

## **Beyond Territorialism?**

### **Why there is no European spatial planning and what to do about it?**

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#### **Publication date**

2022

#### **Document Version**

Final published version

#### **Published in**

Teaching, Learning & Researching Spatial Planning

#### **Citation (APA)**

Faludi, A. K. F. (2022). Beyond Territorialism? Why there is no European spatial planning and what to do about it? In R. Rocco, G. Bracken, C. Newton, & M. Dabrowski (Eds.), *Teaching, Learning & Researching Spatial Planning* (pp. 28-38). TU Delft OPEN.

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# Teaching, Learning & Researching **Spatial Planning**

Edited by Roberto Rocco, Gregory Bracken,  
Caroline Newton & Marcin Dąbrowski

# Teaching, Learning & Researching Spatial Planning

TOOLS, CONCEPTS AND IDEAS TAUGHT AT THE SECTION OF SPATIAL PLANNING AND STRATEGY OF THE  
OF URBANISM, FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, THE NETHERLANDS.

## Published by

TU DELFT OPEN

## Edited by

ROBERTO ROCCO, GREGORY BRACKEN, CAROLINE NEWTON & MARCIN DĄBROWSKI

## Design and layout

ROBERTO ROCCO

## Language review & copy editing

GREGORY BRACKEN

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**ISBN/EAN: 978-94-6366-604-6**

**<https://doi.org/10.34641/mg.50>**

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# Beyond Territorialism?

## Why there is no European spatial planning and what to do about it?

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*This paper is about my path from studying Dutch to European planning. Looking at the latter made me identify a 'territorialism' that subdivides land into supposedly self-contained units as a basic organising principle. Where the EU is concerned, territorialism is problematic: relations, spatial or otherwise, between EU members states take the back stage. A strong, maybe even a federal EU might help but is not on the cards. So, European planning cannot take a leaf out of the book of Dutch planners. At least as far as the twentieth century has been concerned, the latter have pointed the way to a well-ordered Netherlands. But in the EU, member state should not plan as if each were a law unto itself. They should accept that, like in the Middle Ages, borders are not watertight but that there are criss-crossing governance arrangements, functional or otherwise. Nor could European spatial planning, if it existed, be about making one overall scheme, like the one Dutch planners once did for their own country. Instead, we see multiple, overlapping schemes hanging like a cloud over the land. Which only goes to show that not everything can be contained within the territories of each EU member state. The paper ends a consideration of how to create awareness of this, and how to critique territorialism in teaching.*

**DUTCH TWENTIETH-CENTURY PLANNING, EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING,  
THE EU CONSTRUCT, TERRITORIALISM, PLANNING PEDAGOGY**

## 1. Introduction

In Faludi and van der Valk (1994), we unravelled to our own satisfaction the secret of Dutch twentieth-century planning: its having a ‘planning doctrine’ for how to keep the country in shape. More about this below, but what needs saying here is that Dutch conditions at the time were of course different from those prevailing in the European Union (EU) the planning of which was the object of my next research. It has led me from being a, perhaps naïve enthusiast of the EU to being – no, not a Eurosceptic – but circumspect about the meaning of European integration: if it is not about creating a federal, let alone a superstate, maybe it is something novel. And, if so, then we might also need novel forms of planning. Consider, for instance, the notion of ‘ever closer union’. Wrongly understood to mean the formation of a federal, some would say a super-state, this is now anathema. So would, if one were to be proposed, an EU spatial plan. In matters of spatial planning, member states are sovereign: answerable to nobody but their voters. Which rests on the further assumption of the land surface of the globe being divided into territories, each the responsibility of a state. What is meant by the term territorialism in the title of this chapter is precisely this: the world being divided into clearly marked and distinct territories, with pride of place going to the territories of sovereign states. The term itself comes from Jan Adriaan Scholte. Accordingly, territorialism means ‘that macro social space is wholly organized in terms of units such as districts, towns, provinces, countries and regions. In times of statist territorialism more particularly, countries have held pride of place above the other kinds of territorial realms’ (Scholte, 2000: 47).

It is also relevant to look at Jan Zielonka, my source of inspiration in coming to terms in Faludi (2020 [2018]) with European integration and planning. He has invoked Max Weber in saying that in states, functional and geographic borders coincide (Zielonka 2001: 508). This suggests states are like containers. So, leaks in their walls need to be plugged. In terms of Sack (1986: 19) they cast doubt on the ability of states to control people, phenomena, and relationships by asserting control over a geographic area: what he calls their territoriality.

To give an example that is topical: fearing being dammed if not seen to be doing something about COVID-19, states invoked their territoriality by excluding potential carriers of the virus. It is the same when, nurturing life-saving equipment and vaccines, they prevent these from being taken outside their borders. In other words (even if more symbolic than effective as a measure) the border must be closed, asserting the state’s territoriality.

Spatial planning, too, involves drawing borders. Could a putative European planning do the same? Where would it draw its powers from? The question is pertinent, since a permissive consensus has made room for scepticism about European integration. That there is a way out is anything but certain. This has become central to my thinking and research. I discuss European planning below, but not before relating the contrasting case of twentieth-century Dutch planning.

## 2. Dutch planning, the sources of inspiration

Coming to this country, with its reputation for orderliness and planning, I started comparing Dutch practice with that of England and Wales, with two university towns, Leiden and Oxford, the cases I selected. While not the topic here, the finding that Dutch local planning was unable to give firm guidance to urban development was a surprise. In *Flexibility and Commitment in Planning: A comparative study of local planning and development in the Netherlands and England* (Thomas et al., 1983) we interpreted the issue in terms of the dialectics between flexibility and commitment.

I followed this up by exploring an, at the time, unique Dutch practice: national planning. The main issue was the imbalance between the dynamic Western Netherlands and the periphery. Deflecting pressure away from the former to the benefit of the latter seemed the solution. But there was also a concern to preserve the pattern of development in the Western Netherlands with its characteristic ring of cities and towns arrayed around a relatively open space. This pattern has acquired international fame as the 'Randstad', with its 'Green Heart' (Dieleman & Musterd, 1992). To manage urban growth in ways leaving this pattern more or less intact, development needed to be channelled away from the Green Heart and towards new growth centres designated for the purpose. The practice of guiding investment to designated areas called growth centres at the time continues to the present day when – see below – Dutch doctrine has more or less been abandoned.

There was remarkable consensus about the policy as described, and the pragmatism in managing it,

throughout the latter parts of the twentieth century (Faludi & van der Valk, 1994). In an effort to understand how, we drew on discussions about the development of science, in particular on Thomas Kuhn (1970). Kuhn had pointed to the existence of scientific paradigms guiding research, often to the exclusion of other schools of thought. We posited that planning needing something similar. We called this a doctrine. The Dutch doctrine we saw in particular as being based on an image of the shape of the country, together with ideas on how to preserve and enhance it in the future. Development that would impair this shape, like building massively in the Green Heart, was unthinkable, the forbidden, the eternal sin. Just like anomalies could lead to the downfall of a paradigm in what Kuhn called a scientific revolution, so too with Dutch doctrine: massive development in the Green Heart could signal a doctrinal revolution.

The danger could be reduced by maintaining the pattern which the doctrine prescribed. Which required locating the growth centres mentioned above where they enhanced the development of the Randstad. Syphoning off pressure, this made it possible to restrict development in the Green Heart.

We were not the only ones to draw inspiration from the development of science. In a parallel effort, Wil Zonneveld (1991) invoked, not Kuhn but rather his critic, Imre Lakatos (1970), in identifying patterns in the conceptual development of Dutch strategic planning.

Importantly, adherence to the doctrine was achieved, not through dictates but through building consensus in the relevant policy community. In this respect, what helped was the evocative term 'Green Heart' for the open space, much appreciated as it was, in the core of the Randstad. Policies

advocated by mavericks to develop the area were out of bounds. As with paradigms which, in order to change, required a 'scientific revolution', changing doctrine, too, would require a doctrinal revolution, we reckoned. And, as revolutions go, this one, too, would result in the removal of the planning elite behind the doctrine.

Dutch doctrine has since lost its edge, but Green Heart and the Randstad are still household terms. What has happened to this doctrine has not been the object of my further research. I turned my gaze towards European spatial planning, which will be discussed in a moment. Suffice to say, rather than a veritable revolution, the twenty-first century saw the doctrine petering out and national planning suffering from benign neglect until it has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared. The national government abandoning all ambition to guide spatial development is perhaps the ultimate demise of the doctrine.

### 3. Territorialism, its origins, and dangers

I started researching European planning in the same way as I had done before with Dutch planning: by looking at its practice. The occasion for doing so has been planners from the Dutch national planning agency themselves taking an interest in the matter. To articulate issues in European planning in terms of a territorialism that conceives of the land surface of the globe – see above - as neatly divided into the territories of sovereign states took time.

But I soon figured that to expect a European doctrine on the Dutch model was 'a bridge too far' (Faludi, 1996). After all, conditions during post-war

reconstruction in the Netherlands had been uniquely favourable. And, of course, the EU was not a state and not remotely as cohesive as the Netherlands. Only later did it become clear to me that it was not even a state in *statum nascendi*, but rather an enigma.

Reminded of when I came to Dutch planning as an outsider, I set out to look at the humdrum practice of what went on under European planning. So, once I had found out about a 'European Spatial Development Perspective' (ESDP) in the making, Bas Waterhout and I engaged in an in-depth study of its making (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002).

There have been occasions, most recently in Faludi (2020; 2021), for revisiting this process. Importantly, giving up control over their territories was anathema to EU member states. But the planners involved learned to cooperate. The problem was the national administrations. They either ignored the planners or, where their work seemed to concern matters of national interest – in the Dutch case, for instance, the position of the Port of Rotterdam – they told them to take such issues off the agenda. The opposite – planners being instructed to ensure that matters of little overall relevance be included – was also the case: when Greece and Turkey were at loggerheads over an outcrop off the port of Bodrum on the Turkish mainland, Imea (Kardak in Turkish; see Mann, 2001: 34) the Greek member of the team was ordered to insist that this speck of land to be shown on all maps.

Clearly, I needed a better understanding of the EU based as it is on intergovernmental treaties. Those treaties are so comprehensive that the EU seems like a federation, but its members have more say than would be the case in a true federation. Relations are also evolving, giving rise to misun-

derstandings and outright conflict. Jacques Delors, Commission President from 1985-1995, once described the EU as an 'unknown political object'. Another way of putting it is saying that it is *sui generis*: one of a kind. Whatever, the uncertainty over what it was made people ask where integration was heading and what it meant for the more familiar figure of the democratic sovereign state.

Working on the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) with planners from the member states, an activist European Commission considered the EU territory as a whole, but the planners from the member states – see above - were beholden to look at what it meant for their own countries. And these had the upper hand. Spatial planning was not, after all, what is called an EU competence. It could be argued that one such was implied, for instance in the so-called Structural Funds, the vehicles for pursuing social and economic cohesion. But, whilst welcoming essential Commission support for its logistic preparation, led by the Germans, the representatives of the member states considered the ESDP a matter for so-called intergovernmental cooperation. With each member state having what amounted to veto power, this led to lowest- common-denominator decisions. So, in the end, the Commission lost patience. Looking forward to being given a competence at the next occasion: a pending review of the EU treaty, the Commission ended its logistic support for the ESDP in 1999.

The discussion about changing the treaty was not in terms of spatial planning but of territorial cohesion. This seemed a logical add-on to the existing EU competence for economic and social cohesion. Under it, the EU operated the European Regional Development Fund giving assistance, mainly to less favoured regions. In anticipation of territorial cohe-

sion appearing on the books, more or less the same planners, from more or less the same countries that had taken a lead before, prepared the 'Territorial Agenda' as a kind of follow-up to the ESDP. Anticipating that the treaty would be amended in due course, even the German legal experts decided that a case existed, if not for European spatial planning, then at least for a common territorial cohesion policy (Ritter, 2009).

But in 2005, French and Dutch referenda shipwrecked the Treaty, establishing a Constitution for Europe. It was only at the end of 2009 that a toned-down version – the current Lisbon Treaty – came into force. It was then that 'territorial cohesion' became what is called a shared competence of the EU.

It is not always appreciated that a shared competence gives leeway to member states to reject the exercise of said competence on the ground that they themselves could deal with, in this case, the matter of territorial cohesion. Each for its own reasons, Germany and the United Kingdom did precisely that. So, there was no follow-up to the Commission's 2008 'Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion'. The Commission has been trying ever since to infuse Cohesion policy with elements of territorial cohesion, but there is no territorial cohesion policy as such: a far cry, this, from what might have been expected one or two decades before.

Let this be an object lesson on how the EU works: its members, sovereign states each, are all-important. Under the theory of international relations – and here I return to the notion introduced briefly above – not only the European continent, but – with the exception of Antarctica – the entire land surface of the globe is covered with self-contained territories: 'territorialism'.

But this is only half the story. The other half is



that the EU features many overlapping spaces which are the objects of various forms of planning at different scales ranging from cross-border cooperation to macro-regions embracing groups of member and also non-member states. Perhaps even more important, though, meanwhile, there is integration fatigue, putting the future of the EU as such in the balance. Populists are driving governments to reassert control over their territories. I blame this on the 'territorialism' discussed above.

Clearly, European planning is up against territorialism, the more so since populists focus on borders and border security. Balibar argues after all that the sacralisation of borders expresses 'the fact that the state is [...] the people's property' (2009: 193). Like landlords watching over their holdings, governments husband their resources and, therefore, their territories. Other authors talk about 'the submission of all that space contains – beasts, goods, lands and waters – to one single authority exclusive of all others' (Balligand & Maquart, 1990: 31; my translation from the French). So, borders have acquired an almost mythical position, as if they were a skin on the body of the state.

## 4. Alternatives, if any?

For planners, what is beyond the borders can be a matter of concern: optimal locations may be on the other side, and then there are spill-overs. Remember that borders are artificial, cutting into the life tissues, as it were. Constrained by them, as they are, planners cannot always properly define, let alone tackle, planning issues. To do their job, they need to reach across borders. What happens at the Port of Rotterdam has repercussions deep in the European hinterland; an outlet at Oberhausen in Germany at-

tracts shoppers from the Netherlands. Dutch liberal policies on soft drugs raise the ire of other governments for their cross-border effects. In an ideal world, planners would define plan areas according to the reach of proposed measures – and so would health officials dealing with COVID-19!

But states are the holders, if not of the land, then at least of sovereign rights over their territories. And they owe their right of existence to their representation of their citizens. In so doing, they often compete with other states, making for endemic conflict, which makes sovereignty into an issue for European integration and, with it, for European spatial planning. Can anything be done about this? What are the alternatives to territorialism as an organising principle? In Faludi (2020 [2018]) I invoke Zielonka (2014) making the case for neo-medievalism as a much looser spatial organisation principle, accepting, as it does, that jurisdictions may overlap. This is against the classic Weberian notion referred to above as the state as a container. Before this modernist construct became the measure of all things – before space was carved up into self-contained (national) territories – it was common for jurisdictions to overlap. But containerising space and people – us – is not the only way of ordering relations. Nor is it always desirable to do so.

Neo-medievalism breaks with the habit of thinking about the land surface of the globe being parcelled into territories. It means also breaking with the idea that borders must be sharply defined. In the past, they were overlapping so that there were grey zones – no man's lands. Suggesting a return to such, on the face of it disorderly arrangements, sounds provocative, but remember that the EU as is – a union of member states, each exercising control over a well-defined territory – is deeply problemat-

ic, and this not only in planning. So why not consider alternatives?

Take a flagship project like the Single Market. For it to work, the EU must not only remove regulatory barriers, it must also ensure equitable access, in particular for those on its periphery. This not only means improving infrastructure, but also a whole gamut of competitive assets. So, the EU needs powers and, as it lacks resources of its own, EU member states must provide it with the requisite funding. Administering these funds, the EU has to invoke regulations. In so doing, it restricts the room for manoeuvre of the recipients. Which is why the EU, and in particular the Commission on its behalf, is a thorn in member states' flesh. The consequence is that EU cohesion policy becomes a battleground. (Faludi, 2016). The reason for all this is the prevailing territorialism.

Not only cohesion policy, but EU policies in general are almost universally controversial. Once more, territorialism gives pride of place to member states. Relations – functional or otherwise – reaching across borders play second fiddle. Which leads to shortcomings, including the not unimportant matter of the lack of agreement on European planning.

One could of course wish for a strong, supranational EU engaging in planning, somewhat on the same lines as the Dutch once did. An EU with features like a state could look after its territory as it became more coherent, true. But, rather than dreaming about Utopia, we had better look at the EU as is, with many functional arrangements overlapping. Schengen, for instance, does not include all members, but it does include non-members; the Eurozone excludes members, some of them by their volition and others because they do not yet conform to the criteria. EU foreign and defence policy

is anything but coherent, and migration leads to differences between an inner core and an internal, as well as an external, periphery, with functional relations and exchanges between them (Hilpert, 2020). This quite apart from the fact that some members stay out of it altogether.

What planning exists across the EU is also pluriform: cross-border, transnational, macro-regional. But there is no prospect of an overall plan, let alone a planning doctrine. Even in a mid-size, reasonably coherent country like the Netherlands, the days of doctrine, it seems, are gone.

An example of how the planning of overlapping spaces would look, consider maritime planning (Faludi, 2019). On the sea we find a muted form of territorialism up to the outer limits of the 'Exclusive Economic Zones'. Presently, they are in the news because of conflicts over their demarcation in the Mediterranean. But besides those, there are also the Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions (ABNJ). They are not totally unregulated. No, the Freedom of the Sea and the increasingly intense exploitation of the resources of the sea – and the seabed! – do require regulation. This is what the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) is about. Importantly, regulated areas can overlap, depending on function. So, we need not even invoke neo-medievalism. All we need to do is to turn our gaze out to sea and consider how maritime space is being managed to discover that territorialism and associated sovereignty claims are not the only conceivable principles of spatial organisation.

## 5. How to teach students about territorialism

I have never given more than the odd lecture about territorialism. But if pressed on how to teach about it, I would draw on my experience of when I was more involved than now in teaching planning. In fact, Chapter 14 of 'Planning Theory' (Faludi, 1973) is about 'Teaching the Planning Process'. When in charge of teaching on the graduate diploma course at the Oxford Polytechnic – with its dozen or so graduate students – I was inspired by Ira Robinson, whom I had met at an American-Yugoslav Summer School. He had taught about systematically generating and evaluating alternatives which suited my interest in rationality in planning.

The project I was given to supervise at Oxford was about the expansion of a small Oxfordshire town. So, I insisted on students following Ira Robinson's precepts. Naturally, this gave rise to discussions; for instance, about having to make decisions with incomplete information and under pressure of time. Students gave me a hard time explaining – perhaps it had not been clear to me before – that the precepts of rational decision-making needed to be handled pragmatically. As regards presenting the outcome of the exercise, students had devised a simulated meeting of Oxfordshire County Council only to discover that through their gaming it led to their intentionally rational proposals being shredded into pieces. Such is life!

When giving input later on to the first two years of the Amsterdam planning course, I drew on this experience and on my research into Dutch practice. Before explaining this, a word about bringing practice into teaching seems in order. It is often

thought that the royal road is to let students work on life projects. Attractive though this may be in advanced teaching, I thought it less appropriate in the core curriculum. There, students needed to progress swiftly from one module to the next and into the following year, so we gave them extensive, but stylised, information about the institutional and political setups of the places where we set our study projects. The projects themselves culminated in simulated meetings of the council planning committee. Some students were tasked with presenting their recommendations, with others sitting on the committee, and yet others playing the roles of aggrieved parties. Some students were not only good at, but definitely delighted about role-playing. All learned how to accept proposals being de- and reassembled as expedience required. My debriefing also always included commentary on styles of presentation and on the politics in planning.

I devised yet another expedient way for teaching – and thinking – about practice, which was confronting students with life situations culled from my own research. My favourite one concerned a barber by the name of – no joke – Short (Kort in Dutch). Trying to find out why the pavement in front of his shop was being broken up, he found out that many rules had been honoured more in the breach than in the observance. An initially tense situation between him and the authorities, thanks to his having caught the planners with their pants down, resulted in his becoming a key player. In good humour, in the end the planners even consulted him about the colour of the roof of the small kiosk built on his doorstep. Students were shocked by a lay person getting so much say. They had come to the course expecting to become experts, with say on such matters! Again, this was a good opportunity to discuss matters.

The other example I derived from other research. Again, it concerned a veritable tangle where, being called upon to adjudicate in a dispute concerning a planned container terminal, the planning minister was asked to adjudicate. However, his staff did not have all the necessary information. The ministry also got bogged down in a case that involved many parties with conflicting interests. So, by the time he, or better say his staff, had got around to investigating all the ins and outs, demand for the terminal had evaporated. The verdict given prematurely was reversed by a new minister who subsequently proposed a housing scheme in the location where the container terminal had been planned.

Reading this case study, much like the story of Mr Short, came as a healthy shock to first-year students. I knew this from reading the impromptu reactions I asked them to hand in at short notice. A busy evening later, I played back to them the most astonished and frustrated reactions, giving me once more an opportunity for talking about the idiosyncrasies of real-life planning.

We were going further in confronting students early on with situations of uncertainty. Once we invited the manager of a plant processing organic waste from the intensive market gardening the Dutch are famous for. In this case, permission had not yet been granted, but the pressure to open the plant had been such that he had no choice but to start operations no matter what. His opening sentence to first-year students was: I have got one foot in prison. A good occasion, this, for reflecting on the gap between ideal and reality.

If in the position of having to teach about territorialism I would invoke the same didactic principles, taking situations from real life, knead them into stories of what planners can be faced with, and let stu-

dents deal with them as best they could. One of my standard cases for first-year students could serve as an introduction. Presenting the case with, amongst others, Mr Short in it, I used to put a slide on the overhead – those were the days before PowerPoint – showing a four-lane bridge across a canal separating the study area from the neighbouring community. It featured a bus coming across the width of the canal separating the two. For the rest, no cars: the bridge was closed to all motorised traffic other than public transport. The other community had not paid its share in building the bridge, so the border was closed for private cars, not because the bridge lacked the capacity nor for environmental reasons (not yet an issue at the time) but because there was this intangible, but at the same time very real, territorial boundary.

Presently, I could think of similar cases in cross-border areas along national boundaries. How about this one: two authorities, on either side of an international border receiving EU funding for improving their respective positions. This was on the assumption that they would reach across their common border. But the authorities on each side decided to use their allocations to improve their internal connectivity instead. Their internal cohesion was more important, it seems, than overcoming the barrier formed by the international border. Of course, there are myriad more cases of offloading external costs, environmental or otherwise, to neighbours: first-class demonstrations of the idiosyncrasies of territorialism. There are also examples of use being made of differences, such as in cross-border business parks where, with some inventiveness, firms can shop for an optimal mix of services and regulations.

So much for the effects of territorialism in

cross-border areas. My research on the matter had of course been about the ESDP and its follow-ups. That work, too, could prove a rich source of episodes illustrating the restrictions under which well-meaning planners have limited scope to pursue interdependences. My favourite would be the case of the Port of Rotterdam and alternatives for off-loading goods from the Far East. Perhaps I would even bring in the New Silk Road.

## 6. A real privilege: reflection

Episodes like these were my entry points into deliberations about territorialism. Some planners accept its limitations and deal with whatever issues within their own territory, and others reach out. Planning teaching must discuss such situations, including professional ethics, the planners' roles, and hidden prejudices. My guiding principles would be that their education must make students aware, not only of such matters, but also about the motives of, and the pressures on, other actors with whom planners deal.

I close, not without expressing my gratitude for the privilege as an emeritus to be allowed to continue engaging in academic reflections like the ones in this chapter. I suppose I have paid my dues in the past, but now I am able to really follow my own compass, needing no justification for where I am heading, nor where I land. There have been times when this was self-evident in academic teaching and research, but this is no longer the case. Which is why I particularly cherish the islands and niches where academic freedom still persists and where sheer curiosity can be the compass.

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