

# MULTI-LEVEL POLYCENTRIC SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT (Spain): the Asturias Central Area

87

Prepared by Manuel Carrero de Roa, Head of Spatial and Urban Planning,  
Government of the Principality of Asturias

## 1. Description of the theme

### 1.1 Territorial framework

The Principality of Asturias is a mountainous region, located at the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, on the northern slope of the Cantabric Mountain Range. The region extends over a narrow corridor 50 km average wide, 200 km long, covering a surface of 10.565 sqKm. Three well-defined areas, all of high environmental value, can be distinguished: the mountain ranges, the valleys and the coast.

The population reaches 1.000.000, and has become constant after a tender decline. 80% of the popula-

tion lives in a central metropolitan area, which occupies only 20% of the whole territory. It is an ageing population: 22% are older than 65 and fertility rate is one of the lowest in the world.

Asturias is changing from a heavy industry (mining and steel) to a services-based economy. After twenty-five years of crisis, signs of revitalisation are visible, but unemployment rate is still high (8,12%). As for the Cohesion Policy Programme 2007-2013, Asturias is considered to be **phasing-out** region. Away from the most dynamic and vibrant regions in the core of Europe, Asturias aims at joining the European polycentric urban network by cooperating with other partner regions in the Atlantic Area.

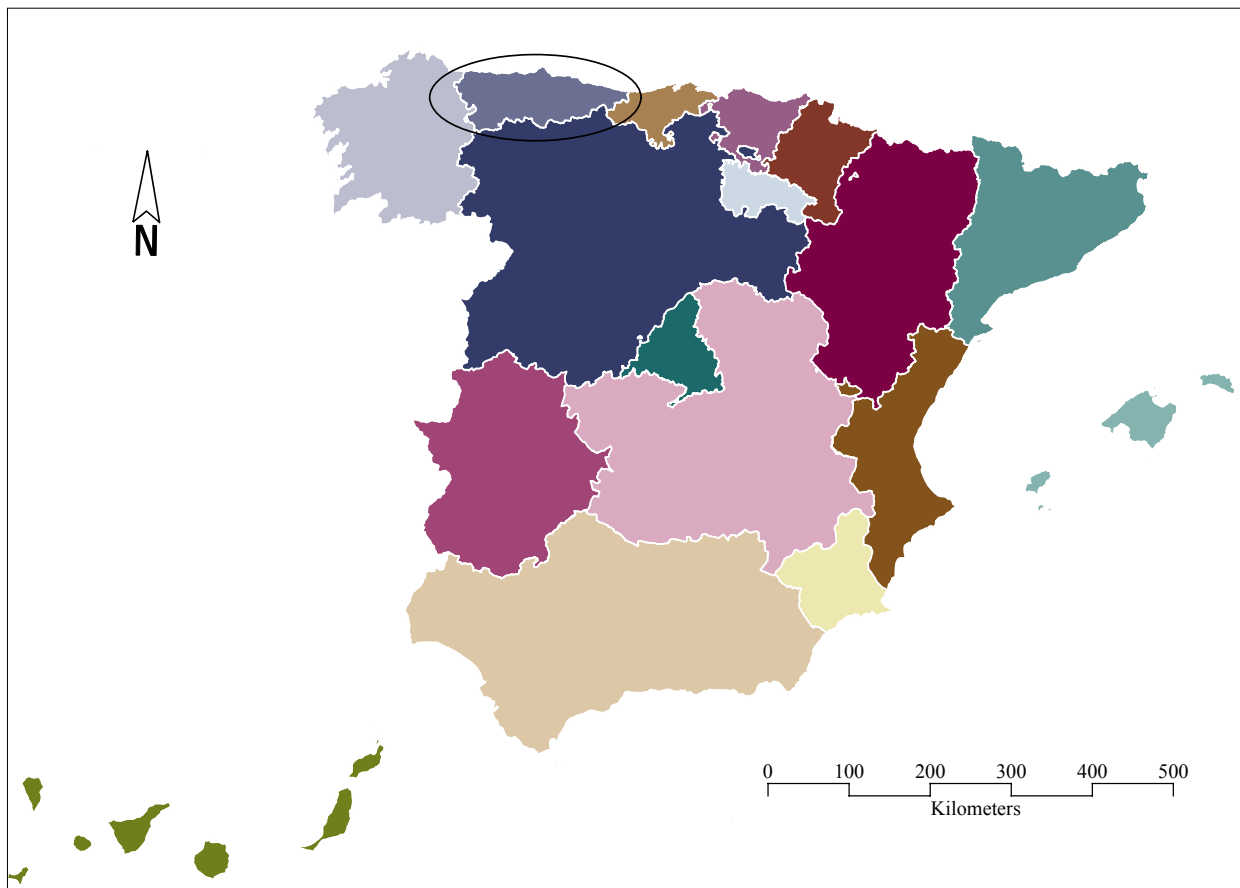


Fig. 1: Asturias and the Autonomous Communities in Spain



Fig. 2: Asturian essential landscapes: mountain, coast, rural and urban.

The Asturias Central Area (ACA) constitutes the heart for a territory which progressively acquires the typical features of a City-Region. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, contrary to the usual urban agglomerations, no single core acts as metropolitan centre, but a number of medium-sized cities build an urban network which can be inscribed in a 30 Km-radius circle and houses 850.000 inhabitants.

### 1.2 Theme of the case study

This case study aims at discussing the role of territorial and urban planning in reinforcing polycentrism at regional level as a way to promote polycentric and balanced spatial development in Europe. Polycentrism is, therefore, considered in this paper from a double perspective: first, as a valuable concept for understanding and planning emerging functional urban areas with multiple urban poles; and second, as a tool for connecting these new nodes into the European urban network.

Urban agglomerations lacking in a prevailing urban core face, in addition to the common sustainable urban development challenges (economic inefficacy, environmental inefficiency and social inability), those derived from the dysfunctions produced by local urban planning developed regardless a territorial scope. However, polycentrism at regional level should not be seen

only as a source of problems, but as an opportunity to take advantage of existing regional urban networks and optimize their performance, by fostering cooperation between local authorities, maximizing synergies and adopting territorial, holistic approaches. Besides, polycentric urban patterns are more suitable to tackle specific metropolitan problems like traffic congestion, facilities and open space provision or urban **macrocephalia** than single-central-city schemes.

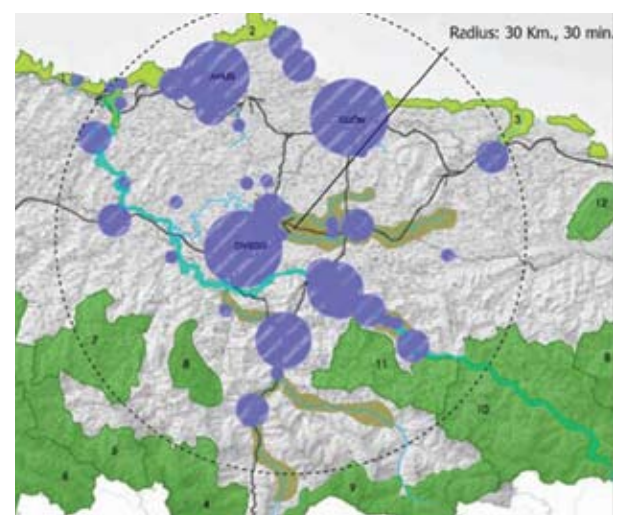


Fig. 3: Polycentrism at the Asturias Central Area. Source: Urban Planning Institute, Valladolid University (2006)

For peripheral regions like Asturias, located close to one of Europe's **finisterrae**, and in the context of a progressively global economy, polycentrism is a strategic option. Development perspectives for the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula are not optimistic, even in a cohesion-oriented scenario for Europe in the coming decades, taking into account the gradual displacement of the European gravity centre eastwards. In terms of competitiveness, the status of Asturias as a region would be considerably improved in the European context if the urban agglomeration performs as an integrated polycentric metropolitan area offering 300.000 jobs and not as a melt of cities ranging from 50.000 to 250.000 inhabitants. At times, also in terms of territorial development, "two plus two equals more than four".

Visibility and city-marketing are crucial for peripheral regions. For example, according to the ESPON report "Potentials for polycentric development in Europe"<sup>1</sup>, two regional (Gijón y Avilés) and one national (Oviedo) functional urban areas (FUAs) can be described in Asturias; but if these three cities would have been considered nodes in a polycentric urban system (as they actually are), the ACA would rank between the Metropolitan European Growth Areas (MEGAs) Fortunately, a later report by ESPON, "Study on Urban Functions"<sup>2</sup> does take into account the polycentric pattern of the Asturian FUA around Oviedo, and points out that "Oviedo, Gijón and Avilés form

a common polycentric FUA and strongly cooperate". Hence, in this report the ACA is classified as a Morphological Urban Area (MUA)

Among the multiple policies and actions aimed at reinforcing territorial cohesion in polycentric urban areas, this paper is targeted at those specifically related to spatial and urban planning: instruments, tools, procedures and governance aspects. Its purpose is not only to show the findings and achievements, but also the deficits and inadequacies and finally, to illustrate and support the need of a territorial approach as a basis for sustainable development policies in Europe.

### 1.3 Territorial priorities of the Territorial Agenda addressed

This case study relates directly to the first priority or the TA, "to Strengthen Polycentric Development and Innovation through Networking of City Regions and Cities". As mentioned above, Asturias is an emerging City Region and its potential to join the European Network of Cities depends to a great extent upon its ability to arise as an integrated polycentric metropolitan area. The consolidation of the ACA will contribute to reinforce polycentrism in the Iberian Northwest, by filling the territorial gap between Euskal Hiria (the Basque City Region) and the Porto-Galicia Euroregion, and hence by developing a network to balance the present European urban system.

The second priority, "New Forms of Partnership and Territorial Governance between Rural and Urban Ar-



Fig. 4: The large cities and the metropolises in Europe. Source: ESPON, Study on Urban Functions, 2007



Fig. 5: Demographic trends and exchange dynamics at the Atlantic Area. Source: Atlantic Arc Development Perspective, CRPM (2006)

1 European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON): Potentials for polycentric development in Europe. Project Report. Luxembourg, 2005.  
2 European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON): Study on Urban Functions. Project Report. Luxembourg, 2007.



“eas” is addressed in this case study as well. As most of the European regions, Asturias is undergoing an increasing urbanization process: 90% of the population live in urban areas, and development pressure is focused especially in the coastal fringe. But the specific features of the settlement patterns, based on an urban network of small and medium-sized cities, enables for a close relationship between urban and rural areas. Market towns spread all over the region perform as centres to provide services and facilities for people living in small hamlets scattered in the countryside, where the prints of centuries of wise management and protection by rural communities are still visible on the landscape. Polycentrism allows as well open rural spaces and green belts between cities in the ACA, thus increasing attractiveness and quality of life.

“To Promote Regional Clusters of Competition and Innovation in Europe”, the third priority in the Agenda, can be tackled by spatial and urban planning, not only providing space suitable for technological parks, but also encouraging compact and diverse urban patterns where information and knowledge flows benefit from vicinity and proximity. Living, diverse and vibrant cities are breeding grounds for innovation; urban quality of life is a key factor for investment location. Mono-nuclear metropolitan areas seek desperately to unload their centres and create “new centralities”; in polinuclear urban areas this job is already done.

Accessibility has improved greatly in the last years –especially regarding road transport– and our region is progressively breaching the natural barriers that historically kept Asturias isolated from Europe. High speed railway to Madrid is now in progress, as well as the motorway along the Cantabric Corridor, and the Ports of Avilés and Gijón, the ACA’s maritime gateways, are expected to play an important role in the Network of European Sea Highways. Infrastructure development and networking is key to territorial cohesion in Asturias; and the more dynamic, competitive and integrated becomes the ACA, the more necessary will be to strengthen its links with other nodes in the urban network. “Supporting the Strengthening and Extension of Trans-European Networks”, as described in the fourth priority of the TA, and polycentrism at regional level in our region are closely-related concepts that mutually feedback each other.

Wise management of natural and cultural resources, proposed as the last priority in the TA and addressed by the ESDP as well, is a key issue for territorial policies in Asturias. The Natural Protected Areas Network covers almost the 30% of the regional territory; Natural and Cultural Heritage have become pillars for regional economic development, especially in rural areas, under the motto “Asturias, Natural Paradise”. Since the early 90’s, the coastal fringe is protected from urban development, and a number of programs in order to make conservation and enjoyment of the coastal natural and cultural heritage compatible are

in progress under the Asturias Coastal Zone Protection Plan. At the metropolitan level, a network of open spaces, greenbelts and natural corridors is being designated, in the belief that a friendly environment fosters not only ecological performance, but also investment attraction and citizen’s quality of life.

#### 1.4 “Strategies for action” of the Leipzig Charter addressed

Integrated urban development policy approaches, as described at the Leipzig Charter, is still a resit subject for the Asturias Planning System. Land use acts, both at national and regional levels, have always been almost exclusively focused on zoning and lacked an integrated urban approach. Nevertheless, consistency between urban and territorial plans in Asturias is secured on the basis of a plan-led conception and a bottom-up methodology: every Plan, at any scale, should be consistent with the policies and guidance adopted at the larger scale.

The Leipzig Charter encourages modernizing infrastructure networks and improving energy efficiency. These issues are tackled in the ACA by cooperation between local and regional authorities. The main public services are supplied by metropolitan companies and consortia of local authorities: CADASA (water supply and sewerage, established 1967) COGERSA (waste management, 1982), and CTA (Metropolitan Transport Consortium, 2004) Spatial and urban planning tools are targeted at promoting compact and diverse cities and prevent urban sprawl, but recent improvements in the means of transport –mainly private– and transport infrastructure, as well as changes in residential patterns –people leaving towns for a better quality of life in peripheral areas– are forces hard to hold back.



Fig. 6: Urban-rural landscape in the peripheral area of Oviedo.

### 1.5 Relevance of the case study in terms of territorial-urban coordination

Planning for polycentric urban areas cannot be the result of the addition of a number of local development plans, but requires a double-scope approach. On the one hand, the urban scale, which is meant to be applied at local land use planning and design, and on the other hand, the metropolitan scale, where territorial issues should be taken into account. In a multi-polar metropolitan area, people commute not only from suburbs to cities, but between cities as well; complementary functions are performed by different nodes in the network; residential and employment areas extend beyond municipal boundaries, and certain metropolitan facilities are located to serve multiple users. If private investors and developers consider polycentric metropolitan areas as single commuter catchment areas and, on that basis, make investment location decisions, why should public boards and spatial planners not adopt the same approach?

Under this hypothesis, territorial-urban coordination arises as prerequisite for polinuclear areas planning, and the only effective way to consider both the local and metropolitan scales. Territorial plans should provide for the metropolitan structure and local plans should be consistent with them. If one of the two spatial levels is lacking, or both are disconnected, it becomes impossible to tackle cross-boundary problems, since the effects of a specific municipal dysfunction can be transfer even to another non-adjacent municipality, or even worse: the synergies obtained from close territorial cooperation would be wasted.

## 2. Assessing the case study from the point of view of planning process




### 2.1 Type of planning process

Territorial and urban issues in the Asturias Central Area are tackled on the basis of a plan-led approach and a hierarchy principle: a wide range of plans, from the large to the small scale, and all of them are intended coherent and consistent with the larger scale. Asturias has pioneered this approach in the context of the Spanish autonomous communities, with the adoption in March 1987 of the Spatial Planning Act, thus showing the Principality's commitment on territorial issues. In those years it was commonly accepted that a wise management of the natural and cultural heritage could be a great help to overcome the industrial crisis. This Act sets the basic principles and instruments in order to

- promote a rational distribution of the activities across the territory,
- protect the environment,
- ensure a better quality of life, and
- encourage the territorial balance.

A wide range of tools was designed to achieve these goals, from the regional to the local level:

According to the scheme designed at the Spatial Planning Act, in January 1991 the Government adopted the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), a statutory framework for all the policies with territorial significance developed by the Regional Administration, such as transport, land use, housing, community facilities, employment areas, protection of the environment, cultural heritage and tourism.

Planning Instrument	Level	Scale
Regional Planning Guidance	Region	
Sub-regional Planning Guidance	Sub-region	
Development Plan	Municipal	

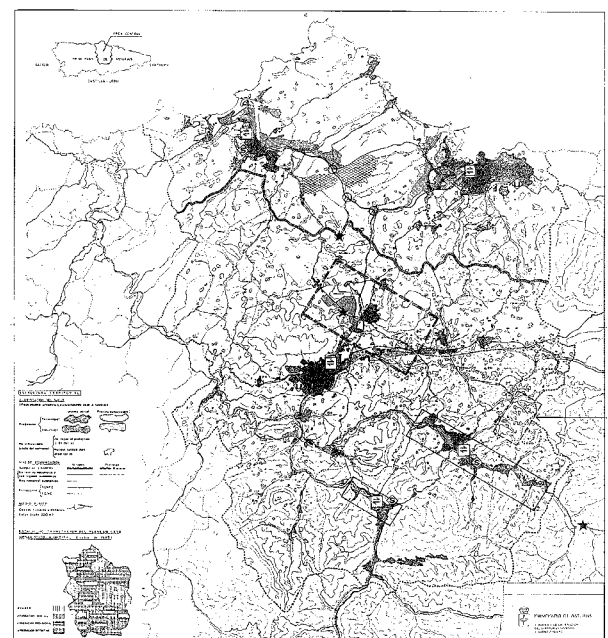
Previous analysis showed great unbalances between the central area of the region and the western and eastern wings. Population, economic activity, transport infrastructures and community facilities were concentrated in the urban areas in the Metropolitan Area, whilst the rural areas in the wings remained abandoned and undeveloped. This became the main challenge for the Regional Planning Guidance: to promote a balanced development and ensure equal opportunities and choices to all citizens, regardless where they live.

The main issues addressed by the Regional Planning Guidance are:

- Provision of community facilities: The region was divided in eight Planning Areas and a number of towns were designated in each of them to host educational, cultural, health and other community facilities. This reduced the need to travel for the inhabitants of the villages to the cities in the ACA.
- Protection of the environment: A number of activities became submitted to Environmental Impact Assessment, and Special Protection Areas were classified in order to protect and enhance the natural heritage. Simultaneously to the adoption of the RPG, under the Natural Resources Protection Act (1991) a Natural Protected Areas Network was designed. 30% of the territory is included in some of these categories: National Park (1), Natural Parks (5), Special Protected Areas (10), Protected Landscapes (10) and Natural Monuments (35).
- Employment: New industrial areas, where necessary, should be located on or near previously developed land, so car dependence and infrastructural costs can be reduced to the minimum. RPG requires the adoption of a Territorial Action Program, at the regional level, for all the new industrial areas to be developed by the Regional Administration.
- Transport: Territorial balance requires the improvement of connections in the East-West direction. Regarding the ACA, RPG recommends the coordination of the existing transport modes (train and bus) to promote the use of a public transport network.
- Housing: Conversion of existing buildings is encouraged, in preference to the development of greenfield sites. Local Development Plans should guarantee that new housing areas do not increase the need to travel, do not require the construction of expensive transport and supplies infrastructures, and are located in areas protected from natural risks.
- Urban Sprawl: RPG recognizes the countryside as a cultural heritage. But new activities (residential, tourism, employment) are changing a high-valued landscape built by farmers during centuries. The countryside should be protected from conversion of rural land to urban uses by supporting the refurbishment of existing buildings in the villages.
- Tourism: Asturias is a region plenty of tourist attractions. However, most of the visitors focus on a few fragile areas (Europe Peaks in the Eastern Sub-region) that easily get overcrowded. The aim of the RPG is to extend the tourist offer over the whole Region so tourism can contribute to the revitalization of towns and villages.

RPG gives the Asturias Central Area the job of acting as territorial engine to boost economic development in the western and eastern wings. Hence, RPG aims at reinforcing the ACA's functional unity and providing a joint offer of employment and services. RPG includes specific guidance for the ACA, which can be summarized as follows:

- Prevent sprawl and maintain the present settlement pattern, based on a number of compact cities and towns. Motorway junctions and other highly accessible points should not be used as support for new developments.
- Create a metropolitan public transport network.
- Integrate water supply, sewerage and waste management services from local to metropolitan level.
- Increase public rental housing offer to facilitate job mobility.
- Promote a more balanced location of metropolitan facilities.



EXPRESION GRAFICA DE LAS DIRECTRICES PARA EL AREA CENTRAL. (Complementarias de las Directrices Regionales)

CLAVE GRAFICA	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	EPICENTRO	CLAVE GRAFICA	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	EPICENTRO
1	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	1	2	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	2
3	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	3	4	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	4
5	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	5	6	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	6
7	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	7	8	REPERTEJO DE REORDENACION DEL TERRITORIO EN EL AREA CENTRAL	8

Se han considerado como Directrices Subregionales para el Area Central las Directrices Regionales de:

Directiva 8.2.1 - población A. Central - >50% población regional

Directiva 8.2.2 - población de áreas centrales >10% población regional

Se han considerado como Directrices Subregionales para el Area Central las Directrices Regionales de:

Directiva 8.2.1 - población A. Central - >50% población regional

Directiva 8.2.2 - población de áreas centrales >10% población regional

Fig. 7: Regional Planning Guidance for the Asturias Central Area (1991)



To the moment, at the sub-regional level, efforts have focused on the coast line. Both the Coastal Fringe Guidance (1993) and the Asturias Coastal Zone Protection Plan (2005) emphasize the need to protect the coast of Asturias from development and enhance its natural and cultural resources. Sectorial Guidance has been adopted as well: Commercial Development Guidance (2006) is aimed at supporting corner-shops commerce in consolidated urban areas and discourages big malls and suburban shopping centres.

## 2.2 Stakeholders involved in the planning process.

In Spain, spatial and urban planning powers are the exclusive jurisdiction of the Autonomous Communities. The planning process is led, therefore, by the Regions, but local authorities have their say as well. Spatial planning in Asturias is elaborated and adopted by the Government of the Principality, and municipalities are invited to take part in the process by expressing their visions and addressing amendments. Urban planning is prepared by local authorities and passed by the region, which in this case is only entitled to look after territorial matters. Citizens can participate during public enquiries held at every territorial or urban planning process. Reports and final decisions are made by the **Spatial and Urban Planning Commission of Asturias (CUOTA)**, a public board formed by regional officials, experts and representatives from national and local authorities. The Government of Spain holds no powers on planning, which explains the lack of any Spatial Development Strategy at the national level.

## 2.3 Timing within the planning process.

Planning in Asturias is a continuous process: spatial and urban plans are in force since their adoption until their revision, when necessary due to changes in population or territorial trends, new demands or other circumstances. Since 1991, when the Regional Planning Guidance was adopted, each of the 78 municipalities in Asturias has its own local development plan, and almost 50% are presently under revision. As aforementioned, Coastal Fringe Guidance was adopted in 1993, and the Coastal Zone Protection Plan, after five years of elaboration, in 2005. After seventeen years, Regional Planning Guidance and specific Guidance for the Asturias Central Area is currently under updating as well.

## 2.4 Relation to planning processes at other levels.

Spatial or urban planning contents and requirements must be observed at every sectorial or crosscutting level, or otherwise modified following the same procedures and public inquiries for its adoption. Specific guidance has been adopted for sectorial activities, such as Commercial Development or Wind Energy, and Regional Planning Guidance has influenced sectorial policies, the best example being the location

of supramunicipal facilities (high schools, health centres, libraries, etc.) in towns designated suitable to act as service providers to the smaller municipalities in their catchment areas. In general terms, the Regional Governments have carried out the policies included in the Regional Planning Guidance, modified its contents to enable a specific project or action, but to the moment observed its general principles and options.

## 2.5 Tools for facilitating the planning process.

No specific tools for facilitating the planning process have been developed, except for books, brochures and other dissemination materials edited during the preparation or adoption of plans.

## 2.6 Strong and weak points of the planning process in terms of territorial-urban coordination.

The strength of the planning process in Asturias in terms of territorial-urban coordination lies on the experience accumulated in more than twenty years, since as aforesaid, urban and territorial issues were tackled by the Autonomous Community right from the beginning of its establishment in the early 80's. The need of coordination between urban and territorial plans is taken as normal and accepted and a global regional approach for the region is supported by public and private stakeholders. Some strategic territorial options, such as the protection and enhancement of the coastal fringe, are considered by private developers as an opportunity to preserve a valuable natural and cultural heritage, an investment in the future.

But, at times, a long tradition can become a heavy load for innovation and an invitation to rest on one's laurels. Regional Planning Guidance, dating back to 1991, requires urgent updating in order to face the new challenges, especially those arising from the new landscape concepts, sustainable development and the new, knowledge-based economy. Territorial coordination is sometimes regarded by local authorities not as an opportunity for better developing their capacities, but as a threat for their self-government powers and competences. On its side, the Regional Government has not always been as successful as desirable in searching for consensus and agreements with municipalities, and in coordinating its own sectorial plans (transport, employment, infrastructures...).

As in the rest of the country, public involvement is the weakest point of the planning system in Asturias. Recent planning scandals occurred specially in the Mediterranean regions have lead a great majority of citizens to connect Territorial and Urban Planning with corruption, land speculation and other shady deals, and actually this is not of much help when en-

couraging public awareness on spatial issues. Private stakeholders do not seem either much interested in debating global territorial schemes, and prefer to deal with specific projects or developments, which takes to constant amendments and modifications in plans.

Last, but not least, it should be mentioned the lack of measuring tools and indicators systems to evaluate the effectiveness of the territorial policies in terms of spatial coordination.

### 3. Assessing the case study from the point of view of instruments for implementation

Putting policies and regulations into practice becomes the acid test for any planning scheme. This chapter is aimed at the analysis of the implementation of the measures designed to foster territorial-urban coordination in the planning instruments.

Some of the main options at the Asturias Central Area Planning Guidance are, as mentioned, the prevention of urban sprawl and the support of a compact settlement pattern. After seventeen years, it can be held that this pattern is maintained or even reinforced, for cities and towns have improved as mixed, multifunctional, diverse and attractive places to live in. Nevertheless, sprawl trends are noticeable but their spatial impacts in terms of land consumption, social exclusion or private transport increase have not been

evaluated yet. Sprawl prevention is a key issue for a hilly metropolitan area where developable land is not abundant and that has made of the quality of its environment a factor of population and investment attraction.

The Metropolitan Transport Consortium (CTA) was established in 2002 and its tasks include: to increase efficiency in the transport system; to support the territorial planning; to minimize transport costs (both internal and external), to reduce private transport and contribute to the enhancement of the environment and the efficient use of existing infrastructure. 950.000 users from 48 municipalities can benefit from a combined ticket for multi-modal transport (bus and train). Besides, a new tram-train network to connect residential and employment areas in the core of the ACA is currently under progress. Water supply, sewerage and waste management services have been integrated in their own metropolitan companies.

The figures for another priority in the RPG's agenda, increasing the public rental housing offer in order to reduce commuting and to facilitate job mobility, are not so optimistic. Significant public investments have been allocated on affordable housing, but home ownership rates, as in the rest of Spain, are between the highest in Europe. Thus, commuting levels between the main cities remain high.

As for metropolitan facilities, the location policy is targeted at counterbalancing the excessive weight of Oviedo and Gijón. A number of new cultural and university centres have been used as nodes for development and urban renewal for cities under restructuring processes.

But, what are the differences between that dreamed-of portrait of the ACA, as planned in 1991, and the actual picture? Some unexpected territorial processes have come up, the most important being presumably the new commercial developments, employment areas and transport infrastructure.

Metropolitan traffic flows have considerably been affected by the location of great commercial developments at the junctions of the main roads. Retail parks have taken advantage of the high accessibility provided by a dense transport network and developed so intensely that special planning guidance has been required in order to direct these facilities to consolidated urban areas.

In spite of extensive brownfield development, employment land needs have exceeded every forecast and, in order to satisfy a demand unimaginable seventeen years ago, additional developments have had to be added to those included in the Regional Planning Guidance. As mentioned, due to the physical characterization of the ACA, developable land is relatively scarce and consequently any new development

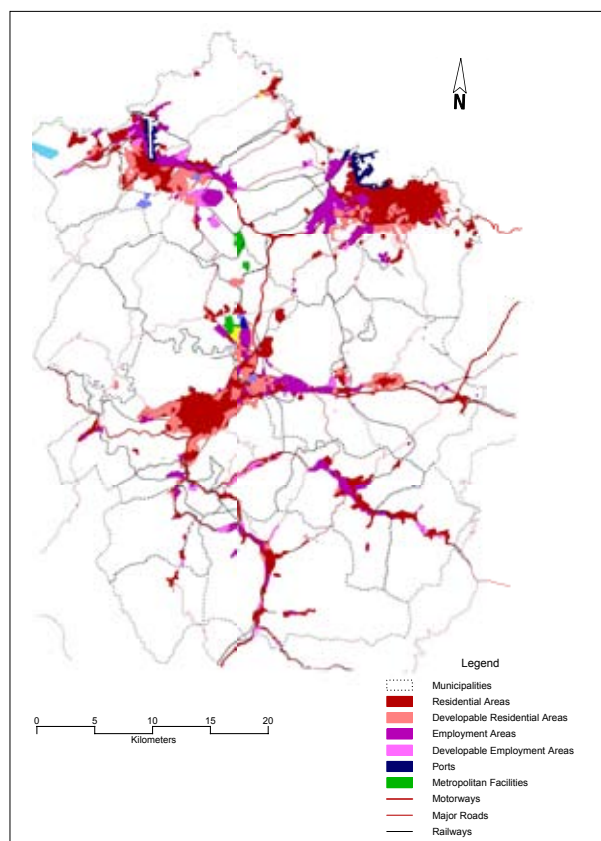


Fig. 8: Metropolitan Structure for the Asturias Central Area (2008)



should be regarded carefully. Therefore, the Regional Government is preparing a Territorial Plan focused on the last great extension of undeveloped land in the best central location, in order to guarantee its development according to a metropolitan, strategic vision.

In 1991, the major transport network was not still designed, and RPG gave little clue about the issue. Nowadays, the recent completion of new motorways is actually changing the commuting patterns and extending the central labour market area west and eastwards. Moreover, the predictable RPG update will have to deal with the thorny question of the location of the new intermodal stations for the high speed railway.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Importance of the theme in terms of territorial-urban coordination.

Along this paper the crucial importance of territorial-urban coordination for polycentric metropolitan areas planning has been widely discussed and outlined. Polycentric phenomena carry on their way, irrespective of local or regional administration's sensibility or commitment, and lack of coordination can only lead to neglect development opportunities, if not to growing territorial dysfunctions which are, inevitably, very difficult to repair. Regional-local collaboration on spatial issues contributes greatly to competitiveness in an increasingly competitive, global Europe.

### 4.2 Proposals for improvement of territorial-urban coordination.

At the European level, it would be very helpful if the European Institutions, especially those responsible for spatial development, take into account polycentrism at the regional scale and consider polycentric urban areas as nodes of the European urban network. Simple, easy gestures as the recognition of regional polycentrism in reports or other publications supported by the EU would be very effective; regions

need sometimes to look in other region's mirror to discover how they actually are.

Regarding planning tools, approaches focused on land-use regulations should be substituted by strategic, flexible planning. The Asturian experience shows that reality usually goes beyond planning when dealing with metropolitan issues; strategic approaches are more suitable to tackle successfully changing urban phenomena than rigid, static spatial planning. Flexibility by no means implies *à la carte* planning, but ability to identify opportunities and threats and to implement new, proactive planning tools. Innovative cross-scale concepts, like landscape<sup>3</sup> or sustainable development, when considered in planning tools, can be particularly valuable at fostering coordination and building links between the territorial and urban levels.

At the governance level, planning coordination becomes easier when the territorial authorities concerned, both at the regional and local levels, are able to work in close partnership on the basis of common spatial interests. To discover the benefits of polycentrism will progressively encourage local authorities to put suspicions aside and deepen cooperation. New governance tools should be developed to avoid administrative burdens and make compatible regional and local interests.

Local and regional authorities should promote stakeholder involvement in spatial and urban planning processes as a way to make sure that every territorial aspect in the strategy is properly addressed, and raise public concern on spatial and urban matters. The more participative, bottom-up led the process, the more likely to produce reality-adjusted, successful strategies and plans.

Both private and public stakeholders will find their involvement more useful and interesting if they are kept regularly updated of the progresses made and the goals that remain unfulfilled. This can be achieved by the implementation of a commonly agreed indicators system that provides information about the achievement of the coordination objectives previously identified, and the eventual adjustments needed.

<sup>3</sup> As defined by the Council of Europe at the European Landscape Convention: "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".