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Spatial planning systems in Europe: multiple trajectories

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EDITORIAL

Spatial planning systems in Europe: multiple trajectories

Planning systems are in a state of perpetual reform. There is a constant struggle over the form and operation of planning as interests vie to shape the distribution of costs and benefits of planning in their favour, and governments adapt instruments and policies to address new challenges and opportunities. Reforms have tended to widen the scope of plans, to introduce more flexibility and cross-boundary working and to engage with more stakeholders (Reimer *et al.*, 2014; Nadin *et al.*, 2021b). Underlying these changes are the effects of increasingly neo-liberal politics and the weakening of the welfare state, more influence of the market and less attention to public sector-led solutions in urban development and transformation (Waterhout *et al.*, 2013; Olesen, 2014). The objective has been to simplify planning and reduce what is often described as the unnecessary burden of regulation on market actors. Nevertheless, planning is 'an increasingly pervasive and indispensable activity' (Phelps, 2021, p. 1), and there is increasing advocacy for planning as a key tool in achieving more sustainable and resilient development (OECD, 2017; D'hondt *et al.*, 2020; WHO, 2020; Berisha *et al.*, 2023). As always, there are opposing forces shaping the reform of spatial planning.

From the turn of the century, there has been more turbulence in the conditions that influence the form of spatial planning in Europe. For the transition and small countries joining the EU since 2004 the changes are extraordinary (Maier, 2012; Stead & Nadin, 2011). Others have faced the brunt of the financial crisis of 2007–08 with forced austerity policies and liberalisation of regulation. The Ukraine war has accelerated the need for an energy transition in which planning can play a critical role (Asarpota & Nadin, 2020). The potential consequences of human-induced climate change have been brought home by extreme weather events, droughts and wildfires. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced calls for planning to attend again to its roots in public health (Grant *et al.*, 2022). And there is an undercurrent of global megatrends: demographic change through ageing and migration; increasing social polarisation and inequity; social and economic effects of rapid digitalisation degradation of biodiversity and critical environmental assets; a crisis in housing affordability; and above all, weaking democratic safeguards in government through populist politics brought about by gross unfairness between the winners and the losers. In this context of multiple crises, we should expect governments to be paying attention to how they can reform spatial planning so that it contributes to lowering socio-economic and spatial inequalities and does not create them (Martin *et al.*, 2022).

This collection of papers offers a range of reflections on the reform of spatial planning systems in Europe drawing on the ESPON COMPASS project on *Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe* (Nadin *et al.*, 2018). The project was commissioned by ESPON, the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion. ESPON COMPASS had two main objectives; first to compare and explain changes in spatial planning systems in 32 European countries from 2000 to 2016;

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and second, to examine the extent of the cross-fertilisation of spatial planning with EU Cohesion Policy and other sectoral policies. As a cross-national study in Europe, the projectalso paid close attention to the process of Europeanisation in spatial planning (Lenschow, 2006), how influences flow between the EU and nations, and how the nations learn from each other.

The findings are given in a main report and seven supplementary volumes available on the ESPON website. [1] The second objective was also pursued in a follow-up project on the *Cross-fertilisation of Cohesion Policy and Spatial Planning* (Nadin *et al.*, 2021). A supplementary objective was to explore data availability on spatial planning in EU candidate countries and other countries of the Western Balkans. These countries were not included in the comparative research, but the findings are summarised in a supplementary volume.[2]

The papers in this collection do not repeat the material available in the project final report and supplementary volumes. They share the same objective as ESPON COMPASS, to contribute to a comparative understanding of how European spatial planning systems are changing and why. However, the project provides only a springboard for the papers. They step back from the project and provide more in-depth consideration of countries or themes, setting their questions in the wider literature. The collection complements other articles drawing on ESPON COMPASS findings (see for example, Berisha, *et al.*, 2021a; Cotella *et al.*, 2021; Nadin *et al.*, 2021a).

Three papers report on changes in planning systems in specific countries: Ireland, Germany and Poland. Williams and Nedović-Budić trace the evolution of spatial planning in Ireland from the 1960s to the 2020s, explaining the influence of the EU during a period when Ireland has experienced rapid economic growth and surge in construction activity. Komornicki and Szejgiec-Kolenda review the evolution of spatial planning in post-1989 Poland with special reference to the role of planning in delivering transport infrastructure in the context of very substantial cohesion policy investment. Despite continued attempts to reform planning of infrastructure and development to coordinate the implementation of large flows of investment, the policy silos remain. Spatial planning has been weakened by the priority to spend EU funding and has not been able to counter impacts on sprawl and the environment. Münter and Reimer explain the persistence of the comprehensive planning system in Germany. It has maintained strengths in regulation but lacks tools for proactive development planning, a gap that has been filled by an informal sphere of planning by-passing formal arrangements.

One paper uses the ESPON COMPASS findings to challenge a key conclusion of the EU Compendium regarding the role of planning in sectoral policy coordination, and the tendency of systems to move towards this. Schmitt and Smas examine the comprehensive integrated tradition of planning in nine countries and question the degree to which actual planning practices resemble the idealised model. The final paper in the collection asks about the contribution of spatial planning to achieving territorial cohesion, a core objective of the EU since 2007. There is clearly a strong spatial dimension to increasing inequalities and life chances, and planning in principle can be part of the solution, but at the European level the compartmentalisation of spatial planning and cohesion policy stands in the way.

Also included in this issue is a paper on the Territorial Agenda 2030 (MSTPD, 2020). It is not part of the collection but in it, Böhme and Redlich provide a thought-provoking

critique of the last in a line of EU statements on territorial cohesion, which is the nearest thing to an EU policy on spatial planning. It reviews pilot actions that raise the visibility of the territorial dimension in policies and reiterates calls for more attention to the spatial dimension by sector policy-makers and how the Agenda can support concrete actions.

In this editorial introduction, we set the papers in the general context of trends in spatial planning systems in Europe. We explain the background and approach of the ESPON COMPASS project and summarise its overall findings drawing from the final reports.

Spatial planning systems

It is widely accepted that there can be no one definition of planning any more than there could be one comprehensive theory of planning (Mazza, 1996). Nor do we need one, rather, the concept of planning and its 'form and operation . . . are embedded in their historical context, the socio-economic, political and cultural patterns' (Nadin & Stead, 2008, p. 35). We are dealing with a vague and variable concept, and this is to be expected since finding agreement about how to operationalise concepts in cross-national comparative research is the norm (Hantrais, 2009). The task is not to define spatial planning but to explain how its meaning varies. ESPON COMPASS provides a modest insight into how the understanding of planning varies among nations (recognising that this does not address variation within countries). However, we need a starting point. The common ground that unites different notions of spatial planning is the imperative for societies to husband their common pool resources, of which land is pre-eminent. This does not prejudge how collective management is achieved, but it does require the construction of institutions, 'sets of working rules' (Ostrom, 1990) in law, policy and practice.

Spatial planning systems are assemblages of interconnected formal and informal institutions, or as Janin Rivolin (2012) explains, 'institutional technologies' that comprise structure, tools, discourse and practices (see also Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2011). Formal institutions are instruments and procedures that guide action on urban and rural development and coordinate policies that have an impact on the territory. Informal institutions are the unwritten rules or shared beliefs and norms that shape acceptable behaviour in relation to, for example, the need for probity or acceptance of corruption. Planning can only operate effectively when formal and informal institutions work in concert. They evolve over time in mutual interaction (Van Assche *et al.*, 2014). Thus, an investigation of planning systems needs to address both informal and informal institutions. However, it is much easier to identify and measure the formal apparatus, and that is exactly what most comparative planning studies have concentrated on. We did pay attention to actual practices in the COMPASS study through the interpretation of local experts, but the operation of informal institutions requires more in-depth analysis, thus the need for papers such as the ones in this collection. For example, Münter and Reimer explain how ideas and discourses on spatial planning in Germany have evolved and led to experiments in by-passing of the formal instruments of planning to enable more adaptable and effective intervention, though not as yet leading to structural change in the system.

At this point, we should explain our use of the term spatial planning in ESPON COMPASS. We use spatial planning as an umbrella term for the diverse systems of

planning in Europe. It has been used in this way in EU institutions (following practice in the Council of Europe) since the 1980s in preference to other English language terms such as city and regional planning or town and country planning. Spatial planning was more acceptable to some member states who were concerned that the EU should not give any impression of a competence over domestic planning systems, even though the term is a literal translation of the name for spatial planning in some countries. However, the term spatial planning is also associated with a particularly European notion of planning. Member state planning systems are typically primarily concerned with the management of land use change from local to national scales. European institutions have been more concerned with the notion of planning as coordinating the territorial impacts of the sectoral policies, especially those over which the EU has some competence. This was described in the *European Spatial Development Perspective* as an integrated spatial planning approach (CSD, 1999). Subsequently, territorial governance became the preferred term (MUDTCEU, 2007) with much the same meaning as the spatial planning approach, effectively 'the governance of place' (Healey, 2010). The use of the term spatial planning in this study encompasses both land use planning and place-based coordination of sectoral policy.

Objectives and approach to cross-national comparison

The approach to cross-national comparison in ESPON COMPASS was informed by the experience of previous comparative studies in Europe and the extensive literature which makes use of their findings. Members of the research team had been involved in many previous studies and were keen to address their weaknesses. Systematic cross-national comparison of planning systems in Europe goes back to the 1980s (Masser, 1984; Masser & Williams, 1986; Davies *et al.*, 1989; Newman & Thornley, 1996). Over 40 years, there have been many small-scale studies comparing a few countries on aspects of spatial planning (from a long list, see for example, Thomas *et al.*, 1983; Booth *et al.*, 2007; Dühr, 2007; Wandl *et al.*, 2014; Tulumello *et al.*, 2020).

Large-scale cross-national study involving detailed analysis of many countries begins with the *EU Compendium on Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* (CEC, 1997) undertaken for the then 15 EU member states and Norway (thus only concerned with western Europe). It proposed a fourfold typology of ideal types of spatial planning systems described in the Compendium as 'traditions' and later as 'models' (Dühr *et al.*, 2010; Nadin & Stead, 2013): comprehensive integrated, land-use management, regional economic and urbanism. This typology has been used in many subsequent comparative planning studies. The ESPON study on the *Governance of Territorial and Urban Policies* (Farinos Dasí, 2006) used the typology and extended comparison to 27 European countries to provide an update on trends. Reimer *et al.* (2014) also reported on trends with more attention to actual spatial planning practices. Studies on the broader governance and territorial governance conditions have also contributed in part to comparative spatial planning, notably the ESPON TANGO project through its examination of learning and adaptation in policy making (Schmitt *et al.*, 2013; Schmitt & van Well, 2016). There are other sources on the form of national spatial planning systems across Europe, sometimes part of global studies, but these make little comparative analysis and are better described as compilations of data, for example, the *ISOCARP Manual of Planning*

Practice (Ryser & Franchini, 2015) and the OECD reports on *The Governances of Land* (Silva & Acheampong, 2015).

There has been considerable reflection on the approaches taken by cross-national comparative studies that has raised a growing list of questions, some of which are long-standing but very difficult to answer (Masser, 1986; Nadin & Stead, 2013; Van Assche *et al.*, 2020). There is a long list of issues. Do studies pay sufficient attention to the limitations of learning lessons from comparison of systems (Spaans & Louw, 2009)? How can we address the tendency to conceive of planning in Anglo-Saxon terms given the obvious significance of culture and language in the understanding and practice of spatial planning (Kunzmann, 2004)? Booth (2011) argues that there has been little theoretical consideration in cross-national planning research. Most studies have explained differences between systems by stressing the importance of constitutions and legal families, with insufficient reference to other important conditions Cross-national studies tend to provide only a snapshot of the formal apparatus of planning and pay less attention to how they are changing and to the realities of practice (Getimis, 2012; Reimer *et al.*, 2014). These criticisms and other pitfalls in doing research across countries and cultures show that it is very demanding. It raises issues that are not easy to resolve, so we should expect studies to pay careful attention to how the methodology and methods of comparison can deliver trustworthy findings (Nadin & Stead, 2013; Sykes & Dembski, 2019; Krehl & Weck, 2020).

The experiences of cross-national comparative research projects on spatial planning, and in other public policy fields (Hantrais, 2009) were used to devise the research approach of ESPON COMPASS. In this editorial, we only indicate the main points, but more thorough explanation and other sources are given in the COMPASS Final Report and in Nadin *et al.* (2024). This is the agenda for the research approach.

- There can be no single definition of spatial planning as planning systems are historically rooted in place and language. Variation must be explained with reference to national and regional social models (socio-economic, political and cultural systems) which can explain performance and change.
- Great care must be given to the translation of terms. Translation to English must avoid terms that have a specific meaning in English language countries. The terminology used should be where possible, generic and non-country specific.
- It is not sufficient to record the formal structure and instruments of spatial planning systems and territorial governance, but also their operation in practice.
- Territorial governance and spatial planning systems are dynamic and, by necessity, always incomplete. Thus, it is important to identify trends as well as snapshots of systems (the diachronic approach).
- Planning systems operate in a fluid, multi-scalar and iterative process between multiple institutions and actors, and thus there is a need to consider the interplay of actors and networks.

Methods

The research gathered data using a network of local 'country experts' with in-depth experience of the organisation and practice of territorial governance and spatial planning,

and relevant EU legislation and policy. The experts consulted others in the country and referred to authoritative sources wherever possible. Data were collected in two phases, the first on the formal structure and the second on actual practices. Five in-depth regional case studies were conducted with special attention to the cross-fertilisation of spatial planning with cohesion policy and other sectoral policies. Expert opinion as a source of data has its weaknesses especially on issues where interpretation or judgement is needed, therefore, the data collection and analysis were subject to intensive quality control under which experts were asked to provide further explanation or review data that seemed incomplete or inconsistent. Additionally, ESPON Monitoring Committee members and ESPON contact points were asked to comment on the questionnaire returns, which led to additional revisions. We are confident that the data is trustworthy but recognise that it is based on a survey that on some questions requires considerable professional judgement, especially in relation to actual practices rather than the formal structures. This is a field characterised by a lack of universal and unambiguous constructs. Also, although designed to investigate the practice of planning as well as the formal system, the study was not able to satisfactorily address the real influence of planning systems in actual decision-making by governments and investors. This is why a wide-ranging survey such as ESPON COMPASS needs to be complemented by focussed in-depth studies like those in the papers in this issue.

ESPON COMPASS findings

Investigation of many aspects of spatial planning in 32 European countries generates a lot of data. The specific properties of systems are exceedingly varied across European countries and regions, resulting in a disparate map of systems that defy simple comparison. Each part of the COMPASS comparison was informed by theory, as explained below, which reduced the complexity for measuring data and comparing characteristics. Here, we give a flavour of the findings into which the arguments of the papers that follow can be set. A full account is given in the final report and Nadin *et al.* (2024).

Perhaps first to state the obvious, spatial planning is a ubiquitous enterprise of all governments in Europe. There is much apparent similarity in the formal structure of planning systems with multi-level hierarchy of policy instruments, regulation of physical development and other tools for specific regeneration, conservation and other tasks.

European governments express a common broad common understanding of the purpose of spatial planning: to steer physical development or the use of space and to manage competing interests over land to balance development with environmental protection in the common interest. However, governments express the formal meaning and objective of planning in very different ways. Some define planning almost wholly in procedural terms, as a decision-making process, but all to a greater or lesser extent set out the goals of planning in law. Typically, goals go beyond the regulation of land use to express the need to coordinate all spatial policy across sectors and to manage their competing interests.

Most governments express the objectives for spatial planning as sustainable development, environmental protection, citizen engagement, infrastructure and economic growth. The EU and 'cohesion' are seldom mentioned, and climate change and resilience were not significant at the time of the study.

Reform of instruments and policies is common although at very different speeds and directions. The EU has been a key influence on those changes alongside the many challenges touched on above. There is some consistency in the way that countries are reforming planning, particularly to attempt to reduce the administrative burden of decision-making by simplifying plan and regulation procedures and to provide more speedy decisions and certainty in the system. However, there is little evidence of a general 'deregulation' of spatial development of which some have warned. We recognise that in practice there is in some places a weakening of the influence of spatial planning in government. For example, in this issue Williams and Nedović-Budić explain how Ireland experienced more centralised planning, but at the same time under the influence of neoliberal politics, a market-led approach to urban development contributed to a boom-and-bust cycle, followed by market collapse and housing crisis.

The diversity between systems has been amplified by the considerable shifts in the allocation of competences among levels of government in different directions: either downwards through from national to sub-national and local levels, or upwards leading to increasing powers at the national level. The most common trend is decentralisation from national to sub-national and local levels, but a small number of countries are increasing powers at the national level. The study supports the widely recognised trend for the creation of functional planning regions or soft spaces that address the reality of flows such as commuting patterns, economic relations, river basins, energy networks and others. Spatial planning is often central to the governance arrangements established for such regions. Whilst some are formally established by the government, particularly in the metropolitan areas, others come about by voluntary collaboration among municipalities and other stakeholders.

The largest category, and one for which it is notoriously difficult to get accurate data, are 'soft territorial cooperation areas'. In these regions, the starting point is cross-border cooperation but there is also a measure of inter-sectoral cooperation as a wide range of organisations get involved.

COMPASS identified more than 250 types of planning instruments in the 32 countries, these are the plans and other tools that are used to express and coordinate planning policies and regulate spatial development. One instrument, such as a plan tends to fulfil multiple purposes. We used four categories of purpose – to provide a vision, to support strategic coordination, to set out a framework of policies, and to regulate development. Our analysis challenges the commonplace understanding of instruments fitting neaatly into categories of vision, strategy, framework or plan. We found that most of the instruments served multiple functions. It is not unusual for a document, which may, for example, be described locally as a masterplan, to have both visionary and regulatory content. Also, whilst it is correct to say that it is the national-level instruments that mostly pursue the strategic function, it is by no means the rule. Local-level instruments often have a visionary and strategic component. Indeed, vision and strategy making are increasingly prevalent at all levels, which questions the often-made assumption about the rigidity of planning. Similarly, about half of the national-level instruments have a regulatory component.

In some countries, there has been wholesale change in the structure of the system, for example, with the loss or gain of a tier of regional strategic planning, but for the majority reform is most noticeable at the local level with innovation in the design of instruments

and procedures. There is some consistency in the direction of reforms at the local level, mostly involving simplification and/or streamlining of procedures, adapting to digital technology, and providing for more adaptability and citizen engagement in the planning process as explained below. In contrast, changes at the sub-national level are more varied, some responding to devolution of competences to the local-level and others strengthening spatial planning at the sub-national level.

The COMPASS project investigated three aspects of planning that are related to the idea of the spatial planning approach introduced above: the extent of interrelations or cross-fertilisation of spatial planning with other sectoral policies; the level of adaptability in planning instruments in the face of uncertainty; and the degree of engagement of citizens in the planning process (Nadin *et al.*, 2021a). The changing extent of integration with 14 other sectoral policies was investigated using measures adapted from Stead and Meijers (2009) in terms of the influence of planning on sectoral policies and its performance in integrating the territorial impacts of sectoral policies. The findings show a positive trend, spatial planning systems are generally becoming better equipped to seek coordination of the territorial impacts of sectoral policies in most countries, especially in environment and transport. However, perhaps surprisingly, spatial planning is largely disengaged from EU cohesion policy and dynamic sectors such as digitalisation, health and housing.

Examination of the changing level of adaptiveness of planning instruments draws on the conceptual framework established for the ESPON TANGO project (Schmitt *et al.*, 2013). The findings show a tendency towards increasing adaptiveness in spatial planning practice. Nadin *et al.* (2021b, p. 798) note that 'an adaptive approach allowing more discretion to decision-makers is dependent on a highly professionalized planning profession with relatively strong capacity, working in a mature and trusted system of recognized "good governance."' This is evident in one obvious pattern in the data, strong adaptiveness was maintained at a high level or increased in the relatively prosperous countries in north-west Europe and the Nordic region with a long history of effective planning institutions. Most other countries, but not all, also experience an increase in adaptiveness but from a low starting point into a moderate position.

The assessment of the degree of change in citizen engagement in spatial planning processes employed a simple and well-known scale from full and effective engagement to none. In this broad comparison across many countries, it was not possible to get into the more challenging aspects of engagement, not least its effectiveness. We can say that the findings show a generally consistent strengthening of citizen engagement in all countries but often starting from a low base. The two most common shifts are in the direction from weak to limited engagement and from limited to full and effective engagement. New opportunities for citizen participation in planning were created, for example, involving consultation, participatory budgeting and public hearings. In countries with established tools for partial or full citizen engagement in place, there was little change over that period. In countries with weak or non-existent engagement before 2000, there has been generally a strong shift towards more engagement, but in a small number of countries engagement remains weak, meaning that citizens are consulted but remain passive recipients of information.

In explaining the reform of spatial planning systems, ESPON COMPASS was particularly interested in the role of the EU. It was guided in this by the work of

Böhme and Waterhout (2008) and Cotella and Janin Rivolin (2011) on the Europeanisation of spatial planning. The project assessed different types of top-down influences from the EU to the country level; bottom-up influences from the country level to the EU; and horizontal influence between countries in relation to EU initiatives. The findings on the significance of EU influence in different countries are uneven, they differ across sectoral policies as well as between countries because of a process of 'filtering' in national systems. There has been uniform influence on domestic spatial planning systems of EU legislation in environment and energy. EU policy statements show much more variation, with higher influence being correlated with EU cohesion policy funding support. EU discourse on spatial planning in statements such as the EU Territorial Agendas (MSPTD, 2020) has not had significant influence, although the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (CSD, 1999) remains an inspiration for some countries.

Bottom-up influence from domestic spatial planning systems to EU governance and discourse is patchy, not least because of the difficulty for EU institutions to learn from the varied practices developed in different systems. Where there is influence, it comes from western European countries that have a history of interest in territorial issues and involvement in transnational initiatives in spatial planning, and from others on specific topics. Eastern and Mediterranean countries have had more interest and impact on the territorial and urban agendas. Despite the heavy investment in cross-border and transnational cooperation in EU cohesion policy, its impact on the reform of domestic planning systems is not significant.

Summary, spatial planning systems on multiple trajectories

In this editorial, we have provided a sketch of the ESPON COMPASS project and its assessment of the directions of reform of spatial planning systems in 32 European countries. It is intended only to provide context for the collection of papers that follow. Interested readers are invited to look at the project reports for much more detail.

The study reports show the pervasiveness of spatial planning in government in Europe. In all places, we see the expression of spatial goals and policies that seek to guide and regulate the transformation of land use and to manage the land resource to meet local and global challenges. Beyond this, there is a bewildering variety of arrangements in terms of instruments, procedures and goals, and indeed, the very meaning of spatial planning. Nonetheless, the study reports provide an insight into many facets of both the structure and operation of spatial planning systems, and especially the directions in which they are developing. The overall picture is of constant reform of spatial planning systems to fit political priorities, to address weaknesses, to better address growing challenges and to incorporate learning from elsewhere.

Spatial planning in individual countries is obviously shaped by local political, socio-economic and territorial conditions in the context of their social model and professional cultures. Yet, there are common themes in the paths taken for the reform of systems although always with notable exceptions. All governments face the perennial bind of reconciling apparently competing priorities in how they manage the territory through systems and policies of spatial planning. Formal statements about how competing priorities are resolved or harmonised are only part of the story, which is why the

COMPASS study also considered the operation of systems in practice. Even so, we should take care in making assumptions about the actual impact of changes.

Reform of planning systems in Europe is often aiming for simplification of administrative structures and procedure reflecting the liberal economic tendencies in politics and the dominant political priority in most countries to boost economic growth. This sits alongside competing priorities to build resilience to the threats of climate change and the opportunities of more sustainable development, which is why we do not see widespread deregulation in the formal structures or practice of spatial planning. This is not to say that in some places a very liberal attitude is taken to managing spatial development, which is evident in widespread informal or unregulated development. There is a general tendency for governments to seek more cross-fertilisation of spatial planning with other sectoral policies, and in some countries promote a coordinating role for spatial planning. There is also a tendency to relax rigid imperative and technocratic styles of planning by creating mechanisms that increase adaptiveness in policy and decision-making and to provide opportunities for citizens to engage more in the process. We do not wish to overstate these trends. In many countries, the changes are modest and there is still a huge gulf between countries where the planning system is well-connected to sectoral policy making and citizens and those where it is not. However, there is without doubt a consistent trend across Europe in these directions.

EU institutions have exerted a significant impact on the reform of spatial planning systems, especially through legislation and the influence of cohesion funding. This supports the notion of a Europeanisation of spatial planning although the effects on individual countries or regions vary so there is no common pattern in the specifics of its impact. National and regional experiences in spatial planning, with some notable exceptions, have had much less influence at the EU level, and although we would expect trends in spatial planning systems to be influenced by horizontal exchange and learning between countries, it seems that learning from elsewhere is less influential than learning from the EU institutions.

Overall, ESPON COMPASS reveals great variety in systems and practices of spatial planning, which has not always been evident in previous cross-national studies that have made sharp distinctions between countries based on the system of government or law. Their classifications are helpful in pointing to essential underlying structures that shape spatial planning, but we also need to give attention to diversity and reform. Starting points and the direction and intensity of change are specific to each country. The result is multiple and sometimes, contradictory trajectories for spatial planning at national, regional and local levels. Even so, there are commonalities and common trends which suggest a steady if slow transition to a model of spatial planning that has wider ambitions to shape spatial development in cooperation with other sectoral interests and stakeholders, using more indicative and responsive tools. However, if spatial planning is going to play its part in tackling the multiple crises facing Europe, then there will need to be more rethinking and concerted action on spatial planning systems.

Notes

1. The ESPON COMPASS Final Report and seven supplementary volumes are available at https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems.

2. The additional countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the (then) Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia [FYROM], Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. These countries were not included in the main COMPASS study, but Supplementary Volume 5 summarises the findings from these countries. See also Berisha *et al.* (2021b).

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