy instruments has been done, including the studies referred to above on

the impacts of green belts. Here, too, however, researchers acknowledge the difficulties in gaining an accurate assessment, especially in isolating cause and effect. In response to these problems, an indicators system is under development that will provide a more systematic approach for gauging policy performance and, in turn, improving the ability to fine-tune or, if necessary, overhaul policies.⁷⁷

Regarding the local development plans themselves—the foundation for the entire British system—serious concerns have been raised about the current condition of many plans and their ability to meet modern challenges:

“The plan-making process today is for most places much more complex and contentious... primarily because of the increasing participation of interests who recognize its potential significance for later development control decisions. Objections to plans are now typically counted in the thousands, while few plans would have been subjected to this level of objection twenty years ago.”⁷⁸

Increased stress on town and country planning is a direct consequence of intensifying development pressures and rising expectations from the system. The substantial investment of the last century must now be leveraged to ensure meaningful returns in the next for the UK to maintain its role as groundbreaking world leader.

Fostering a Renaissance of European Communities

Whether investigating the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, or the

European Union as a whole, efforts to revitalize existing communities are central to securing quality of life. Not only does revitalization of cities and towns go straight to the problems of sprawl, it tackles head-on the enormous complexities of sustainability. By providing a tangible focus for solving the social, economic, and environmental ills that destabilize and threaten society, the promise of a real urban renaissance would, indeed, seem to be at hand. Spatial planning provides a framework for acting on this opportunity.

Across Europe, cities of all sizes are taking aggressive steps to attract new development, but in the context of becoming more sustainable. As already discussed, this activity is supported by an increasingly sophisticated network of national and transnational initiatives intent on making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The central role required of urban areas is acknowledged in the European Spatial Development Perspective that calls on member states to “pursue the concept of the ‘compact city...’”

Largely because of established planning systems and long-term goals, there has also been broad embrace of Local Agenda 21 by European communities. This program reinforces the international importance of local action, given that “so many of the problems being addressed in Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities.”⁷⁹

Recent research shows that the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have been active in advancing Local Agenda 21 goals. Two other standouts include Denmark and Sweden, “the leading country in Europe concerning implementation of LA21.” Brief case descriptions of local actions being taken in

these two countries, and the systems of national planning that back them up, illustrate the vital links between local and national initiative, and their combined contribution to the global goals of sustainability.⁸⁰ In fact, both Denmark and Sweden have been working with neighboring Nordic countries on a special program that uses spatial planning practices to promote sustainable development.⁸¹ Given the prevailing importance of local level actions in the United States, the integrated role of cities and towns in Denmark and Sweden offer valuable examples deserving greater attention.

Denmark

Through Denmark’s Planning Act, central government employs an aggressive approach to spatial planning with a well-integrated system of national, regional, and local plans focused on containing the spread of development and ensuring that Danish society can become sustainable.⁸² Thus, its provisions are considered a “positive model...that establishes clear rules for the planning process.”⁸³

The Danish system divides the country into three zones—urban, recreational, and rural. Regulations flowing from the Planning Act dictate the degree of development in the first two zones. In the rural zone, which comprises roughly 90 percent of Denmark, development is heavily restricted to prevent uncontrolled growth. Unless it supports forestry and agriculture, rural zone development requires a permit and must adhere to tight guidelines that exclude sprawl. Urban areas represent about 5 percent of total land area, but accommodate some 85 percent of the people.⁸⁴

Danish planning is heavily decentralized, delegating much of the responsibility for

implementation to regional, “and especially local levels,” where legally binding plans play much the same role as local development plans in the United Kingdom. Like the UK, Danish central government issues periodic policy directives to lower level authorities that must be followed.⁸⁵

Denmark is also a strong supporter of the European Spatial Development Perspective and the need for strategic transnational cooperation. In addition to the ESDP, cross-border actions include participation in “VASAB 2010,” a joint initiative of eleven countries aimed at implementing sustainable spatial development of the Baltic Sea region.⁸⁶

Danish planning tradition is rooted in “understanding the necessity for functional cities and the regulation of land use.” Nowhere is pursuit of the functional city more in evidence than in Copenhagen. Its so-called “Finger Plan” for regional development gained international attention after being released in 1949. The plan directed growth outward in “five fingers” toward already established towns surrounding Copenhagen. Development was sited near commuter rail lines and highways to limit its spread and to foster efficient transport. Green wedges between the fingers were kept undeveloped for nature and recreation. Specific provisions have evolved over time, but the plan’s core mission of concentrating development in the Greater Copenhagen area remains intact.⁸⁷

Further contributing to this mission is a progressive national system of taxation and wealth re-distribution that has sought to balance differences in affluence among regions—across the country and within Copenhagen itself. According to investigators, this has had a pronounced

stabilizing effect on migration patterns and the ability to improve urban living conditions.⁸⁸

The fundamental role of Danish local governments coupled with a long history of consensus-seeking have created the right circumstances for successful implementation of Local Agenda 21. National government, primarily through the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (spatial planning department), has been a driving force and key collaborator. Beginning in the late 1990s an explicit intervention strategy of Denmark has been to integrate LA21 objectives directly into spatial planning documents.⁸⁹

The community of Albertslund within Greater Copenhagen offers perhaps the best example of LA21 implementation in Denmark. Here, as in a number of other Danish localities, LA21 activities are having a measurable improvement on environmental health and livability. Specific intermediate and long-term goals have been established (and are starting to be realized) that include substantial reductions of emissions, water consumption, waste, and energy use along with progress on other issues necessary for an enduring quality of life.⁹⁰

Sweden

Like Denmark, Sweden’s system of spatial planning has a high degree of local responsibility with national government providing an overarching framework and ongoing policy directives. Municipalities are required to produce “comprehensive plans” accounting for a range of spatial planning considerations. Detailed development plans form part of the process.

Operating from the premise that a “sustainable society is a responsibility

shared by all actors engaged in planning,” the Swedish system is classified as “neither hierarchical nor of the bottom-up type.” It is instead “characterized by close cooperation between governments at different levels and others with interests in the planning process,”⁹¹ a prerequisite for any society working toward a sustainable future. The need to achieve this kind of balance is especially acute in the United States where “despite recent smart growth innovations, most states delegate virtually all planning responsibilities to municipal governments... .”⁹²

Sweden is also an active participant in the VASAB 2010 initiative and, through its Sustainable Sweden program, is making important national strides on sustainable development.⁹³ The nation’s serious commitments have translated into strong support (financial and institutional) for Local Agenda 21, a major reason for Sweden’s foremost standing among fellow European countries. Extensive local integration of LA21 goals has been achieved in programs addressing environment and health, including: “renewable energy, refurbishing and environmental adaptation of deprived housing areas, recycling within new building construction, reducing traffic [creating cycle paths]” and more.⁹⁴

As a result of government funding in LA21 programs, it is estimated that “energy use will be reduced by 2.1 TWh annually...carbon dioxide emissions...by 1.57 million tons (equaling 2.8 percent of Sweden’s emissions) and landfill refuse...by 500,000 tons.” Employment resulting from these programs is estimated at 17,000 man-years.⁹⁵ Tangible environmental and economic gains such as these are accelerating Sweden’s transformation into a sustainable society.

The rough equivalent of Denmark’s functional city in Sweden is the “suitable city,” a planning objective that primarily targets medium-sized cities. As envisioned, a suitable city has the integrated dynamics of a compact city. It aims to fuse the cultural and economic benefits of a larger metropolitan area with small town amenities and extensive public access, by foot and by bike, to attract and retain residents.⁹⁶

In Europe today, more than 75 percent of the urban population lives in small to medium-sized cities. Many are self-contained within larger city-regions that, connected by convenient public transportation, afford the multiple benefits sought by planners. The modern-day challenge is to prevent these city-regions from becoming chaotic agglomerations that lose the very qualities making them suitable for living and working.⁹⁷

Greater Stockholm can be viewed as a city-region with a variety of smaller urban units existing within its boundaries. Stockholm is also dedicated to becoming a sustainable city. Its position in the information technology (IT) and bio-medical industries has triggered fast growth, but Stockholm is making a concerted effort to avoid sprawl by vigorously applying the principles of the compact city. Development demand is being accommodated by converting former industrial and harbor sites into mixed use areas that combine commercial and residential development. As designed, these new neighborhoods encircle the inner city and are well-connected to Stockholm’s tramway system. Incorporated are state-of-the-art technologies for energy, water use, waste disposal, and transportation.

Detailed mapping of ecological, cultural, and social factors in Stockholm has been done to optimize the living environment and determine the location of new parks and green spaces. Central to the effort is

a structured dialogue that engages Stockholm's diverse population, creating a shared sense of purpose essential for continued progress.⁹⁸

Lessons from Abroad

The experiences of Sweden, Denmark, and the other nations of Europe reveal patterns of action and interaction offering lessons axiomatic to effective spatial planning and smart growth. Having institutionalized commitments to quality of life and sustainable development, Europe is continuously refining and evolving its approach, never losing its grip on the challenges or its vision to the future. An almost intuitive understanding of the need for constant communication and cooperation is responsible for the interlocking and sometimes overlapping nature of these efforts.

In summary, from municipal to transnational, European spatial planning is:

- **Integrated:** The gravity of current spatial responsibilities requires extensive integration, vertically and horizontally, with all parties working from a common set of principles. Integration occurs in both space and time, with long range goals that are steadfastly pursued.
- **Cooperative:** For multiple and competing needs to be met, effective integration demands cooperation among levels of government and diverse constituencies.
- **Transparent:** An open planning environment is crucial to avoiding incomplete or duplicated effort. The more individual interests know about the issues and about each other's needs the better the solutions can be. Inherent in transparency is ongoing communication and a necessary degree of trust among the various players.
- **Comprehensive:** By definition, European spatial planning provides the all-encompassing structure necessary to take on complex issues that impact quality of life and the potential for sustainable development.
- **Innovative:** To successfully pursue sustainable development requires wholesale redefinition of the problems to be addressed, taking into account the environmental, economic, and social implications of growth. Responsive policy innovations embracing this broader perspective depend on a creative planning environment.⁹⁹
- **Grounded:** Meaningful results stem from deeply rooted societal goals. Because of the shifting nature of politics and economics, these goals must be systemically anchored—by statute, constitutional amendment, and other means necessary to ensure continuity of effort and purpose.
- **Systematic:** Ongoing analysis of spatial planning methods enables improved performance. High priority is placed on understanding conditions and policy influences along with the proper roles to be played by government and private sectors.
- **Financed:** Commitments to ambitious objectives can be measured by investments made (public and private) in institutions, incentive programs, research, and all aspects of the planning agenda. Quality costs, but the returns are intended to accrue for generations.
- **Restorative:** The call for an urban renaissance can be readily expanded to include communities big and small. Harmonizing the spatial relationship between living and working is achieved by creating quality communities. Bringing people together not only curbs sprawl, but restores a sense of belonging that contributes to personal health and well being.
- **Flexible:** Flexibility is of growing importance, especially in a network society where traditional spatial lines are blurred and the need for a more nimble policy response is paramount.
- **Visionary:** A compelling vision is crucial for engaging all interests as productive participants in a larger process that extends well into the future and offers the promise of a lasting legacy.

Opportunities for Funders

While the circumstances in Europe and North America are indeed distinct, the above attributes, and the lessons behind them, can be universally applied. As others have already proposed, “learning from European practice, perhaps the next generation of smart growth strategies could incorporate [spatial] planning elements.”¹⁰⁰ Toward this end, funders could focus on translating the value of European experience for domestic application. Actions are needed to bring together key players here and in Europe, virtually and face-to-face.

High-speed communications and network societies enable sophisticated transcontinental interchange and cooperation. Unprecedented opportunities for strategic alliances, international networking, and cross-border benchmarking now exist that can help all parties arrive at better solutions to common problems. Serious consideration should be given to initiating these and other actions under the auspices of a new transatlantic exchange program that leverages experience and expertise from both sides of the Atlantic.

Philanthropic funders, either individually or in partnership, could sponsor the kind of exchange envisioned. An appropriate first step would be to underwrite a feasibility/needs assessment that outlines the scope of the project, surveys interest and perceived value from European and North American actors, and specifies anticipated outcomes. This paper—*Learning from Abroad*—helps to establish the rationale for proceeding and can be a resource in developing the details of how an exchange could be instituted.

Examples of international cooperation on planning do exist and include the Glynwood Center’s Countryside Exchange program. The Exchange recruits teams of planning professionals, often international in make-up, to facilitate and design prescriptive plans aimed at “helping communities achieve economic well-being while retaining a vibrant culture, community and environment.”¹⁰¹ Their localized, custom-tailored approach has served more than 80 communities in North America and Europe, providing a valuable model that deserves continued support.

Sweden’s “city-to-city” initiative offers another example of long-distance cooperation. Experts from Swedish municipalities collaborate with their counterparts in selected locations across Europe and in developing countries to focus on mutually important issues including comprehensive planning, environmental impact assessments, and Agenda 21.¹⁰² The magnitude of the planning challenge, especially in the context of sustainable development, underscores the importance of such programs and the need to augment these efforts with a dedicated exchange program intended to reach and influence a much larger audience.

One recent, but small-scale, example of a transatlantic forum for learning and dialogue was “Smart Growth: the Dutch Way,” an event hosted by the Netherlands Ambassador in Washington, DC in April 2003. All in attendance—academics, government officials, and advocates—enthusiastically endorsed the interchange. The purpose of this gathering was to share information and express good will. The opportunity now exists to harness

these same interests in a concerted effort to achieve lasting results.

An important prospect for bridging smart growth in the United States with spatial planning in Europe is the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States. A widely respected presence since the end of World War II, GMF has devoted itself to “strengthening transatlantic cooperation.” With a broad mission, the Fund “actively seeks innovative solutions and partners with whom [it] can work to develop a sustainable, effective transatlantic community.”¹⁰³ A partnership of the German Marshall Fund and funders could provide a solid platform for advancing these ideals. As a first step, a symposium could be held to introduce opportunities and lay the groundwork for transatlantic collaboration. Funders interested in this area are encouraged to explore the potential to partner with GMF.

Central to the task of an exchange would be stimulating progress on the ground. This could be done through regional partnerships with targeted interests across North America functioning as working hubs for active interchange. These regional initiatives could “become laboratories for innovation,”¹⁰⁴ providing model strategies for adaptation in other areas. Moreover, a regional approach could serve as a geographically representative basis for mobilizing support of policy actions at the federal level. Such actions could include creation of a “U.S. Spatial Development Perspective” that begins to address the need for national coherence and integration. Identification and funding of regional leaders for this purpose (civic-led planning groups, “Friends” organizations, and other smart growth advocates) could also be initiated without establishing a formal transatlantic exchange. These

groups could then become primary points of contact for European involvement as appropriate.

Drawing from, and in allegiance with, the urban renaissance strategy underway in Europe, funders have the opportunity to work with advocates to consider a campaign calling for a “Renaissance of the American Community.” Its focus would be on promoting the qualities that make strong communities—the backbone of a healthy society. Many of the qualities featured would coincide with those now driving European progress, a tangible means for reinforcing the message. The approach would also provide a timely context for contrasting actions that either build or diminish community strength. Funders could support campaign development and implementation.

The Active Living by Design program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provides an innovative example of how European experience could be effectively utilized. This program is helping communities around the United States to improve their structure and function in ways that encourage better personal health and healthier neighborhoods.¹⁰⁵ A similar approach could engage European representatives who are already achieving desired results, fortifying program goals and contributing to its success. This could either be accomplished as an adjunct to the existing program or as a separate project that uses the program as a springboard to reach a broader audience.

A less ambitious alternative to the transatlantic exchange that combines elements of the Countryside Exchange with Sweden’s city-to-city initiative would be to establish a program of “sister communities” designed to unite public and private leaders from selected towns in Europe and North America. The

objective would be for these communities to learn from each other and work together to improve their livability while also collaborating on the global goals of sustainability. Particularly useful would be to match standout communities on LA21 in Europe with similarly constituted communities in North America that together could provide working models of cooperation and progress. The Countryside Exchange could be a valuable resource in developing such a program and would be a logical choice for pilot testing the idea.

Finally, funders should be aware of the uniformly high level of interest that has been expressed in the course of researching and writing this report—from European embassies, government officials, policy consultants, and academics. Prompt, and often detailed, responses were always made to the many queries that went into its preparation. A consistently high level of interest bodes well for further collaboration. Needed now are the specific means of engagement.

Conclusion

Land as the physical manifestation of liberty is a founding principle of the United States, deeply ingrained in the American psyche and provided for in the Bill of Rights. In an era of runaway sprawl, how this principle is defended will prove decisive to the future character of the country. Europe provides roots to America's past as well as a glimpse of the future, when cheap, easy to develop land no longer exists. Through extraordinary commitment, innovation, and cooperation Europe endeavors to uphold the liberty that comes from living in whole communities where cars are optional, not compulsory.

With foresight, ingenuity, and cooperation of its own, America could have both, fully functioning communities and abundant land to own and enjoy. Doing so will require a new mindset that embraces the value and the necessity of limits. Sprawl illustrates the consequences of exceeding those limits. Its impacts—on community, environmental, economic, and personal health—coupled with Europe's vast experience countering these problems, should now be powerful motivators for “shaping the future to our will” and aggressively pursuing a sustainable quality of life.

References/Endnotes/Internet Links

- ¹ Eric J. Siy (ericsey@earthlink.net) is founder of the Global Innovations Group, an international consultancy, and former vice president of Resource Renewal Institute, a nonprofit group working to identify and promote effective strategies for sustainable development (www.rri.org).
- ² The author thanks numerous individuals for their expert advice and input including Andreas Faludi, Patsy Healy, Holger Platz, Cecilia Wong, David Shaw, Helle Fischer, Bob Yaro, John Pucher, Henning Arp, Vincent Goodstadt, Vincent Nadin, Jan Suurland (the Dutch Embassy), Elizabeth Humphrey (Growth Management Leadership Alliance), and Cheeying Ho (Smart Growth BC). Special thanks goes to Olivier Sykes of the University of Liverpool for his outstanding guidance on overall content and to Arjen van der Burg, Senior Expert for the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment for input and editing of the Netherlands section. Thanks also to Gordon Noble of the Bethlehem Public Library for tracking down several obscure, but crucial, references. Finally, many thanks to Ben Starrett and Hooper Brooks of the Funders' Network whose visionary support made this study possible (for more information about the Network, visit www.fundersnetwork.org).
- ³ From a speech by Richard Reiten, chairman of the board of Northwest Natural Gas in Portland, Oregon.
- ⁴ For additional investigation of European activities go to ESPRID (European Spatial Planning Resource and Information Database) – www.esprid.org. For New Zealand visit Local Government New Zealand – www.lgnz.co.nz/about/staff/John.html. In Canada, contact Smart Growth BC – www.smartgrowth.bc.ca.
- ⁵ Reiten, Richard, see item 3.
- ⁶ Associated Press. 2003. "Suburban Sprawl Adds Health Concerns, Studies Say," *The New York Times*. August 31.
- ⁷ Pucher, John, and Lewis Dijkstra. September 2003. "Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health: Lessons from The Netherlands and Germany." *American Journal of Public Health*. 93, No. 9: 1509-1516. Also, pucher@rci.rutgers.edu.
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- ⁹ Habitat Agenda Working Group. 2001. *Implementing the Habitat Agenda: The European Experience*. Stockholm: Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
- ¹⁰ Loewenberg, Samuel. 2003. "Europe Gets Tougher on U.S. Companies." *The New York Times*. April 20.
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- ¹² European Commission. 1999. *European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards a Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- ¹³ Ewing, Reid, et al. 2002. *Measuring Sprawl and Its Impacts: The Character and Consequences of Metropolitan Expansion*. Washington, DC: Smart Growth America. www.smartgrowthamerica.com/sprawindex/sprawindex.html.
- ¹⁴ For the latest, go to www.smartgrowthamerica.com/.
- ¹⁵ See item 12 under "Policy Aims and Options for the Territory of the EU." page 22.
- ¹⁶ Yaro, Robert D., in Faludi, Andreas (editor). 2002. *European Spatial Planning*. Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- ¹⁷ Prior to enlargement from 15 to 25 states in May 2004, the EU was home to about 50 percent more people than the U.S. living on a third of the land area. Cullingworth, Barry and Nadin, Vincent. 2002. *Town and Country Planning in the UK* (13th Edition). London: Routledge.
- ¹⁸ European Commission. 1991. *Europe 2000: Outlook for the Development of the Community's Territory*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Community.
- ¹⁹ Tewdwr-Jones, Mark in Albrechts, Louis et al. (editors). 2001. *The Changing Institutional Landscape of Planning*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- ²⁰ This issue is a primary consideration of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* and is discussed in detail in *European Spatial Planning*. See item 16.
- ²¹ A gateway to the European Union and its institutions, including the European Commission, is www.europa.int/index-en.htm.
- ²² Yaro, Robert D. in Faludi, Andreas. See item 16.

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- ²³ CEC, The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies, p.24. In *The Wales Spatial Plan: People Places, Futures* (2003), www.wales.gov.uk/index_e.html, spatial planning is defined as “the consideration of what should happen where. It investigates the interaction of different policies in particular places as well as the role of places in a wider context. It goes beyond traditional land-use planning and sets out a strategic framework to guide future development and policy interventions, whether or not subject to land use planning control.”
- ²⁴ Smart Growth Network/International City/County Management Association, 2003. *Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation*. (www.icma.org)
- ²⁵ Useful details comparing EU and U.S. approaches and describing applications of spatial planning can be found in *European Spatial Planning*. See item 16.
- ²⁶ The concerns raised here by Bob Yaro come from years of experience with smart growth initiatives in the United States coupled with a strong working knowledge of EU approaches. Strategic implications of European planning are discussed at length in his Epilogue to *European Spatial Planning*.
- ²⁷ As described by the Habitat Working Group, the principle of subsidiarity, included in the European Treaty, “provides for decision-making at the lowest appropriate level... Within the 15 member countries of the EU more emphasis is being given to the role of the local level in ensuring that urban development is sustainable.”
- ²⁸ One of the premier researchers on the ESDP is Andreas Faludi, at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands (a.faludi@hccnet.nl). He has written extensively on the topic (visit <http://hccnet.nl/a.faludi/> for current index of articles) and represents a valuable resource for understanding the intricacies of EU actions.
- ²⁹ In *The Changing Institutional Landscape of Planning* (item 19), Mark Tewdwr-Jones examines, in general terms, the factors contributing to successful vertical and horizontal cooperation in “the broader political and institutional governmental context.”
- ³⁰ For more on CEMAT’s activities go to the Council of Europe’s website at www.coe.int.
- ³¹ Established in 1949 to foster unity and cooperation, the intergovernmental Council of Europe is much less powerful than the EU, but includes 41 member countries, including 16 that were formerly under communist rule.
- ³² Faludi, Andreas in *The Changing Institutional Landscape of Planning*. See item 19.
- ³³ Tewdwr-Jones, Mark in *The Changing Institutional Landscape of Planning*. See item 19.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Endorsement of the *European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development* took place in 2001 from which numerous initiatives have been launched including the formal call for international action in *Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development* (2002). These and related documents can be reviewed at: www.europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/pages/document_en.htm.
- ³⁶ European Commission. 1997. *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. (Not available on the web.)
- ³⁷ A thorough accounting of the frameworks that connect national to urban policies in each of the member states is found in *National Urban Policies in the European Union*. 1998. Berg, Leo van den, et al. (Editors) Aldershot: Ashgate. Also, Atkinson, Rob. 2001. “The Emerging ‘Urban Agenda’ and the European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards an EU Urban Policy?” *European Planning Studies*. 9, No. 3: 385-406.
- ³⁸ As an example, see *Spatial Perspectives in Europe*. 2000. The Hague: Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment – www.vrom.nl.
- ³⁹ Alterman, Rachele (editor). 2001. *National-Level Planning in Democratic Countries: A Comparative Perspective*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- ⁴⁰ Complementing spatial planning policies is the National Environmental Policy Plan (now in its 4th iteration) aimed at transitioning the Netherlands to sustainability. Available at www.vrom.nl.
- ⁴¹ Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment. 2003. *Smart Growth: The Dutch Way, Proceedings of the Symposium at the Royal Netherlands Embassy*. Washington, DC. April 30.
- ⁴² In the latest National Environmental Policy Plan “*Damage to the quality living environment*” is one of seven key problems demanding an integrated solution.
- ⁴³ European Commission. 1999. *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* (Volume 28K). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- ⁴⁴ Mastop, Hans, J.M., in Alterman, Rachele (Editor). 2001. *National-Level Planning in Democratic Countries: An International Comparison of City and Regional Policy-Making*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- ⁴⁵ *Smart Growth: The Dutch Way*. 2003. See item 41.

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- ⁴⁶ National Spatial Planning Commission. 2001. *Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning*. The Hague: Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment. For actual text go to www.vrom.nl.
- ⁴⁷ Articles on confronting the planning challenge of a network society include Hajer, Maarten and Zonneveld, Wil. 2000. "Spatial Planning in the Network Society — Rethinking the Principles of Planning in the Netherlands." *European Planning Studies*. 8, No. 3: 337-355.
- ⁴⁸ An explicit objective of the Fifth NPD.
- ⁴⁹ Personal communication with Arjen van der Burg, Senior Expert, Directorate General for Spatial Policy in the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment. For more on the Fifth NPD and latest spatial planning developments go to www.vrom.nl or contact Mr. van der Burg directly at Arjen.vanderburg@minvrom.nl.
- ⁵⁰ This is a composite list of criteria that combines items from the *EU Compendium* (Volume 28) and *Smart Growth: The Dutch Way*. See item 41.
- ⁵¹ From *Implementing the Habitat Agenda*. See item 9. Member states of the EU favor mixed use urban development as a key strategy for creating sustainable communities.
- ⁵² Ewing, Reid, et al. 2003. "Relationship Between Urban Sprawl and Physical Activity, Obesity, and Morbidity." *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 18, No. 1: 47-57.
- ⁵³ From *Smart Growth: the Dutch Way*. See item 41. Covenants (or long-term agreements) have also been a cornerstone strategy for achieving environmental objectives including improved energy efficiency. For more examples of Dutch covenants go to www.lta.novem.org and www.vno-ncw.nl.
- ⁵⁴ Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment. 2003. *Livable cities*. The Hague: VROM. Further details on the City and Environment Program, including specific results, can be found at www.vrom.nl/international (click "domestic," then "Environment," and then "City and Environment.")
- ⁵⁵ As described by Lafferty in *Sustainable Communities in Europe*. "Local Agenda 21 (LA21) refers to the general goal set for local communities in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, 'the action plan for sustainable development' adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [Earth Summit] in Rio in 1992." The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, launched in 1994, has been the main vehicle for promoting LA21's objectives. As of 2001, 1200 local authorities in 36 European countries were participating in the Campaign, making it the single largest effort in Europe for local sustainable development. The Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Denmark are active players in this initiative. For more details go to: www.iclei.org/ICLEI/la21.htm or www.sustainable-cities.org/sub10.html.
- ⁵⁶ Hidding, Marjan C., and Teunissen, Andre T.J. 2002. "Beyond fragmentation: new concepts for urban-rural development." *Landscape and Urban Planning*. 58: 297-308. Also in Hajer and Zonneveld (item 47 above).
- ⁵⁷ European Commission. 2000. *EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policy* (Volume 28P). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- ⁵⁸ Grant, Malcolm in *National-Level Planning in Democratic Countries*. See item 39.
- ⁵⁹ The UK's increasing focus on sustainability is outlined in *A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development in the UK* – www.sustainable-development.gov.uk – and is specifically intended to complement the EU's overall strategy.
- ⁶⁰ Cullingworth and Nadin. *Town and Country Planning in the UK*. (see item 17) Commonly called the "bible of planning," far and away the single-best source for understanding the UK approach in all its dimensions.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² While the U.S. Bill of Rights provides certain protections (of due process, private property, etc.) that can be used to challenge regulations, the UK is not bound by "a codified constitution" thus granting immense power and wide discretion to its central government.
- ⁶³ Also decidedly different than the United States – and stemming from a lack of constitutional constraints – is the limited role of the courts (used mainly to interpret the law where its meaning is disputed). There are rights to appeal to central government when development permission is denied, but final decisions cannot be challenged.
- ⁶⁴ Structure plans also include "Key Diagrams" outlining "strategic locations" for particular uses without singling out specific properties. Additionally, they establish tailored policies for traffic management.
- ⁶⁵ Green belts account for about 12 percent of England and the policy is more vigorously supported today than in its early years.
- ⁶⁶ Cullingworth and Nadin. See item 17.

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- ⁶⁷ Among the PPG topics covered are out-of-town shopping centers (PPG6), renewable energy (PPG22), planning and pollution control (PPG23), and enforcement (PPG 18). Actual provisions of all PPGs can be reviewed at www.odpm.gov.uk.
- ⁶⁸ For the text of PPG3 go to www.odpm.gov.uk.
- ⁶⁹ Department of Environment, Transport, and the Regions. 1999. *Towards an Urban Renaissance: Final Report of the Urban Task Force*. London: The Stationery Office.
- ⁷⁰ The 105 recommendations of the Urban Task Force includes many proposals on traffic, transport, adaptive use, urban design principles, and much more that could be applied to U.S. cities and towns. For details go to www.odpm.gov.uk.
- ⁷¹ Cullingworth and Nadin. See item 17.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ The wide range of topics that local authorities are asked to address in PPG12 reflects well on the needs of sustainability and its interdependent relationship with spatial planning.
- ⁷⁴ Lloyd, M.G. and McCarthy, J. in Rydin, Yvonne and Thornley, Andy (Editors). 2002. *Planning in the UK*. Aldershot. Ashgate.
- ⁷⁵ Department of Environment, Transport, and the Regions. 1998. *Modernizing Planning* (A ministerial statement). DETR.
- ⁷⁶ ESDP adoption prompted Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland to develop their own national spatial planning strategies. It has also provided the impetus for serious consideration of establishing a “UK-wide integrated spatial planning framework.” See Wong, Cecilia. 2002. “Is There a Need for a Fully Integrated Spatial Planning Framework?” *Planning Theory & Practice*. 3, No.3: 278-300.
- ⁷⁷ A useful overview of the approach being developed can be found in *Planning in the UK* (see item 74), where research initially commissioned by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions has provided the basis for a working methodology.
- ⁷⁸ Cullingworth and Nadin. See item 17.
- ⁷⁹ See Local Agenda 21 for more, www.iclei.org/ICLEI/la21.htm.
- ⁸⁰ Holm, Jesper and Kamara, Mercy W. in Lafferty, William M. (Editor). 2001. *Sustainable Communities in Europe*. London: Earthscan. Provides a comprehensive overview of LA21 progress across Europe.
- ⁸¹ Danish Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning Department. November 2001. *Spatial planning as an instrument for promoting sustainable development in Nordic countries*. Copenhagen. An excellent guide with numerous case examples in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland. Available at www.spatialplanningdepartment.dk.
- ⁸² The text of Denmark’s Planning Act is available at www.spatialplanningdeparment.dk.
- ⁸³ Danish Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning Department. October 2002. *Spatial Planning in Denmark*. Copenhagen. This 28-page booklet offers a detailed overview and is available online at www.spatialplanningdepartment.dk.
- ⁸⁴ European Commission. EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Practices (Volume 28C). 1999. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- ⁸⁵ Matthiessen, Christian W. in van den Berg, Leo, Braun, Erik, and van der Meer, Jan (Editors). 1998. *National Urban Policies in the European Union*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- ⁸⁶ For a full account of *Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic 2010* go to www.vasab.org.pl/.
- ⁸⁷ See item 85 for more details.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid. Also see *Spatial Planning in Denmark* (item 83) for a useful summary.
- ⁹⁰ Holm, Jesper and Kamara, Mercy W. in Lafferty, William M. (Editor). *Sustainable Communities in Europe*.
- ⁹¹ Alterman, Rachele. See item 39.
- ⁹² Yaro, Robert D. in Faludi. See item 16.
- ⁹³ Go to the Environment Ministry’s website for more on Sweden’s sustainability efforts — www.miljo.regeringen.se.
- ⁹⁴ Eckerberg, Katarina in Lafferty, William M. (Editor). 2001. *Sustainable Communities in Europe*.
- ⁹⁵ Swedish Ministry of the Environment. 2001. *Swedish National Report to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Review and Appraisal of the Habitat Agenda*. Stockholm. A thorough review of national, regional, and municipal activities available online at www.agenda21forum.org.
- ⁹⁶ Nilsson, Jan-Evert in van den Berg, Leo et al. (Editors). 1998. *National Urban Policies in the European Union*.

⁹⁷ Danish Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning Department. 2002. *European Cities in a Global Era – Urban Identities and Regional Development*. Copenhagen. The proceedings of a conference focusing on how to meet the challenges of future urban and regional development. Available at www.spatialplanningdepartment.dk.

⁹⁸ See item 9.

⁹⁹ An excellent summary of creative planning elements is found in item 97 beginning on page 52.

¹⁰⁰ Yaro, Robert D. in Faludi. See item 16.

¹⁰¹ Description of the Countryside Exchange program and actual community projects is presented on the Glynwood Center's website: www.glynwoodcenter.org.

¹⁰² See item 95 for more details.

¹⁰³ More on the German Marshall Fund can be found at www.gmfus.org.

¹⁰⁴ Yaro, Robert D. in Faludi. See item 16.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation *Active Living Resource Center*.
www.rwjf.org/programs/physicalActivity.jsp.