

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
EUROPEAN MASTERS PROGRAMME***

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Sumário

Este texto refere-se à experiência dos autores no desenvolvimento de um projecto curricular de especialização em planeamento e desenvolvimento espacial na União Europeia, ao abrigo de uma iniciativa piloto para promoção de European Masters Programmes no âmbito do programa SOCRATES financiado pela DG XXII.

O tema do projecto é o Planeamento e Ordenamento do Território - 'spatial planning' na tradução utilizada entre os diferentes países da UE. O planeamento e ordenamento do território é um tema emergente na Comissão Europeia, interessada na definição de uma política comum para esta área. Os estudos e relatórios recentemente produzidos - 'Esquema de Desenvolvimento do Espaço Comunitário' e 'Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies' - são exemplo deste interesse. O objecto do European Masters é, precisamente, incentivar a troca de experiências entre diferentes culturas e práticas e promover a qualificação dos profissionais, académicos e investigadores com responsabilidades e interesses no ordenamento do território na perspectiva da integração Europeia.

O projecto tem a sua origem na candidatura apresentada pela Universidade de Newcastle upon Tyne no Reino Unido para o desenvolvimento de um 'Joint European Masters Programme', em parceria com o Departamento de Ambiente e Ordenamento da Universidade de Aveiro, a Faculty of Spatial Planning (Fakultät Raumplanung), University of Dortmund, o Institut Urbanisme de Grenoble, Grenoble II e o Department of Infrastructure and Planning (Infrastruktur och samhällsplanering), Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

Nos trabalhos e reuniões realizadas entre os membros da rede foram identificadas diferentes formas de integração do programa nas diferentes universidades, desde a sua inserção nos programas de licenciatura existentes, à criação de programas específicos de pós-graduação. O programa acordado está previsto ter a duração de um ano, e começar em 1999/2000. Os cursos e aulas serão organizados em dois semestres. No primeiro semestre, os alunos, escolhidos na base de mérito especial, deverão aprofundar os seus conhecimentos sobre as questões do planeamento e ordenamento no espaço Europeu. No segundo semestre, os alunos deslocam-se para outra universidade da rede onde estudarão outros sistemas de planeamento, desenvolverão trabalhos comuns em contacto com outros grupos nas restantes universidades, e elaborarão projectos específicos relacionados com problemas e questões do país anfitrião.

Entre as questões de compatibilização e viabilização do programa, levantadas e equacionadas pela rede, foi referida a validação académica e curricular do curso, que obedece a diferentes normas nas diferentes instituições, a sua acreditação profissional e o conteúdo e estrutura do programa a leccionar. É igualmente objectivo do programa promover a utilização de técnicas e meios de comunicação à distância nomeadamente uso de video-conferências para a realização de aulas e de debates entre os diferentes cursos sobre projectos e temas comuns.

Em Portugal o tema em foco tem particular pertinência numa altura em que estão a ser desenhadas e propostas importantes alterações na legislação do planeamento e ordenamento do território, expressas na produção de uma Lei de Bases que se pretende ser integradora de tendências para uma melhor eficiência do processo de gestão urbana e do ordenamento dos territórios, respondendo tanto a exigências e condicionantes internas como dos sistemas e culturas dos países da UE.

O processo de integração do programa no Departamento de Ambiente e Ordenamento da Universidade de Aveiro enquadra-se num ambiente institucional particularmente favorável. A universidade assume e apoia de forma explícita programas de troca de conhecimentos como o Erasmus / Sócrates e tem condições técnicas excelentes de infraestruturas para video-conferência. Os aspectos a ter em conta

para a integração do programa e sua viabilização dizem respeito ao necessário enquadramento institucional e validação curricular. A opção de integrar o programa no último ano do curso de planeamento regional e urbano permitirá, nesta fase, com um número reduzido de alunos, a sua viabilização e adequação aos princípios do projecto, enquanto se considera a possibilidade de criar um mestrado e pós-graduação apoiados nas condições oferecidas pela rede. A utilização alargada de técnicas de vídeo-conferência e de sessões de orientação a alunos e grupos, do departamento e das universidades da rede, são condições críticas para o sucesso na implementação e continuação deste programa.

Introduction

The concept of a Masters degree is very much associated with the British and American traditions of higher education, but universities in several other European countries are now developing such degrees and the European Union (EU) SOCRATES programme has actively encouraged this by promoting the concept of a European Masters Programme. It may seem ironic, given the Anglo-American origin, that the former French Prime Minister, Commissioner Édith Cresson, has given this initiative her strong personal support.

The aim of this article is to share with a wider audience some of the authors' experience and the lessons learnt from participating in the pilot project phase of this part of the SOCRATES programme. The authors' project is one of only 16 Curriculum Development proposals for a European Masters programmes to be funded in 1996 as part of the SOCRATES Pilot Project Mini-Guide II. It was clear at a meeting of the project teams held by DG XXII in Brussels in February 1997 that the different projects are developing very different structures for their Masters programmes. From the point of view of the Commission, this is welcome because it will generate a broad range of experience on which to base future schemes developed within the framework of SOCRATES Institutional Contracts.

It should be noted, however, that this article is based upon the experience of one project that may or may not turn out to be typical.

The subject-matter and its European Significance

Our particular Masters programme is in the subject now normally referred to in Euroenglish as spatial planning. In more domestic English, it would be 'town and country planning' or 'urban and regional planning', and in Portuguese 'planeamento e ordenamento do território'.

This falls within the urban planning priority, one of the priorities of the SOCRATES Pilot Project.

Spatial planning is a subject that is far from being equally well developed in EU member-states, but in several it is now recognised both as an academic discipline and as an independent professional activity. It is of growing importance as a sector of public policy not only at the local and regional scales but increasingly as a sector of EU policy-making. Its status in Portugal is discussed below.

Work is currently under way to complete a document known as the European Spatial Development Perspective, or Esquema de Desenvolvimento do Espaço Comunitário, and there are a whole variety of EU programmes that are either explicitly related to spatial planning, such as INTERREG, or are directly concerned with spatial development, such as the structural funds (Williams 1996). In the UK, expertise in the whole range of EU programmes relevant to local planning authorities is becoming a distinct specialism within the planning profession, and some planning graduates take posts devoted to EU work. EU spatial planning and funding programmes are also of great importance in Portugal.

Overall, there is enormous variation between member-states in the ways in which planning is organised and operates at the municipal and provincial levels, the variety of problems being faced by local and regional planning authorities, and the levels of development of the associated educational programmes in universities. The European Commission (DGXVI) has recently prepared a Compendium of Spatial Planning Policies and Systems (Commission 1997), to which the University of Aveiro has contributed.

Therefore, a European Masters programme in spatial planning could contribute to the development of a European planning profession at several levels:

- by promoting the sharing of expertise and learning from the experience of local and regional planning in other countries
- by supporting the development of professional planning education programmes and research in universities
- by producing more graduates with expertise in EU spatial planning initiatives
- by educating planners capable of making the adjustments necessary to enable them to work professionally in more than one EU member-state.

Outline of the project

A successful application made in 1996 for a SOCRATES Mini-Guide Pilot Project to develop a 'Joint European Masters Programme' by the Department of Town and Country Planning, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The other partners are the Departamento de Ambiente e Ordenamento, Universidade de Aveiro, the Faculty of Spatial Planning (Fakultät Raumplanung), University of Dortmund, the Institut Urbanisme de Grenoble, Grenoble II and the Department of Infrastructure and Planning (Infrastruktur och samhällsplanering), Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm (1).

All are well-established planning schools in major public-sector universities in the countries concerned. All are active members of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP). Aveiro is hosting the 1998 AESOP Congress, and others have staff members who have held senior positions in AESOP. All have full academic accreditation for their planning programmes within their own country's systems. Newcastle has offered an undergraduate planning programme since 1946 and is a pioneer in the development of planning as an academic discipline separate from architecture. It also has long-established Masters programmes in planning, the basic professional programme being the two-year Master of Town Planning (MTP).

Successful ERASMUS exchanges have taken place within this network since 1990. This Masters proposal has been developed in order to deepen this successful cooperation. It takes the form of a common 1-year programme which can be incorporated within the existing programmes of all partner universities. The common programme is to be offered to students on existing programmes such as the Aveiro Degree in Urban and Regional Planning (Planeamento Regional e Urbano) who are interested in developing specialist expertise in spatial planning at the European scale. It will take the form of one semester at the student's home university followed by one semester at one of the other partner universities. Common teaching and learning objectives will be set for both semesters, so each university will offer courses that will reflect these common objectives. It is intended that all partners will receive students in the second semester from all the other four universities. Teaching would be in the local language in Newcastle, Grenoble and Dortmund, but the international part of the programme would be taught in English in Stockholm and Aveiro.

In addition, some partners including Newcastle and Stockholm are developing new Masters programmes within which this common year will be incorporated. In the case of Newcastle, a new 2-year degree, Master of Town Planning Europe (MTPE), based on the existing MTP, will incorporate the common year

as its second year programme. Stockholm is developing new 1-year Masters degrees, and this possibility is also being considered by Aveiro.

A series of meetings have been held by the project team, starting in November 1996 in Newcastle. Much of the discussion has involved sharing of information about each others system of education, approval and validation processes, and arriving at a common position about what can be achieved. It was necessary to set realistic objectives, and to steer a path between being too ambitious and too cautious, so that something could be created which was new and innovative, but which was capable of functioning within the limits of staffing and financial resources that would be available after the period of the Pilot Project grant.

In developing the model outlined above, a number of general principles were agreed between the partners:

- decentralised structure integrated with existing national systems of planning education
- the programme can be taken without adding an extra year of study to the total normally necessary to obtain the appropriate national professional qualification
- teaching objectives and learning outcomes are to be adopted for each semester that are common to all partners
- number of places to be specified in applications for SOCRATES Institutional Contracts, so that equal numbers will move to and from each partner
- students selected to participate on basis of merit
- students will normally have completed at least 4 years of higher education on a route leading to a qualification in planning (minimum 3 years of higher education if a full planning curriculum has been followed for this time)
- students expected to be familiar with own national system of planning before starting programme.

Students who complete the programme satisfactorily will be entitled to receive a form of certification confirming their specialism in urban and regional planning in Europe as an endorsement to their regular degree/diploma.

General issues arising

A number of key issues emerged from the meetings and consultations during the preparation stage of the project. Some of wider general significance are discussed below.

Recruitment strategy

It is absolutely vital to plan ahead for student recruitment. Several examples exist of well-prepared courses which have not run because no thought was given early enough to marketing and recruitment, with the consequence that the necessary numbers of students were not registered. Course involving study abroad or unfamiliar specialisms are vulnerable to this problem. One reason for integration into existing programmes and not adding an extra year of study is that recruitment is then not dependent upon extra funding for students. Also, the risk to the student in taking something unorthodox is minimised.

Academic validation of degrees and quality assurance.

The key issue is which university validates the degrees eventually awarded. This links to another key issue: who receives fee income and at what level is it levied? The validating university must accept responsibility for academic quality assurance for study credits obtained in partner universities. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is to be used, but it is not clear whether this will prove to be an acceptable guarantee of quality. The proposal in this programme is that the successful candidate receives a degree validated by the university at which s/he first registers, not a degree jointly validated by all participating universities. This university is also the one which levies the appropriate fee.

Professional accreditation.

In order to ensure a market and recruit successfully, professional accreditation is essential, certainly for anyone wishing to work in the UK and some other countries, or for firms operating throughout Europe since several of these base the professional services they offer on the British model of professional qualification. This is clear from experience in Newcastle and elsewhere of non-professional masters courses. The advice from consultations elsewhere was that a professional title and clear relationship to a sector of employment in which that professional title is recognised was essential for recruitment.

Assurance issues arise concerning the quality of professional education. The UK professional body, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) sets out the qualities expected of an 'effective planning school'. All

partners were invited to join the project on the basis that they match up to these qualities in the context of their own country.

Role of distance learning and videoconferencing technology

Demonstration link-ups between Newcastle and Grenoble were made in November 1996 and February 1997, during which tutorial contact was made with students on normal ERASMUS exchanges. Similarly, in November 1997, links were made from Grenoble to Aveiro and Stockholm. It is evident that this technology has great potential and that the technology is capable of offering many more possibilities than have so far been tried, but there is a need for training and practice with the techniques required for teaching and tutorial guidance using videoconferencing so that users are comfortable with it. Also, differences in technical specification and reliability, and availability of convenient teaching rooms with the necessary equipment, mean that it is not yet possible to offer a Masters programme that is highly dependent on this form of distance learning. It is recognised that the lead must be taken by the user group rather than the information technologists, and that is what this project is doing. It is intended to use videoconferencing to allow contributions to be made to the existing teaching programme in Aveiro in May 1998 by all the other partners.

Curriculum contents

In many ways this is the easy part of course development, since several partners have research interests and publications that contribute to the European spatial planning focus of the programme, have participated in European research projects, and already teach courses on this. This is why they want to participate. The danger is that too much time is taken up discussing curriculum issues, and not enough devoted to marketing and recruitment, meeting validation requirements and course management. The important curriculum issue to be decided is the question of balance between EU spatial policy and European integration issues and a country-specific and local urban planning focus.

The Development of the Programme in the University of Aveiro

In addition to the overall development of spatial planning in the European Union (Williams 1996), which provides the context for the programme as a whole, it is hoped that this Masters programme will be particularly opportune in Portugal in view of changes that are taking place in planning and regional government.

Emerging trends in the EU and the changing Portuguese planning system

The opportunity to exchange information and learn from experiences in other EU countries, a major element of the programme, will offer important advantages for Portugal because of the growing significance of EU spatial policy, the need to articulate the different spatial development policies of the member-states, and the recent changes in the Portuguese legal system of planning and government structure.

Firstly, it relates to the establishment of planning regions and elected regional bodies. The creation and role of this level of government, their powers and role in decision-making and development, is an issue of debate in several EU countries, particularly the UK and France. In Portugal, the creation of regions will make important changes to the planning system, for which an understanding of other systems will be of critical importance.

A second issue is associated with the changes to be made to the existing planning systems. These were highlighted in a government project for a new spatial planning framework, the Lei de Bases do Ordenamento do Território (LBOT), which would allocate to the local level most planning powers on land-use and construction, while providing for more strategic plans at the regional and national levels with instrumental roles in economic development and protection of natural and cultural resources. The creation of conditions for a more participatory and regulatory role at the local level, and for more discretionary and flexible forms of planning and governance, follows trends in other EU countries towards more efficient planning systems from which Portugal can learn.

In Portugal, however, spatial planning is still dominated by land-use issues. Traditionally, the establishment of land-use parameters has been the role of architects and engineers, concentrating on the control of urban development. In 1990, after publication of adequate legislation covering the different levels of municipal administration, the role of other professionals such as geographers, landscape architects and sociologists gained importance and asserted the interdisciplinary component of planning. The emergence of planning as an autonomous and specialized activity became apparent. The degree in Urban and Regional Planning created in the University of Aveiro in 1983 addresses this new demand. However, recognition of planners as being accountable for promotion of state spatial planning and the design of territorial development plans, through an accredited professional title, is not yet legally established as it is in several other EU countries.

The role of the new planning professional is however gaining importance. The Association of Planners based in Aveiro (Associação Portuguesa de Planeadores do Território, APPLA), established in 1993, currently has over 200 members and has an influential role in assigning professionals to be employed by

municipalities. Therefore, the links created by the new European Masters programme will strengthen the credibility of planners and provide networks for collaboration and promotion of international strategies for accreditation.

Integration of the programme in Aveiro

Integration of the European Masters programme into the planning curriculum of the University of Aveiro requires a series of conditions to be met and an adequate curriculum structure to be designed. Issues concern the technical and organisational capacity of the University, the legal framework and the contents of the course.

Aveiro does have adequate facilities and the necessary experience of technical and organisational matters. The university was one of 145 European universities taking part in the pilot scheme for development of ECTS. In 1997-8, all departments were using ECTS for their international credit transfer. The university is a partner in several curriculum development projects at advanced and intermediate levels (CDA, CDI), intensive programmes and thematic networks. It has bilateral agreements with around 130 EU universities for student mobility and has participated in most exchange programmes including ERASMUS, SOCRATES, TEMPUS, LINGUA, LEONARDO and ALFA. The university administration strongly supports these exchanges and networks. In 1996-7 there were 80 outgoing and 60 incoming students.

Secondly, there is the issue of integrating a new degree and curriculum within the existing framework. This is important as the university will only invest resources in courses and students that will fit within its overall institutional framework and educational objectives. The students, on the other hand, will only be interested in the programme if it promotes their professional education and legal qualification. For this Masters programme, two issues arise. One relates to the creation of a new course and degree. The other relates to the capacity to integrate students from other universities and to create new disciplines and a syllabus for a reduced number of students.

In Portuguese diploma courses, the Licenciatura is usually awarded after a 4 or 5 year programme. The academic degree of Mestre requires a Licenciatura and is awarded after a 1 to 2 year study programme and the submission of a written dissertation. This is equivalent to the system in Germany, but differs from the English system where students can enroll on a Masters programme after a 3-year BA. For this proposal, a practical option for Aveiro is to incorporate the European Masters programme into the fifth year of the existing Urban and Regional Planning course. This will comply with the general principle referred to earlier that students should have completed 4 years of higher education on a route leading

to a qualification in planning. It is expected, however, that further developments in the programme will allow other planning students to join and for the establishment of a new Masters Programme in Aveiro.

The second issue relates to the creation of new disciplines within the existing course programme. According to Aveiro University regulations, any discipline must have a minimum of 10 students. That raises the problem of how to deliver the material and information relevant to this programme to a reduced number of students. For the first semester, the solution will be to incorporate the material on European planning into the existing course structure. Teaching and course work for the visiting students in the second semester will rely on the use of teleconferencing facilities, private and group tutorials and the realisation of common projects. Since students will be travelling to other universities as part of bilateral agreements under the SOCRATES programme, accreditation of study in the different institutions using ECTS will not be a problem.

Thirdly, there is the issue of course contents. The question is how to transmit the information, ideas and experience, and in which format, in order to meet the overall objectives of the joint programme, while taking advantage of the facilities and expertise, interaction between the students, and different natural and built environments and social and economic context of each participating university. In the first semester, home students will be prepared through study of European planning issues, EU spatial policies, different systems of planning, and the most vital theme of different perspectives on planning practice and professional cultures. Use of teleconferencing will enable students to 'meet' each other, become familiar with places to be studied as case studies in the second semester, and become familiar with new communication technologies.

In the second semester, visiting students will engage in study and research covering three different aspects and types of project. One will focus on the planning system and culture of the host country, tracing its evolution and links to changes in spatial structure, economy and society. A second will take the form of a common theme, to be researched in the local context by groups in each university. Possible themes will relate to issues of concern throughout Europe, such as urban regeneration, planning of transport infrastructure, location of multinational firms, environmental and heritage conservation, housing and social exclusion. A third module will focus on a project to be undertaken with home students, which will focus on practical aspects of local planning, if possible in collaboration with local planning authorities or agencies interested in the topic being studied.

It is expected that the technical facilities in Aveiro, especially for teleconferencing, will be fully used. The objective is to build up and develop communication skills, to promote regular exchange of information

on the different case studies and common themes, to monitor achievements, and to ensure that the intellectual and technical capacities and added-value created by the SOCRATES Project network is constantly expanded.

General lessons and benefits

Really, it is too early to say. The programme will be a success if it attracts students who can say afterwards that they have added something extra to their professional education, have wider intellectual horizons and perhaps have wider employment opportunities as a result. The hope is that the programme will attract new students to the participating universities, including those from other EU member-states not represented in the programme. It will also be a success if it serves as a model on which developments in other faculties of the participating universities could be based, or which could be extended to planning programmes in other countries.

Note (1)

The contribution of all the other members of the project network is gratefully acknowledged: Artur Rosa Pires (Aveiro), Barry Wood (Newcastle), Göran Cars and Angela Churie (Stockholm), Klaus Kunzmann and Sebastian Müller (Dortmund) and Jan Tucny (Grenoble).

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