

Territorial governance in the Western Balkans: multi-scalar approaches and perspectives

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PART I

TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: MULTI-SCALAR APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES

Guest editors: Giancarlo COTELLA ^{*}, Rudina TOTO ^{**}

FOREWORD: TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: MULTI-SCALAR APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Western Balkans have embarked on a complex path of transition and societal transformation, that was intended to eventually lead to their integration into the European Union. The pace of this process has, however, varied, with some countries already having acquired membership, while others still struggling. Territorial governance plays a particularly important role in this process, as the internal cohesion of the region is key to its successful integration into the EU. However, knowledge on territorial governance in the Western Balkans is still limited and fragmented. This special issue aims to shed some light on the matter, discussing territorial governance contexts and practices in the Western Balkans from a multi-scalar perspective. This editorial serves as an introduction to the special issue, framing its context and guiding the reader through the articles that follow.

Key words: Western Balkans, territorial governance, spatial planning, transition, European integration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Though numerous contributions focusing on territorial governance in Europe and its countries have already been developed, they have mostly concerned EU Member States (Loughlin, 2009; Schmitt and Van Well, 2015; Tulumello *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, except for a small number of recent contributions (Cotella and Berisha, 2016; Berisha *et al.*, 2018, 2021a; Allkja, 2019; Faludi, 2020; Toto and Shutina, 2021), meaningful, systematised knowledge on Western Balkan countries is still missing. With an aim to fill this gap, this special issue positions itself within the current discourse and research on territorial governance, by exploring selected Western Balkan territorial governance practices from a multi-scalar perspective.

The Western Balkans are emerging as a macro-region in the European context, from both geographical-historical and political perspectives (Solly and Berisha, 2021). The region is rich in local and regional diversity and features complex socio-economic and environmental interactions that have led to internal conflicts, and an external perception of being ‘intriguing and provocative’ (TG-WeB, 2018; 2019). The region’s multi-faceted relations are a reflection of the territory and of the way it is being used. The territory of the Western Balkans, a common resource to the people living there, is important to the future of Europe in relation to numerous aspects: climate change, pollution mitigation, geopolitics, energy networks, migration and stability, the rule of law, and economic development (Uvalic, 2019).

As such, the Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe. The region shares its heritage and history with the Member States that surround it geographically, and the region’s countries intend to join the EU and actively participate in the definition of joint development strategies and trajectories (Berisha and Cotella, 2021). In fact, while recent, geopolitical definitions of the Western Balkan region have included only six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), geographically speaking the region encompasses countries that are already members of the European Union (EU), such as Croatia and Slovenia, but also a part of Bulgaria, and possibly other countries. After all, the region is a territorial construct, composed of communities and cultures, and ecosystems and geographies that are strongly interlinked, and which have interacted with one another and with other surrounding European territories throughout history, regardless of any shifts in national borders or any other political conventions. In fact, one of the goals of this special issue is to contribute, i.a., to the further integration of the region, both globally and within the European Community. As a result, the special issue moves away from a container view on the region, and includes contributions focusing on countries that, while being now

¹ This designation (*) is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

fully integrated into the EU, historically and geographically shared a common regional legacy with those that are associated with the geopolitical definition of the Western Balkans. In this light, integration is here embraced as a multi-faceted concept that sees the coexistence of a political/administrative and societal dimension, with the latter being crucial to achieving the former.

Aiming at introducing the above issues, this contribution serves as an editorial, setting its context and presenting the editors' view and approach to the subject matter. After this brief incipit, the following section introduces the fluidity that has characterised the region over the past 30 years, as a consequence of the transition from the common socialist and communist past towards market-oriented economic and institutional models, and of the incremental engagement with the EU integration process. The multi-scalar implications of these processes for the territorial governance of the region and its countries are discussed in section three, before the authors leap forward to reflect on what the future of the Western Balkan region's territorial development and governance could entail. Finally, the structure of the special issue is presented, as a useful roadmap for navigating its contents more easily.

2. THE WESTERN BALKANS: A SPACE IN FLUID TRANSITION

Since the early 1990s, the Western Balkans has undergone a transformation under multiple perspectives. Democratisation and institutional reforms overlapped nation building efforts and EU integration, and were not exempt from conflicts. The transition towards market economy required first and foremost the creation of new institutions to guarantee the introduction of a market economy and the abandonment of state planning logics (Cotella, 2007). Overarching reforms and new institutional practices had to be introduced, in order to move away from the former legacy of the past.

Although some degree of democracy was introduced right at the beginning of the 1990s, the Western Balkans experienced transition at a later stage, if compared to Central and Eastern European countries, due to internal geopolitical challenges (Rupnik, 2000). As a consequence, differences among countries in relation to the level of democracy, as well as that of economic development persisted until recently and have continued to cast their shadow. In fact, while Central and Eastern European transition economies had been successfully developing throughout the 1990s (Cotella, 2014), this was not the case for the Western Balkans, which in 1998 featured lower development levels than in 1989.² This delayed transition

² The GDPs of Western Balkans' countries in 1998 ranged from 35% of their 1989 level in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the 86% in Albania (Uvalic, 2001).

brought new challenges for the region, with all countries that struggled to introduce sound conditions for self-sustainable economic growth, often due to weak institutional and organisational capacity. Overall, the building of institutions capable of overcoming the old and emerging challenges was one of the key issues that characterised the region throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. In turn, this situation contributed to hampering socioeconomic development, with progress along market lines that were hard to achieve in the presence of a state sector still ineffective in fulfilling its basic functions (Gligorov *et al.*, 1999).

Due to these complexities, the Western Balkan region has continued to be perceived by most outside observers as a fluid space of change, a sort of “Europe’s wild west” where major political and institutional transformations have occurred in the last decades and are still ongoing (Olsen, 2000, p. 70). Throughout the path towards European integration, the concept of “quality of institutions has emerged as a key aspect of territorial governance” (Pere and Bartlett, 2019, p. 75). Even though the Western Balkans seems to be lagging in various aspects of *good governance* and the *rule of law*, the situation could “improve or worsen depending on what decisions are taken” (Čeperković and Gaub, 2018, p. 20). In particular, each national context has evolved as a consequence of a mixture of internal and external stimuli, generating a highly complex, differential, and fluid landscape. The emergence of decentralisation processes has been accompanied by the growing importance of regionalisation mechanisms. At the same time, this has also led to the need to improve both horizontal and vertical coordination, as well as to introduce public participation mechanisms, promoting an active role of citizens in political and planning decisions.

Despite the described turbulence and the challenges posed by the transition, through time Western Balkan countries have implemented a sequence of steps that progressively have steered the region towards the EU. The prospect of membership was extended to Western Balkans countries in the year 2000, when the heads of EU States and Governments confirmed the prospect of Balkan countries as potential candidates for EU membership at the Feira European Council. This EU policy shift towards the Balkan region created high expectations that the enlargement strategy could discipline democratic institution-building and foster post-communist reforms in the same way that it did in the previous candidates. In order to be admitted for membership, countries had to, however, comply with strict EU political, economic and legal requirements. Such a relationship implies that, during the last 20 years, the EU has exerted an impact on the Western Balkans, triggering episodes of Europeanisation (Stead and Cotella, 2011; Cotella, 2020), where Western Balkan countries reviewed much of their legislation, adapted existing institutions or built new ones conforming to the EU’s legislation, policies, and standards. As a result, all the countries have experienced major transformations, the most direct ones concerning the structures of their public administrations and a change in the substance and processes of democratic governance.

More specifically, in recent years, the EU has developed and implemented policies to support the gradual integration of all the countries, which were involved in a progressive partnership in order to stabilise the region and establish a free-trade area. However, the European integration process varies greatly from country to country of the Western Balkan region, with Slovenia, which had already acquired its membership status in 2007, and Croatia which followed its footsteps in 2013. Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia are now official candidates, and accession negotiations and chapters opened in 2012 with Montenegro and in 2013 with Serbia. At the same time, the EU integration process is still at its early stages in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, two countries that are identified as potential candidates. Overall, while stabilisation policies and agreements have entered into force in all countries, although at different stages, the European Commission 2019 annual report highlighted that many of them did not seem to have “yet met the required standards as to economic, political, administrative, legal and human rights policies” (Osbuild and Bartlett, 2019, p. 3).

By dint of the above issues, a number of questions has been raised concerning the Western Balkans’ readiness to join the EU, and the most sceptic observers consider Western Balkan countries potentially *second-class members*. However, despite the scepticism and uncertainty surrounding the EU integration process, it appears nowadays irreversible for all countries at stake. “Europe [...] stands as the common denominator around which a new collective identity of the Balkans has begun to crystallize” (Bechev and Andreev, 2005, p. 22), and this puts the accession into the EU at the centre of any long-range vision for the region. While it is not yet certain whether “elites and constituencies throughout the region increasingly share a European orientation” (Balkan Forum, 2004, p. 5), they will have to stand to the task as tangible measures need to be taken, and compliance with EU standards and consequently the launch of the opening process rests on them.

Be that as it may, throughout the years, European policies and programmes seem to have promoted a progressive openness of the territorial governance systems of the various countries towards European aims and priorities, as a consequence of the numerous initiatives put in place by the EU through its candidate and neighbourhood policies. By triggering various Europeanisation mechanisms, the pre-accession process has led to several rearrangements in the territorial governance systems that characterise the various countries. As clearly indicated in the ESTIA report (2000, p. 10), the impact of the EU integration process on the Western Balkan region can be seen in “a number of issues concerning both the administrative context and the policy instruments of spatial planning, though in a different mix depending on the particular country and its stage of transition and restructuring.” According to ESTIA (2000, pp. 10–11), these changes are evident in: (i) the establishment of new territorial divisions and new regional institutions; (ii) the introduction of the environmental dimension in the physical planning approach; (iii) the effort to provide relevant information for spatial planning and

development; and (iv) the effort to establish mechanisms for public participation and consultation in the spatial planning decisions. New administrative levels have been established, which are comparable with the European NUTS system and often given responsibility for the coordination of EU programming activities. As regards the environmental dimension, various EU sectoral directives and regulations (e.g. water and waste management, nature conservation) have been transposed on the domestic legislation of the various countries. Information and monitoring mechanisms have also been promoted in order to provide a better implementation of policies and projects, as well as to promote more effective spatial development. Moreover, the European model has enabled Western Balkan countries to implement more strategic instruments and programmes, at the same time leading to higher cooperation between the states.

3. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE?

The historical pathways and development in the Western Balkans have led to complex implications for territorial governance in the region (Berisha *et al.*, 2018, 2021b; Faludi, 2020). The concept of governance itself is inherently complex; different theories and approaches use or define the term in different ways, and with different levels of precision. Additionally, its potential dimensions (structures, actors, mechanisms, levels, etc.) are rather broad, and characterised by various sub-systems, multiple and heterogenous components, network interactions, and the *emergence* factor (Schneider, 2012). When coupled with the territorial dimension, this complexity increases due to the multiplicity of elements that characterise socio-geographical constructs and that need to be considered when the latter enter the scope of governance processes and actions (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008; Faludi, 2012; Cotella *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, understanding and analysing the implications of (or for) territorial governance in the Western Balkans, is bound to embrace multi-scalar thinking, i.e., to handle several policy or development issues of spatial implications, connect or cut across disciplines and policy objectives, investigate territories of various sizes and relational depth, and examine and untangle multiple conduits of stakeholder interactions, including mechanisms of cooperation and/or competition.

The contributions included in this special issue discuss territorial governance in the Western Balkans in its evolution and consolidation over the last 30 years, during the transition and transformation period that the societies and governments instigated after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which put an end to the socialist systems and centralised economies in the Central East Europe. The emphasis of the historical period is intentional. The authors do recognise the *sturdy legacy* of the

past socio-political systems in Western Balkan countries (Koczan, 2016), but look towards a foresight and integration-fostering approach. Therefore, they try to dissect the (incomplete) transitions so far, focusing particularly on territorial governance, under the lenses of broader global perspectives and approaches, such as government decentralisation and regionalisation (Soderbaum and Shaw, 2003; Ruano and Profiriou, 2017), participatory democracies (Pateman, 2021), sustainable development, low carbon transition and climate change (Callway, 2013; Valkenburg and Cotella, 2014), and regional development and innovation (Cooke, 2013). A broad context of these perspectives for Western Balkan countries follows below.

Government decentralisation was very high in the political agenda of post-socialist countries soon after 1990, presented and implemented as a “global policy goal for supporting local democracy, improved governance and reduced regional inequalities” (Loewen, 2018, pp. 103). Decentralisation evolved along inter-related pillars, namely political, administrative, functional, economic, and fiscal, each following different speeds or trajectories in different countries. In the first half of the transition, decentralisation of government and then governance gave a significant impetus to local development and democracy in the Western Balkans. However, particularly in the last decade, the numerous challenges of decentralisation have become visible, including fragmentation, a lack of institutional capacities and resources in smaller local governments, corruption and/or bureaucracy obstacles, low or uneven technological diffusion in the territory, inadequate access to financial resources, etc. Most importantly, besides the fact that regionalisation or second-tier government reforms did not advance in the region, regional inequalities have increased and inner peripheries or less developed regions have not seen the expected social and economic gains (Loewen, 2018; Koczan, 2016; World Bank, 2021). Aiming at increasing the quality of public services and the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation, the countries of the Western Balkans have undertaken territorial, administrative, and governance reforms that indicated a tendency of re-centralisation. At the same time, however, such reforms have somehow reverted the impact of the first years of the transition, reducing subsidiarity and democratic legitimacy (see Loewen, 2018), without necessarily contributing to the intended efficiency objective, due to the politicisation of the reforms and the scarce transparency of the dynamics they generated.

When it comes to the impact of EU integration goals and requirements, the countries of the Western Balkans have been until recently mainly focusing on issues concerning the rule of law and fundamental rights. In 2018, the new Enlargement Perspective for the Western Balkans recognised that the functioning of democratic institutions should go beyond these criteria, emphasising also the importance of public administration reform, policy coordination, trust building on government institutions, local/regional economic development, etc. (OECD, 2020). EU country progress reports indicate each year that the sizeable gaps to be closed for the region to converge with EU in terms of governance, democracy, and

economic growth, remain significant, regardless of the positive trends identifiable in certain areas, such as public procurement, service delivery to businesses, etc. (*ibid.*) Importantly, even where a progress of some sort is detected, this has been uneven between countries, as well as between territories, indicating, i.a., an uneven distribution of governance capacities and strategies on the territorial level. In this respect, significant efforts for multi-level regional development governance are still required (Cotella *et al.*, 2021), to which the EU pre-accession process and related programmes have provided an important input. As a matter of fact, all countries have embraced some sort of regional policy discourses and initiatives, sometimes associated with government reforms, aiming at targeting weak regions and promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion. However, remains possible that in many cases the rhetoric underpinning regional development strategies and programmes is simply pretending to be adhering to EU spatial objectives and strategies, whereas resources are allocated and spent according to more pragmatic local reasons (Berisha *et al.*, 2021b).

From an economic growth perspective, the territories in the Western Balkans face the challenge of a not yet fully functional market economy (European Commission, 2018), mainly driven by small and medium enterprises (99% of all firms in the region), with a high share of micro-enterprises and low territorial competitiveness (OECD *et al.*, 2019). With a limited domestic market size and a limited purchasing power of the local population, coupled with high unemployment rates and skilled labour emigration to EU countries, Western Balkan territorial cooperation and openness (regionally and with Europe) become imperative to removing barriers for territorial development (OECD, 2020; OECD *et al.*, 2018). This would further contribute to addressing the spatial and socio-economic disparities that are currently very pronounced at the local level and between territorial dichotomies, such as urban and rural areas, central and peripheral settlements (including inner peripheries), and coastal and mountainous remote regions (see Gaifami *et al.*, 2020).

The region is also rich in territorial and natural resources that should be framed as competitive advantages in sustainable development, as well as used in the actions of the countries' smart specialisation strategies. The emphasis on natural resources and biodiversity, together with green infrastructure and green economies, seems to be a preferable territorial scenario for the Western Balkans.³ This is considered a means to overcome macro-regional competitiveness limitations, and build on niche territorial features and sectors (e.g., tourism or agriculture). In addition, such a focus should contribute to the countries' preparedness and mitigation efforts towards expected climate change effects, as well as to avoid a further spread of resource overexploitation and environmental pollution to the ecosys-

³ For more on this see the 'The ADRION 2021–2027 Territorial Analysis' and the ESPON TEVI – Territorial Scenarios for the EUSDR and EUSAIR macro-regions.

tems of the European Green Belt,⁴ the latter consisting of a large portion of the territory of the Western Balkans. However, the promotion of green economy in the Western Balkans is challenging and requires stronger institutions, better human capacities, and skilled labour. In response to the challenge, the region should definitely improve also in terms of research, development, and innovation. In 2018, the average research and development investment was only 0.5% of GDP in the Western Balkans, which contrasted clearly with the 1.15% in the CEEC⁵ and the 1.62% in the EU (OECD, 2021). The 2021 European Innovation Scoreboard has indicated the Western Balkans as an emerging innovator,⁶ while based on Eurostat data less than half of the patent applications made to the European Patent Office (EPO) from the region (approx. 100 in the years 2010–2019), were granted though suggesting substantial quality shortcomings. In addition, the overall expenditure on research and development remains low, and well below the EU level.

4. LOOKING THROUGH THE CRYSTAL BALL. WHAT WILL THE FUTURE ENTAIL?

The future of the Western Balkans within the EU and as a macro-region is far from being crystallised. The countries have endorsed EU integration as a political and societal objective, but their respective paths towards it have differed and have been, overall, slower than expected. This has fostered citizen scepticism about seeing their countries ever joining the European Union.⁷ The considerable risks for the EU caused by the weak rule of law, regressing democratic processes, and the borders swap discourse in the Western Balkans have hindered the integration. Indeed, the Balkans may be said to represent the most unstable region in Europe, with internal contested or unfinished ‘businesses’ (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2021) that negatively impact its EU trajectory. However, sluggish EU cooperation and commitment towards the region would only reinforce the regional vulnerabilities further, and would also institutionalise a void which could be filled by other international influences (see Cotella and Berisha, in this special issue).

The accession of the region in the EU is, therefore, trapped in political silos, but the societal actors are sensitive and responsive to territorial integration policies and actions that can prepare citizens and communities to bridge the stalling

⁴ <https://www.europeangreenbelt.org>.

⁵ Central East European Countries.

⁶ https://interactivetool.eu/EIS/EIS_2.html. No data for Albania and Kosovo*. At the regional level, assessment only for Serbia.

⁷ More on this see: <https://ecfr.eu/article/germanys-new-government-promising-signs-for-western-balkans-eu-integration/>.

relationship with EU territories. After all, the cultural links with the other countries of Central East Europe, the common legacies of the socialist regimes prior to 1990, the similar challenges shared during the transition period, as well as the territorial continuities, are the factors that bring communities closer, opposing the political narratives and in this process producing also tensions at a territorial development level. The Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA 2030 CEC, 2021) and the Economic and Investment Plan for the WB (European Commission, 2020) are relevant instruments and processes in this regard, which respectively provide further momentum to EU enlargement through a consolidated rationale on EU support and a large share of resources for territorial development.

More specifically, the Territorial Agenda 2030 “provides an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe”, applying to every territory and focusing on people’s wellbeing, underlying the importance of spatial planning to the strengthening of the territorial dimension of sector policies and governance levels (*ibid.*, p. 3). Though most Western Balkan countries are not yet members of the EU, the TA 2030 is equally relevant to territorial governance in the region as it is for long-standing members. Much more than its predecessors, the TA 2030 conveys the message of its proponents also outside the EU area, encouraging the neighbouring countries to notice them and put them in practice at all territorial levels and scales. In fact, by participating in the implementation of TA 2030, Western Balkan actors and countries would reinforce the European perspective of the region also internally, in so achieving greater cohesion and a larger critical mass when negotiating the accession. This would happen through the alignment of territorial development priorities, but also through joint efforts in reducing the gap between the EU and the WB area in terms of quality of life, general interest services, territorial disparities, demographic imbalances, employment, and digital and green transitions. Additionally, TA 2030 actions tackling WB territories could also help decelerate and possibly reverse migration flows from the region towards EU countries, by enhancing the quality of places and empowering local value chains.

Additional fuel to achieve this goal is provided by the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, adopted by the European Commission in 2020. This plan aims to, i.a., support green and digital transitions, backed by a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, in line with the EU Green Deal goal to make Europe the first climate neutral continent in the world. Climate change is expected to raise WB temperatures up to 4°C by the end of the century in a baseline, no-mitigation scenario (IPCC, 2014), followed by extreme weather events, increased occurrence rates of natural disasters, lower energy and water availability (Uvalić and Cvijanović, 2018), biodiversity loss and soil degradation, and social and economic consequences for communities. Economic, green, and digital transition plans aim at counteracting these effects by mitigating them and ensuring a smooth adaptation process with enhanced regional resilience. A region that invests in green technologies and infrastructures, next to promoting cooperation

instead of conflicting competition, will be better suited to steer local economies through the transition. It further means that societal actors should actively interact in polycentric networks of governance and direct their sense of urgency and priority towards the currently poor institutional and financial capacities, accompanied by brain-drain and a loss of quality human resources and workforce. This place-sensitive governance, with policies informed by knowledge and evidence, capable of recognising and even shaping future alternative scenarios of territorial development, would provide an impetus for sustainable development in the Western Balkans, as well as finally merging the region into the EU area.

5. A ROADMAP FOR READERS

After this brief editorial introduction, a number of contributions will discuss various aspects concerning the evolution, consolidation, and challenges of territorial governance in the Western Balkan Region. Their goal is to provide readers with additional information concerning the nuances that characterise the countries composing the region, considering it in various scales and from different perspectives. Here we provide a quick roadmap that readers may follow, in order to become acquainted with the contents of the various contributions before starting exploring them in more detail.

The first three articles focus on territorial governance policies as developed and implemented in a number of Western Balkan countries. The first contribution, by Ana Peric, Siniša Trkulja and Zora Zivanovic, proposes a comparative analysis of the European Union's territorial policy trends in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and reflects on how these countries are progressively moving from a conformative to a performative logic in their actions. The authors explore to what extent EU pre-accession has influenced both the formal regulative frameworks and the spatial planning practice in the two countries, and in so doing, they unveil a mismatch between the declaratively adopted EU territorial trends and the actual place-based needs. The second paper, written by Ledio Allkja and Kejt Dhrami, shifts the geographical focus of the special issue to Albania and Kosovo, reflecting on how spatial planning is used there to contribute to the territorial governance of cultural heritage. They discuss how the intensity of urban development, combined with low levels of institutional capacity, has put cultural heritage under increasing pressure. Adopting a comparative perspective to exploring the territorial governance of cultural heritage in both countries, the authors focus on the legal and institutional framework, policies, and stakeholders involved in some way in the protection of cultural heritage. The evolution and consolidation of the spatial governance and planning system of Slovenia constitutes the focus of the third article. In her work, Naja Marot offers an account of 30 years of

legal and institutional reforms in the country, reflecting on how the influence of the EU has contributed to the incremental consolidation of a territorial governance approach that is characterised by a mix of regulatory processes and plans.

After that, the special issue features two contributions concerning more closely governance related aspects. Firstly, through her work, Sonja Dragović explores the role that local, grassroots initiatives may have in propelling territorial governance changes in Montenegro. She discusses how these initiatives have gained importance, in recent years, in articulating the interests of local communities towards the preservation of the common good. Dritan Shutina and Rudina Toto focus their contribution on the territorial rescaling of governance in Albania towards a more polycentric model. More specifically, they analyse local-to-national case studies, investigating fragmentation, interdependencies, and functional mismatches by assessing territorial disparities and governance reforms that have occurred in the last 30 years.

The last three contributions shift the focus of the special issue to the investment mechanisms that accompany and back territorial governance processes. The contribution by Vesna Garvanlieva Andonova, Marjan Nikolov, Ivana Velkovska and Ana Marija Petrovska examines the territorial development agenda of North Macedonia and its orientation towards economic growth, discussing the effects of full capital budgets to address the present infrastructural gaps. The authors do so by testing several hypothetical scenarios of full capital budget utilisation that are expected to positively contribute to an immediate economic growth, as well as to produce longer term benefits. A peculiar EU investment instrument, the Integration Territorial Investments, constitute the focus of the analysis of Ivana Katuric and Sven Simon. In particular, they discuss the role that the adoption of this instrument in the Croatian context had for the development of strategic spatial planning activities, with particular reference to a number of case studies, by dint of the possibility to promote coordinated territorial development and governance within functional urban areas. Finally, Giancarlo Cotella and Erblin Berisha open the perspective to drivers and influences from outside the region, exploring the logics of China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Western Balkans, in terms of the vision, priorities, sectors and volumes of investments, and means of implementation, and compares them with those underlying the EU integration process. In so doing, the authors question whether the increasing inflow of resources, attached to different development priorities and implementation means, may progressively weaken the role of the EU in the region and, in turn, slower the region's integration with the EU.

The special issue concludes in a commentary by Peter Nientied and Dritan Shutina, who reflect on how the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic may trigger innovation in the tourism field, with particular reference to the Western Balkan Region. The contribution uses the creative destruction and innovation framework to reflect on the possible changes that may affect tourism consumers' behaviour, the spatial effects that these changes may bring along, and how the latter may result in an increasing attention to the concept of tourism resilience.

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INVITED ARTICLES

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FROM CONFORMANCE TO PERFORMANCE? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TERRITORIAL POLICY TRENDS IN SERBIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract. As several Western Balkans countries aspire to become members of the European Union (EU) in the (near) future, it is interesting to explore to what extent EU territorial trends are adopted in both the official national regulations and spatial planning practice. To do so, we: 1) screen EU territorial policies to elucidate the trends and principles of territorial development, 2) analyse the contents of spatial plans in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 3) compare the practical application of the principles such as decentralisation, diffusion of power, subsidiarity, multi-actorship, synergy, transparency, citizen participation, coordinated action (among various disciplinary bodies), and holistic strategies. The findings show the ineffectiveness of declaratively adopted EU territorial trends against place-based territorial policy approaches.

Key words: territorial development, spatial planning, vertical coordination, multi-sectorial cooperation, multidisciplinary cooperation, Western Balkans.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Despite the number of different programmes and strategies triggering the episodes of Europeanisation of spatial planning among EU Member States (Adams *et al.*, 2011; Stead and Cotella, 2011; Cotella, 2020; ESPON, 2018), bodies at the supranational level, e.g., the European Commission (EC), have never been officially recognised as the competence holders to develop EU territorial policies. Consequently, Member States are not obliged to follow EU-defined principles and priorities of territorial development. Nevertheless, since the need for coordinated development was acknowledged as one of the highest priorities, many EU Member States have adopted the crucial EU territorial policies despite their non-binding nature (ESPON, 2013, 2017).

The extent to which the adopted policies are effective in practice is related to the notable duality between the ‘conformance’ and ‘performance’ (Faludi, 2000; Waterhout, 2008; Janin Rivolin, 2008; Stead, 2012). Many EU Member States have adopted fundamental principles – sustainable development, territorial cohesion, strategic planning, good governance – in their national spatial plans and strategies. However, the effectiveness of EU territorial policies depends on the way how European input has been translated and adapted into national settings (Purkarthofer, 2019). As expected, the implementation of EU principles is far more demanding than their pure inclusion in national documents.

Western Balkan (WB) countries¹ seem to be more complicated in this regard (Belloni, 2016; Börzel and Grimm, 2018; Džankić, 2019). The WB is not officially obliged to fulfil any EU standards. However, as most WB countries are candidates for EU membership,² a relevant approach would be to follow EU guidelines and prepare relevant pre-accession chapters timely. Though WB states are persistent in undertaking steps towards EU integration (Elbasani, 2013; Vučković and Djordjević, 2019), the issues of territorial development and spatial planning are not well addressed in EU enlargement policies, as the first set of documents with which one should comply. As a result, each WB state interprets EU policies and programmes focused on the territorial dimension and adapts these to national developmental conditions (Cotella, 2018; Cotella and Berisha, 2016; Trkulja *et al.*, 2012).

With this in mind, we assume that spatial planning in WB is shaped by EU trends in territorial development. To explore the extent of domestic acknowledge-

¹ For the purpose of this research, we consider the following countries as part of the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo* (*UN Security Council Resolution 1244 from 1999). This region is also known as the Western Balkans 6 (WB6), as adopted in several European Union policies.

² EU candidate countries are: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, while potential candidates are: Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo* (EC, 2020).

ment of EU territorial policies, we intend to determine what has been addressed, i.e., the topics and scales of cooperation, and how the recognised trends are proposed to be applied (e.g., through different forms of vertical or horizontal cooperation). In other words, we aim to identify the principles inscribed in both the substantial and procedural aspects of territorial development as given in the spatial planning regulatory frameworks of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although once part of the federal state of Yugoslavia, these countries nowadays differ in terms of their 1) accession status to the EU (Serbia is a candidate country, whilst Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered a potential candidate), hence depicting different stages of compliance to EU territorial policies, and 2) territorial organisations, which also affect different administrative bodies competent for spatial planning. Informed by the overview of the main trends and principles covered in the domestic spatial planning documents, the paper further examines the similarities and differences in translating EU trends into spatial planning practice in the selected WB countries. Ultimately, this will elucidate the dichotomy of the ‘conformance’ to EU standards and their actual implementation.

The paper is structured as follows. After introductory remarks, we identify the trends and principles related to the procedural aspect of territorial development in the crucial EU territorial policies prepared to date. Followed by an insight into the methodological approach applied, we provide an overview of the leading spatial planning documents of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina. More precisely, we focus on national spatial development plans as the core elements inscribed in the planning traditions of the mentioned countries, which thus represent the key instruments of their national spatial planning systems. The comparative analysis helps elucidate to what extent the mentioned cases apply EU principles related to the procedural aspect of territorial development – revolving around vertical coordination, multi-sectorial cooperation, and multidisciplinary cooperation – in their planning practice. Finally, the findings on the relationship between EU trends and their national performance are observed through the lens of the broader socio-political conditions of WB.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION TERRITORIAL POLICIES: AN OVERVIEW OF TRENDS AND PRINCIPLES

To elucidate the procedural aspect of territorial development in the EU spatial planning narrative, i.e., to identify different forms of vertical coordination and horizontal cooperation, we provide a brief chronological overview of EU territorial policies. The cross-cutting issues and principles of crucial EU territorial policy documents are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Trends and principles of the major EU territorial policy documents

Documents	Cross-cutting issues and principles
<i>Territorial Agenda 2030</i> (EU Ministers, 2020)	• functional regions • integration beyond borders • place-based approach
<i>Urban Agenda for the EU</i> (EC, 2016)	• effective urban governance • integrated and participatory policy making • citizens' participation • new models of governance
<i>Integrated sustainable urban development – Cohesion policy 2014–2020</i> (EC, 2014)	• dynamic environment of multiple governmental and non-governmental players • engagement of different territorial scales
<i>Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020</i> (EU Ministers, 2011)	• territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions • economic, social and ecological balance • mutual trust and social capital
<i>Urban Dimension of Cohesion Policy</i> (EP, 2009)	• bottom-up principles in urban policy implementation • vertical and horizontal governance • inter-sectorial partnerships and communication
<i>Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion</i> (CEC, 2008)	• functional approach to integrated territorial development • place-based policies • cross-sectoral policy coordination • multi-level governance • cooperation between territories to strengthen European integration
<i>Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities</i> (EU Ministers, 2007)	• cooperation between states, regions and cities • horizontal collaboration among sectorial agencies • consensus between public authorities, citizens, and economic actors
<i>European Spatial Development Perspective</i> (CSD, 1999)	• intensive and continuous collaboration of various stakeholders important for spatial development

Source: own work.

Evidently, *territorial governance* is one of the umbrella concepts that spans over different principles introduced in the documents covered in Table 1. The concept comprises two notions: multi-level politics and governance, closely connected to understanding the governmental hierarchy, as well as 'functional spill-over,' respectively (Böhme *et al.*, 2015; Bache and Flinders, 2004; Perić, 2019). Regarding the multi-level governmental hierarchy, the focus is on formal authority being spread from the nation states to both supranational institutions and sub-national authorities. The aspect of governance focuses on single-purpose functional jurisdictions, i.e., specialised, task-specific organisations (governmental and non-gov-

ernmental) which criss-cross judicial boundaries (Piattoni, 2016). In the domain of EU studies, such a transformation refers to the integration process, emphasising not only the role of Member States and the EU, but explaining how the system actually works (Faludi, 2012).

A closer consideration into documents reveals three tendencies towards better territorial governance: addressing jurisdictions at different territorial scales (from neighbourhoods to macro-regions); the involvement of relevant stakeholders (private sector, local economy, public officials, civil society, and citizens) to strengthen democracy through increased participation; and cross-sectorial horizontal cooperation (between the bodies in charge of different aspects, e.g., transport, environment, demography, and economy, as related to spatial and territorial development). Based on this, we have recognised three broad categories related to the procedural aspect of territorial development: 1) vertical coordination (among administrative bodies at various territorial scales), 2) multi-sectorial cooperation (between public, private, and civil sectors), and 3) multidisciplinary cooperation (among various sectoral bodies in charge of preparing policies with spatial/territorial effects). In the empirical part of the paper, the principles associated with the mentioned categories will be firstly identified in national spatial planning documents and their implementation in the spatial planning practice shall be further discussed.

3. CASE SELECTION, RESEARCH MATERIAL, AND METHODOLOGY

Separated by the Drina River, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are two neighbouring WB countries with many cultural similarities and a common historical background as they were part of the same state over the centuries. Notably, spatial planning systems in both countries have been inherited from former Yugoslavia, a decentralised federal state composed of six republics, each with their own planning laws and spatial plans. The preparation of the first Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia started in 1968 and it was only adopted in 1996 with a timeframe of until 2010, while the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted in 1981 setting 2000 as the end of the timeframe.³ After the fragmentation of Yugoslavia after 1991 and civil wars in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the latter faced a serious reorganisation of its government and territorial structure, seen in two entities (the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), and one district (Brčko district),⁴ as depicted in Fig. 1.

³ This plan is still in use because the draft of the new spatial plan was not adopted in 2014 as it was previously planned.

⁴ This administrative organisation was an outcome of the Dayton peace agreement, which put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995.

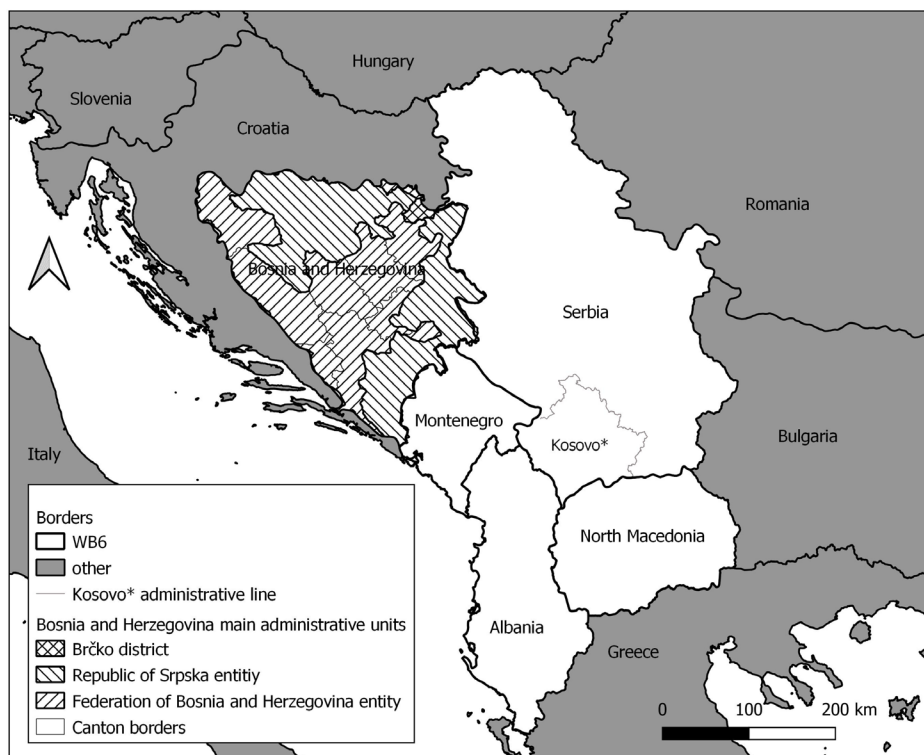


Fig. 1. The spatial organisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the WB6

Source: own work.

Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina differ in terms of their territorial and administrative structures, a fact which also affects the levels of government competent for spatial planning. In Serbia, there are five territorial and administrative layers: republic, province (*pokrajina*), district (*okrug*), local self-government unit (*jedinica lokalne samouprave*), and local commune (*mesna zajednica*). Administrative and operational functions of districts and local communes are very weak, while the republic, an autonomous province, and municipalities have institutions responsible for spatial planning. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the administrative structure comprises the state, two entities (with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina divided into ten cantons), one district, local self-government units (cities and municipalities), and, finally, local communes. Spatial planning institutions and responsibilities appear at all levels except the state and the local commune levels.

As the highest administrative tiers responsible for spatial planning are republic and entities (in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively), the paper focuses on a comparative analysis of the three cases – the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This proves

particularly interesting given that territorial organisation and spatial policies in the Republic of Srpska, although being part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are more like those in Serbia (Bijelić and Djordjević, 2018). For the empirical analysis, we have selected the crucial national/entity spatial planning documents – two currently (as of April 2021) valid spatial plans and one which attained the final phase of its adoption: Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010–2020 (OG RS 88/2010), Spatial Plan of the Republic of Srpska 2015–2025 (OG RoS 15/2015), and draft Spatial Plan of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2008–2028 (FMSO, 2013).

To collect the relevant data, we relied on personal professional experience,⁵ used the insight into the main primary sources (the national/entity spatial plans of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), additional primary sources (e.g., legal documents in relevant domains, and supplementary regulation), as well as secondary sources that place the data from the primary sources into specific contexts.

The documentary analysis, as the primary method used in the research, will follow a two-step process. Firstly, to analyse conformance with EU trends in the selected WB countries, we shall analyse selected spatial plans to identify the substantial aspect of territorial development, i.e., topical coverage (e.g., sustainable development, territorial cohesion, and nature of land-use policy), and the scale of territorial cooperation (e.g., from local to supranational). We shall also identify the proposed procedures for implementing the mentioned topics and classify them under previously identified three categories: 1) vertical coordination, 2) multi-sectorial cooperation, and 3) multidisciplinary cooperation. More precisely, we shall address the following principles: 1) decentralisation, diffusion of power, and subsidiarity; 2) multi-actorship, synergy, transparency, and citizen participation; and 3) coordinated action (among various disciplinary bodies) and holistic strategies (including different topical domains). Thus, we shall identify the extent to which EU territorial trends inform the domestic substantial and procedural aspects of territorial development.

Secondly, we shall analyse the performance of EU trends in the selected WB countries using additional primary sources (relevant legal and regulatory frameworks of the selected WB countries) and secondary sources (academic literature by domestic scholars) that interpret and, thus, offer a better understanding of the domestic spatial planning contexts. To illuminate the real implementation of the declared EU territorial trends, we shall particularly focus on the procedural aspect of territorial development, comprising the categories of: 1) vertical coordination, 2) multi-sectorial cooperation, and 3) multidisciplinary cooperation. The overview of the associated principles is done through a comparative analysis of the spatial planning practices of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁵ The authors of the paper have actively participated and/or monitored the preparation process of some spatial plans designated as the analytical units of research.

4. CONFORMANCE WITH EU TERRITORIAL TRENDS: AN INSIGHT INTO SPATIAL PLANS IN SERBIA AND IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

By studying the aims and visions as presented in the spatial plans in the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we address the substantial and procedural aspects of territorial development as proposed in core national policies. More precisely, we examine whether the principles under the categories of topical coverage and the scale of territorial cooperation (substantial aspect), as well as under vertical coordination, multi-sectorial cooperation and multidisciplinary cooperation (procedural aspect) are interpreted in the plans and if so, to what extent. Table 2 summarises the adoption of the main EU trends in national spatial plans.

Table 2. The substantial and procedural aspects of territorial development in the spatial/entity plans of the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Aspect	Categories / principles	Republic of Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
S U B S T A N T I A L	<i>Topical coverage</i>			
	sustainable development	•	•	o
	territorial cohesion	•	•	o
	nature of land-use policy	•	•	o
	<i>Scale of territorial cooperation</i>			
	cross-border	•	•	o
	interregional	•	o	o
	supranational	•	o	o
P R O C E D U R A L	<i>Vertical coordination</i>			
	decentralisation	•	o	o
	diffusion of power	•	o	o
	subsidiarity	•	o	o
	<i>Multi-sectorial cooperation</i>			
	multi-actorship	•	•	o
	synergy	o	o	o
	transparency	•	o	o
	citizen participation	•	o	o
	<i>Multidisciplinary cooperation</i>			
	coordinated action	o	o	o
	holistic strategies	o	o	o

• addressed o partially addressed ○ not addressed

Source: own work.

4.1. The Republic of Serbia

The currently (as of April 2021) valid Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia addresses the period between 2010 and 2020 (OG RS 88/2010).⁶ As the second spatial plan prepared for the republic stratum,⁷ it is based mainly on the preceding plan (OG RS 13/1996) and its planning proposals. However, the new plan applies an updated methodology: it provides strategic guidelines binding for elaboration in lower-tier spatial planning documents. The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010–2020 was prepared in two years, involving a comprehensive team of experts from various sectors, several thematic round tables, and public hearings on its draft plan. It contains the vision, five goals, and many sectoral objectives.

4.1.1. Substantial aspects of territorial development

The overarching idea of the plan supports the principle of sustainable development grouped into environmental, social, and economic chapters. According to EU recommendations, territorial cohesion should be achieved through balanced regional socio-economic development based on efficient regional organisation and coordinated regional policy. An innovative cross-sectoral chapter on transboundary territorial cooperation recognises cross-border, interregional, and transnational cooperation. Land-use policy is considered a task for lower territorial units, while the national spatial plan addresses only four core land types (agricultural, forest, water, and construction areas). The proposed land-use policy is of a strategic nature: it offers the main directions of formulating the future territorial policy and reserves the land for a specific use of national importance, e.g., infrastructure corridors, natural and cultural protected areas, water accumulations, mining areas, etc.

4.1.2. Procedural aspects of territorial development

The plan explicitly lists the principles of decentralisation, division of power, and subsidiarity as prerequisites for more efficient spatial planning decision-making. However, the region is considered only a territorial stratum and not an administrative unit. In addition, the plan does not include mechanisms which would indicate how to achieve active participation of lower jurisdictional levels in solving complex spatial problems.

⁶ The Draft Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2035 is under the process of public inspection (5 April – 5 May 2021).

⁷ Since the dissolution of the Federal State of Yugoslavia in 2006, Serbia and Montenegro have continued to operate as independent countries, with the republic as the highest territorial and administrative tier that has since corresponded to the national level.

The basic principles of multi-sectorial cooperation are given in the plan as follows: 1) active implementation of the spatial development policy by public participation, through the permanent education of citizens and administration, 2) the development of instruments for directing the activities of spatial planning, and 3) the development of service functions (agencies or non-profit organisations) at the municipal and/or city levels to consolidate all spatial development actors and create synergy. In terms of institutional responsibility, the plan requires the development of legally stipulated, locally conditioned informal forms of participation in the decision-making process (involving citizens and their associations, spatial development actors, associations, and political parties). This should resolve the conflict concerning the public-private relationship and generate further support for implementing policies, strategies, and plans collaboratively.

The plan proposes a multidisciplinary approach by recognising diverse areas of spatial development, yet through the lens of separate topics and without attending to cumulative spatial effects of many sectoral domains. For example, the proposal of a transport infrastructure corridor lacks an acknowledgement of nature protection: the Požega–Užice motorway should pass between two national parks, Mokra Gora and Zlatibor. Furthermore, the economy is observed apart from the territory and settlements. Demography has continued to be studied through extensive analysis without enough impact on planning proposals. The development of social services lacks innovative approaches towards sustainable development. GIS systems based on spatial development indicators are a tangible tool for coordinated action among different disciplines. They enable an evidence-based approach with the monitoring of trends and promote a better quality of planning proposals in the forthcoming plans.⁸

4.2. The Republic of Srpska

After the first spatial plan for Republic of Srpska was adopted in 1996, and the second one in 2008, the currently (as of April 2021) valid plan was amended in 2015 for the timeframe until 2025. In terms of its contents, the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Srpska 2015–2025 (OG RoS 15/2015) has many similarities with the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010–2020,⁹ mainly seen in its structure (vision, five goals, and many sectoral objectives) and topical coverage. In short, the plan focuses on the pragmatic implementation of objectives and goals towards the overall vision.

⁸ A 106 indicators have been tentatively defined in the spatial plan, further elaborated in the implementation programmes and finally calculated in annual and biannual Reports on Spatial Development and Realisation of the Spatial Plan in the Republic of Serbia.

⁹ Most of the experts who prepared the Serbian spatial plan have also actively collaborated on the development of the spatial plan of the Republic of Srpska.

4.2.1. Substantial aspects of territorial development

The principle of sustainable development is considered the backbone for structuring spatially relevant activities around three pillars – the economy, environment, and social development. The concept of territorial cohesion is viewed holistically: cohesion is perceived as a balance between economic, social and territorial factors that can jointly act as a tool against a post-socialist market influencing diverse social, territorial, and cultural resources. The translation of the Europe-scale forms of territorial cooperation is relatively weak: e.g., the supranational territorial cooperation is presumed only to happen as cross-border cooperation. The land-use policy is pragmatic in its nature: the key instruments in this regard include urban regulation plans, plans for special-use areas, and municipal and city plans for land use outside the urban settlement area.

4.2.2. Procedural aspects of territorial development

As the Republic of Srpska lacks an intermediate governmental or statistical level, vertical coordination is not the focus, suggesting the main channel of communication between the national and local levels in a top-down approach. Decentralisation is not an issue, as the plan lacks the operationalisation tools for empowering local governments to address the spatial problems affecting their administrative areas.

However, the plan proposes a relatively comprehensive horizontal cooperation to be pursued through different networks: 1) cooperation between diverse institutions (Chamber of Commerce, public enterprises, agencies, institutes, offices and operators for infrastructure, social services, statistical office, and cadastre), 2) joint activities among the entity ministries, and 3) cooperation among the spatial planning institutions in the other entity (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and neighbouring countries as well. In addition, the final chapter of the spatial plan refers basically to the implementation through the spatial plans of smaller territorial units like special-use areas and municipalities.

Multidisciplinary cooperation among various institutions and organisations aimed at concerted actions and holistic visions is superficially addressed in the spatial plan. Social development strategy needs more operationalisation mechanisms, while the conventional economic development strategy lacks attention to other sectors. Infrastructure as the backbone of spatial development is not focussed sufficiently to reduce existing spatial conflicts. Nevertheless, and similarly to the spatial plan of Serbia, the indicators are defined as a tool for more accessible data collection and an improvement of spatial development policies towards fostering overall development.

4.3. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The draft Spatial Plan of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2008–2028 (FMSO, 2013) is quite different from the spatial plans of Serbia or of the Republic of Srpska, foremost due to a specific administrative set-up of the entity. Namely, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of ten cantons, each with an independent legal system. Therefore, in addition to the law on spatial planning at the entity level (OJ FBiH 45/2010), there are ten laws valid for every canton. The Federation's spatial plan has not been adopted yet (as of April 2021), although the draft version was finalised in 2012 and a part of the enactment procedure was undertaken until 2014, though not concluded. Since then, the approval of the draft spatial plan has been delayed. The planning approach applied in the draft plan is conventional: the regulatory dimension of spatial planning based on steering the development and addressing the present problems is emphasised compared to long-term spatial visioning.

4.3.1. Substantial aspects of territorial development

Regarding topical coverage, the plan acknowledges neither the concept of sustainable development nor territorial cohesion to a greater extent. Instead, such topics as population, land policy and infrastructure are highlighted, although not coherently. Land-use policy is not the subject of this plan. As for macro-regional territorial cooperation, the cooperation across various geographical and jurisdictional levels (cross-border, interregional, and transnational) is not considered in the plan.

4.3.2. Procedural aspects of territorial development

Vertical coordination is not an element of the entity's spatial plan, as the intermediate administrative and territorial level – canton – has a vital role in spatial planning decision-making. Notably, in the absence of entity strategic spatial plan, the adopted cantonal plans provide the direction for the development at lower levels.¹⁰

As the chapter on implementation is missing, the elements of multi-actor cooperation are not envisioned in the plan. The closest step towards implementation and, hence, proposed collaborative approaches promoting the inclusion of different sectors, tackles planning proposals and plans for smaller territorial units within the sectoral chapters of the spatial plan.

¹⁰ Cantonal plans are of a strategic nature: they do not define land use but give a framework for municipal spatial plans and urban plans, i.e., land-use and zoning plans, respectively. Municipal spatial plans are land-use oriented for the zones outside settlement areas as covered by urban plans.

Similarly, the multidisciplinary approach is omitted. Extensive population analysis is not connected to or made usable for the domains of land policy or infrastructure. The social and economic policy is not well incorporated in the plan, whilst the environmental aspect of development is inferior. The infrastructural network does not fit the territory to enable its development but rather provides spatial-transport conflicts. Finally, the draft plan defines no spatial development indicators.

5. TOWARDS THE PERFORMANCE OF EU TERRITORIAL POLICY IN SERBIA AND IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA?

The above analysis confirms the initial hypothesis that the spatial plans in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina consider EU territorial development trends yet to varying extents: Serbia seems to pursue a far more proactive approach than the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the question remains whether the nature of adopting the trends is declarative or real. In the following paragraphs we shall place the EU spatial planning narrative into the spatial planning contexts of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. More precisely, we are going to compare the principles inscribed in the procedural aspect of territorial development, i.e., these associated with the following categories: 1) vertical coordination, 2), multi-sectorial cooperation, and 3) multidisciplinary cooperation. In doing so, we will elucidate: the coordination between administrative bodies at different territorial strata; the involvement of stakeholders other than public authorities in the spatial planning decision-making; and the organisation of spatially relevant activities among sectoral departments.

5.1. Vertical coordination

The principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity are only recognised in Serbian spatial documents. However, this is in discrepancy with the actual spatial organisation in Serbia, which operates in a centralised manner, with the national (republic) level in charge of spatial planning, whilst the regional level (districts) is considered merely a territorial and not an administrative unit. More precisely, regional spatial plans in Serbia refer to groups of districts with very weak institutions, except for the autonomous province of Vojvodina and the administrative territory of the City of Belgrade. Therefore, the national administration in charge of spatial planning takes the leading role in creating regional plans (Maruna *et al.*, 2018). The attempt to pursue the ‘shift from government to governance’ has been recognised in the crucial Serbian laws relevant for spatial development. Namely, the Act on Local Self-government Units (OG RS 47/2018) identifies local

self-governments as being responsible for preparing municipal and city spatial plans. However, the lack of professional capacity makes cooperation with national-level bodies weak (Zeković and Vujošević, 2018). Similarly, the Act on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (OG RS 30/2018) has introduced a bottom-up approach as the necessary type of cooperation among jurisdictional levels and, thus, established a framework for territorial governance. Nevertheless, such an approach has not yet taken root in practice (Maruna *et al.*, 2018).

The spatial plan of the Republic of Srpska does not address coordination or dialogue among administrative units, which is reflected in the jurisdictional organisation of the entity: the regional level between the entity and municipalities is entirely missing. Consequently, the national government subordinates local authorities in the process of spatial planning decision-making (Bijelić and Đorđević, 2018).

The draft plan of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not explicitly prescribe the need for power diffusion. However, due to the specific territorial organisation of the entity, the principle of decentralisation is applied in an advanced manner compared to Serbia and the Republic of Srpska. Notably, the regional level units – cantons – are essential for spatial planning as cantonal authorities are responsible for preparing cantonal spatial plans. Due to the lack of the official federation spatial plan, cantons play a key role in steering spatial development at lower administrative and territorial strata (Jusić, 2014).

What is typical for all the cases is the inferior position of local administration in planning and decision-making. The top-down coordination – from the national/entity towards the local level in Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, respectively, and from the cantonal to the municipality level in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – prevail over the bottom-up approach (Zeković and Vujošević, 2018; Bijelić and Đorđević, 2018; Bojičić-Dželilović, 2011; Maruna *et al.*, 2018). The reason behind such a discrepancy between the norms proposed in the plans and spatial planning reality is the complexity inscribed in the coordinative effort – an acknowledgement of data from the local plans, their synthesis, and adaptation for use at the regional and national levels require various resources, mainly time and expert skills. Hence, moving beyond the general narrative on a bottom-up approach means establishing a mid-governance level with competence in spatial planning. Ultimately, this enables the introduction of a regulatory framework that promotes a new planning paradigm focused on territorial governance, thus dismissing the firmly rooted tradition of government, i.e., a top-down approach.

5.2. Multi-sectorial cooperation

All the cases (though to various extents) indicate the public sector as the most active actor, whilst the private and non-governmental sectors' participation is supported declaratively in documents, yet rare in reality. The spatial plans recognise

the need to bridge that gap, however, clear and transparent mechanisms to achieve multi-actor efforts are missing (Bijelić and Đorđević, 2018; Jusić, 2014). Poor public response results from the complex nature of spatial plans and excessive use of technical jargon, finally disabling citizens and other stakeholders to grasp the main ideas as presented in plans.

In comparison to both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia seems to make a shift in this regard, as its spatial plan instructs the promotion of local initiatives (educational, and social and cultural services and activities) adjusted to the needs and interests of the local population. The document also recommends introducing incentive measures for the active involvement of citizens and civil society organisations in planning and creating partnerships between local authorities and civil society. Such efforts have been formally supported by the Act on Planning and Construction (OG RS 145/2014), which introduced the mechanisms of early public inspection and public inspection, enabling the public to have an insight and offer comments for a draft and the final plan, respectively. The reality is significantly different: participation only serves to provide legitimacy for the planning procedure, planners usually neglect the citizens' input, which, eventually, results in mistrust among the general public to institutions (Čukić and Perić, 2019; Perić, 2020a, 2020b). Notably, lacking the mechanisms for effective involvement of stakeholders other than governmental institutions, public support to decision-making becomes more declarative. Therefore, to boost the proper participatory process, the first step is to make plans user-friendly so that citizens and any interested party can understand the visions proposed in a plan. The public reaction will then logically follow. Also, the previously mentioned data processing based on spatial development indicators can be done by non-governmental organisations or private consultancies, not only the public sector.

5.3. Multidisciplinary cooperation

An integrated, comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to sustainable spatial development is mostly neglected in the analysed spatial plans. In the federation's draft plan, multidisciplinary cooperation is rudimentary and it is not applied in practice. In Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, while they implement proposals from the plan, the integration of different sectors does not occur mainly due to a considerable complexity of data collection and its analysis when coming from more than one institution (Bijelić and Đorđević, 2018). For example, the Serbian spatial plan proposes tourist routes in central Serbia near the cultural heritage areas. However, the implementation programme¹¹ is highly fragmented as it lacks

¹¹ Implementation programme is a document that identifies stakeholders relevant for the implementation phase of planning proposals.

a coordinated timeframe for execution, involvement of interdisciplinary agencies, and joint financial sources. Such elements became part of the methodological procedure of strategic planning introduced by the Act on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (OG RS 30/2018), binding for strategic spatial plans.¹²

In addition to a pragmatic perspective on collaborative activities between various disciplines, the holistic and comprehensive approach can also be seen at a rather abstract level. More precisely, an insight into the topical coverage of three spatial plans elucidates a weak to moderate relationship between the domains of spatial development and other sectoral policies and their spatial effects (demography, social development, environment, economy, and infrastructure). In contrast, the utmost impact of multidisciplinary cooperation is a balanced representation of sectors and topics, as is the attending to the spatial effects of sectoral policies.

The previous overview of the planning practices of the selected WB countries indicates poor implementation of the principles that promote a more coordinated approach to territorial development, as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Implementation of the principles related to the procedural aspect of territorial development in the planning practice of the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Aspect	Categories /principles	Republic of Serbia	Republic of Srpska	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
P R O C E D U R A L	<i>Vertical coordination</i>			
	decentralisation	o	○	•
	diffusion of power	o	○	•
	subsidiarity	o	○	•
	<i>Multi-sectorial cooperation</i>			
	multi-actorship	o	o	o
	synergy	o	o	o
	transparency	o	o	o
	citizen participation	o	o	o
	<i>Multidisciplinary cooperation</i>			
	coordinated action	o	o	○
	holistic strategies	o	o	○

• applied ○ partially applied ○ not applied

Source: own work.

¹² The Strategy of Sustainable Urban Development of the Republic of Serbia until 2030 (OG RS 47/2019) has been the recent strategy that incorporated the methodological procedure of strategic planning as according to the Act on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (OG RS 30/2018).

In summary, we have confirmed the initial hypothesis that EU territorial policy trends are declaratively addressed in the key spatial development documents of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but poorly applied in planning practice. However, the overview indicates an interesting case of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the draft entity plan does not acknowledge the crucial principles of EU territorial development, it does not prevent the entity from applying its spatial development policy efficiently compared to both Serbia and the Republic of Srpska. Some observations on the reasons behind such a situation follow in the conclusion.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The examination of the territorial development principles in both the official regulations and planning practice of the selected WB states has showed the discrepancy between the Europeanised narrative in the documents on the one hand, and its weak implementation on the other. As prescribed by EU policies, the crucial idea inscribed in the procedural aspect of territorial development is cooperation – between different jurisdictional strata, multiple stakeholders, and experts. The first is, however, tightly related to the territorial organisation of a state. This is the key to understanding why intense vertical and horizontal cooperation cannot flourish easily in Serbia, which inherited the centralised system from the former Yugoslavia, or in the Republic of Srpska, which copied its administrative organisation from Serbia. However, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina wisely used the opportunity to transform its territorial-administrative system after the break with the rules of Yugoslav heritage in 1995. Even without acknowledging the principle of vertical coordination in the draft spatial plan, the federal organisation of the entity genuinely contributes to implementing some European territorial governance trends.

The relationship between the declarative adoption of EU trends and the extent of their actual implementation should also be viewed through the lens of both internal and external tensions. The former result from the lack of a democratic political culture and independent institutions, and a dominance of the authoritarian regimes in both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bojičić-Dželilović, 2011; Perić, 2020a). Within such political systems, cooperative spatial planning decision-making efforts are considered a threat, not the desired type of social action.

External pressures arise as WB countries are not (yet) EU Member States, thus allowing other international factors to play a decisive role when entering domestic actor-networks. For example, the Republic of Srpska is highly politically influenced by the Republic of Serbia, in addition to the previously mentioned influence of Serbian planning experts and their continuous consultancy in addressing the spatial problems of the Republic of Srpska. The Federation of Bosnia and Her-

zegovina has another role model for its territorial organisation, again outside the EU: Switzerland with its cantonal structure. Finally, spatial development in the entire Balkan region is interesting to many foreign non-European players – from China investing in the Balkan route of the Belt and Road Initiative, to Russia, which has been financing the railway development between Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey as a sponsor of the railway line between Sarajevo and Belgrade, and American consortiums in support of a road line between Niš (Serbia) and Pristina (Kosovo*), and further towards Tirana and Durrës, in Albania (Bijelić and Djordjević, 2018; Perić and Niedermaier, 2019; Miletić, 2020). Such international stakeholders demand strong national leadership as the key partner for executing the mentioned transboundary initiatives. Consequently, the decentralised governance approach and multidisciplinary planning are neglected as they are seen as hindrances rather than facilitators of development.

Finally, when drawing lessons from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for other WB countries, we can highlight two instruments: 1) the cantonal spatial plans of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the main instruments of spatial development, and 2) advanced mechanisms for multi-sectorial cooperation as prescribed in the Serbian spatial plan. As for the former, although cantonal plans hinder the process of adopting the entity's spatial plan, i.e., cantonal plans as strategic documents cover some elements of the entity plan, cantons as mid-territorial scale administrative units with their effective spatial instruments have proven to be a useful link in connecting the federal/national level with the local one. Regarding the latter, the tools for various stakeholders to express their conflicting interests and enable consensus-building are designed to promote social action. Nevertheless, as the analysis has showed, to strengthen cooperation across administrative and institutional boundaries and engage different actors, as according to EU trends, it is necessary for the actors at all jurisdictional strata and all the sectors to actively participate in territorial development. Such an endeavour, however, demands raising the collective awareness of the benefits of cooperative decision-making on the one hand, and a shift of socio-spatial settings from proto-democracy, on the other. The fulfilment of both conditions is part of a long-term transitional process.

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TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH SPATIAL PLANNING IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

Abstract. Cultural and historical heritage is inextricably linked to territorial capital. Over the years, the recognition of its importance has increased in the political and policy discourse. This paper examines these challenges considering spatial planning policies and instruments, namely “how effective spatial planning instruments are in addressing the goal of protecting and enhancing cultural heritage.” The research is focused on two Western Balkan cases of Albania and Kosovo, and takes a comparative approach, considering the ever-present conflict between “the old and the new”, and between growth and preservation, in the respective capital cities of Tirana and Pristina. Both countries have gone through drastic transformations in their planning systems over the last two decades, with an attempt to shift from traditional rigid urbanism approaches towards more comprehensive and integrated ones. Additionally, the two countries are in similar stages of socio-economic development, which include a trend of concentration and rapid urban development. The findings suggest that while cultural preservation and valorisation is ranked high in terms of planning policies, both countries fail to preserve these values when it comes to land development practices.

Key words: territorial governance, spatial planning, cultural heritage, cultural preservation, urban identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural and historical heritage is inextricably linked to territorial capital. Over the years, the recognition of its importance has increased in the political and policy discourse. SDGs, the UN Urban Agenda Habitat III, the ESDP, the EU Terri-

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torial Agendas (2010, 2020, and 2030), and the EU Urban Agenda are just a few examples of policies on cultural and historical heritage that have been incorporated into international, national, and local policy making and territorial governance. “The protection and enhancement of cultural and historical heritage” is a common objective in all these documents.

The attention put towards heritage conservation and management practices in the last 70 years has been also accompanied by a subtle evolution in interpretation and management of the changes in historic environments (Chen *et al.*, 2020). Such changes are relevant because they emphasise the importance of the social and political context in influencing the local practices of cultural preservation. This paper examines these challenges considering spatial planning policies and instruments, namely: ‘how effective spatial planning instruments are in addressing the goal of protecting and enhancing cultural heritage.’ The research is focused on two Western Balkan cases of Albania and Kosovo, and takes a comparative approach, considering the ever-present conflict between “the old and the new”, and between growth and preservation, in the respective capital cities of Tirana and Pristina. Both countries have gone through drastic transformations in their planning systems over the last two decades, with an attempt to shift from traditional rigid urbanism approaches towards more comprehensive and integrated ones. Additionally, the two countries are in similar stages of socio-economic development, which include a trend of concentration and rapid urban development.

After an initial overview of the international framework that addresses cultural preservation, the research analyses the relationships between spatial planning and cultural heritage in Albania and Kosovo, from legal, institutional, and development perspectives. Next, the focus will shift to local policies and practices in the cities of Tirana and Pristina, with examples of urban transformation and their coherence with national and local spatial planning policies.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Spatial planning, as one of the main tools for achieving territorial governance, plays a key role in respect to the promotion of cultural and historical heritage. Apart from sectoral policies initiated by respective institutions of cultural heritage, it is through spatial planning that these policies are enacted in a territory and become part of the broader territorial development framework. Spatial planning plays an important role in harmonising and smoothing conflicting sectorial policies and their impacts. Hence, it plays a leading role in achieving development objectives for cultural and historic heritage (Dobricic *et al.*, 2016). In the West-

ern Balkans spatial planning is a highly heterogeneous activity, due to the ever-growing dependency on market economic mechanisms (Berisha *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is worth exploring how spatial planning policies targeting cultural preservation are implemented in Western Balkan countries.

Indeed, not only in the Western Balkans but also globally urbanisation trends are growing, which results in increased pressure on cultural and historical heritage in urban areas (Al-Houdalieh and Sauders, 2009). Meanwhile, the growing numbers of tourists and urban visitors are on the one hand raising opportunities for preserving historic urban areas, but on the other the pressure encourages their re-appropriation and use for touristic purposes. This activity increases the economic income of urban areas through tourism while, subsequently, posing new challenges for maintaining cultural and historical heritage (Al-Houdalieh and Sauders, 2009).

An important focus of urban research since the 1980s has been the role of culture and cultural heritage in city development at the global level. In the 20th century, cultural heritage started to be perceived not only as an image, but a pure living evidence of the past lifestyle and knowledge (Nijkamp *et al.*, 1998). This includes the way of living passed from generation to generation, the practices, artistic values and expression, objects, etc. Nevertheless, when discussing conservation strategies, the issue remains problematic. A debate whether the conservation should be active, museum-like or pragmatic persists (Angelidoua *et al.*, 2017).

Under the current circumstances of globalisation, this problem is highlighted in developing countries, like Albania and Kosovo, which face the ambitious challenge of acquiring a competitive advantage in a world marked by globalisation. Gunay (2008) highlighted the idea that with the ascendancy of neoliberalism, cities have become incubators for many of the major political and ideological initiatives, through which city space has been increasingly reorganised by market-oriented economic growth and elite consuming behaviour. This means that cities rely more than ever on the built capital for growth, and to some extent this approach devalues cultural preservation actions. In this sense, it is important to regard the “cultural heritage sector” as a tool for economic development, and integrate it to spatial planning practices.

Spatial planning can contribute in different ways to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. The discourse on the protection of cultural heritage through spatial planning plays an important role in increasing the level of knowledge and awareness of citizens. UNESCO guidelines highlight the importance of urban planning policies in this respect (UNESCO, 2019). Land-use policies support the protection of cultural heritage through restricting development in areas which are sensitive in terms of heritage (Guzman and Roders, 2014).

Nevertheless, financing cultural heritage projects is not always easy. While public and private investments in cultural heritage and cultural tourism can

produce optimal economic returns (Nijkamp, 2012), the use of hybrid financing instruments is optimal for ensuring financial sustainability (Finpiemonte, 2021; Jelincic and Šveb, 2021). Therefore, Financial Instruments of Land Development (FILDs) can offer incentives for the protection, promotion, and rehabilitation of heritage areas.

Lastly, yet not least importantly, these areas can be further promoted through direct investment in rehabilitation projects. Nevertheless, in order to achieve this protection, coordination is necessary between different institutions and stakeholders. Considering the general transition that has occurred in spatial planning from a strictly land-use urban oriented planning towards forms of strategic spatial planning, visions have started to play an important role. A vision is important as it not only projects the future goals for the development of a given space and it supports and directs planning decisions, but also it creates a narrative for involving citizens and other stakeholders, following the idea of a shared European model of society, based on the inviolability of human rights (Faludi, 2007). Spatial Visions play an important role in planning decisions and they are enacted through land-use provisions and other planning instruments.

Hence, one hypothesis that can be developed is that while a city, a municipality, a region, or even a state for that matter, has a vision of sustainable future development, the protection of cultural and historical heritage is incorporated. Additionally, this means that the spatial vision of sustainable territorial development would be enacted in terms of land-uses and other instruments in order to enable the protection of cultural heritage. While from a normative viewpoint this may persist, in reality, conflicts between cultural heritage protection and new development are at the forefront of spatial planning debates. The immense pressures of urban development and the different stakeholder interests are of a growing concern for the future of cultural heritage.

3. INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

Over the years, there has been a growing body of international documents and frameworks that support the integration of cultural and historical heritage in spatial planning. Some, such as SDGs and the UN Urban Agenda, operate at the global level, while others such as the ESDP, the Territorial Agenda, and the EU Urban Agenda operate at the European level. Albania and Kosovo have both committed in terms of implementing SDGs and the UN Urban Agenda. Additionally, both aim to join the EU and as such, many EU Spatial Documents have permeated into the spatial discourses. The below table offers an overview of the main goals, visions, and objectives of the above-mentioned documents.

Table 1. Collection of International Frameworks that address cultural heritage

Documents	Vision / Goals and Objectives
SDG	SDG 11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage
UN- New Urban Agenda	Safeguard and promote cultural infrastructures and sites , museums, indigenous cultures and languages, as well as traditional knowledge and the arts; develop vibrant, sustainable and inclusive urban economies, building on endogenous potential, competitive advantages, cultural heritage and local resources ; promoting planned urban extension, while preserving cultural heritage ; policies that safeguard a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes , and will protect them from potential disruptive impacts of urban development.
ESDP	Development of integrated strategies for the protection of cultural heritage which is endangered or decaying, including the development of instruments for assessing risk factors and for managing critical situations; Maintenance and creative redesign of urban ensembles worthy of protection; Promotion of contemporary buildings with high architectural quality ; Increasing awareness of the contribution of urban and spatial development policy to the cultural heritage of future generations
Territorial Agenda 2007	Strengthening of ecological structures and cultural resources as the added value for development
Territorial Agenda 2020	Wise management of natural and cultural assets
Territorial Agenda 2030	Prosperity based on local assets, characteristics and traditions, cultural, social and human capital and innovation capacities; Natural and cultural heritage is a unique and diverse asset to be protected, managed and further developed; awareness on protection and utilization/re-utilization of cultural assets and other unique values , through instruments of Cohesion Policy.
Urban Agenda for EU	Ensure good governance through all aspects of urban development, including cultural issues ; Urban regeneration, including social, economic, environmental, spatial and cultural aspects .

Source: SDG (2015); ESDP (1999); UN-New Urban Agenda (2017); Territorial Agenda (2007); Territorial Agenda 2020 (2011); Territorial Agenda 2030- A future for all places (2021); The Urban Agenda for EU (2016).

As the above table shows, there is a global and European recognition of the role that spatial planning can play in protecting and enhancing cultural and historical heritage. While the cultural component is addressed in an unspecific way, it generally is quite prominent and covers a diverse range of meanings, from assets, to heritage, architectural and built environment, etc.

4. SPATIAL PLANNING AND CULTURAL HERITAGE GOVERNANCE IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

Spatial Planning Systems in Albania and Kosovo have undergone considerable changes over the years. In an attempt to take a more comprehensive and integrated approach to spatial planning, legal changes have been undertaken in both countries. In Kosovo, the foundations of a new planning system were established in 2004 with the approval of the “Spatial Planning Law”, subsequently changed in 2010. Meanwhile in Albania, the major legal changes in spatial planning occurred in the period 2006–2009, and culminated in 2009 with law 10119 “On territorial planning”. Although later, in 2014, there have been subsequent legal changes, these have not altered the wider framework and aim of territorial planning in Albania. Table 2 offers a comparison of the two countries:

Table 2. Comparison of Institutional and Legal Frameworks in Territorial Planning in Albania and Kosovo

Variable	Albania	Kosovo
Law	Law 107/2014 “On Territorial Planning and Development”	Law No. 74- L174 “On Spatial Planning”
National Level Institutions	National Territorial Council	Parliament of Kosovo
	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	Ministry of Environment and Planning
	National Territorial Planning Agency	Institute of Spatial Planning
National Planning Instruments	General National Territorial Plan	National Spatial Plan of Kosovo
	National Sectorial Plan	Zoning Map of Kosovo
	National Detailed Plan for Areas of National Importance	Spatial Plans for Areas of Special Importance
Local Planning Institutions	Municipal Council	Municipal Council
	Directory of Planning	Directory of Planning
Local Planning Instruments	General Local Territorial Plan	Municipal Development Plan
	Local Sectorial Plan	Municipal Zoning Map
	Detailed Local Plan	Detailed Regulatory Plans

Source: own work (Allkja, 2019).

Based on the comparison one can see that there is a general similarity in terms of institutions and instruments for spatial planning. Both countries operate at the national and local levels, while regional planning is absent. At the national level in Albania, the highest-level institution is the National Territorial Council (NTC), a collegial entity, led by the prime minister, and composed of the ministers responsible for territorial policies, including the ministry responsible for cultural and historical heritage. This institution is responsible for approving the General National Plan of Albania, as well as approving the General Local Territorial Plans. Meanwhile in Kosovo, the highest-level institution is the Parliament of Kosovo, responsible not only for the approval of the legislation in planning, but also the Spatial Plan of Kosovo. Municipal Development and Zoning Maps are approved by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in Kosovo. This is one of the main differences between the two countries – while in Albania they are approved by the NTC, in Kosovo the approval is given by a ministry. Additionally, the National Territorial Planning Agency (NTPA) in Albania and the Institute of Spatial Planning in Kosovo play similar roles in terms of preparing national planning instruments and supporting horizontal and vertical coordination in planning processes (Allkja, 2019).

Respective ministries responsible for territorial/spatial planning lead the process for the preparation of the national planning instruments. These plans are prepared as a joint effort by all ministries and are coordinated by the NTPA and the Institute of Spatial Planning. Institutions at the national level have the competences to establish areas of national importance, including those related to cultural and historical heritage. In Albania this process is done within the General National Territorial Plan (GNTP), while in Kosovo through the Kosovo Zoning Map. Meanwhile, at the local level, the process is similar in both countries, with the only difference being the approval of the plan as mentioned above. The General Local Territorial Plan in Albania is composed of three main documents: the Territorial Development Strategy, the Land-use Plan, and the Territorial Regulation. Meanwhile, in Kosovo, the Development Plan and the Zoning Plan are two separate instruments. These instruments have a broad spectrum of territorial policies and also include issues related to the cultural and historical sectors. Lastly, detailed local plans are quite similar in both countries. The main difference, however, is that Albanian legislation has also incorporated Financial Instruments of Land Development while in Kosovo these instruments are not present. FILDs are important instruments in achieving planning objectives at the local level, including those of preserving cultural and historical heritage. Such instruments, including Betterment Fees, Transfer of Development Rights, Intensity Bonus, etc. may provide a good opportunity for capturing added land value, to allocate it to the local ambitions for preserving cultural heritage (Allkja, 2019).

Both countries have approved their Spatial Planning Instrument at the national level. The table below offers an overview of their visions, strategic objectives, and policies regarding cultural heritage:

Table 3. Comparison of the GNTF of Albania and NSP of Kosovo

Local Plans	Albania- GNTF (2015-2030)	Kosovo- NSP (2010-2020+)
Vision	Albania as an Integrated centre in the infrastructural and Economic European system, with a diverse and competitive economy in the Balkan space. A country that aims at parity of access in infrastructure, economy and knowledge. <i>Ensuring protection of the natural, cultural and historical heritage with the aim of becoming an authentic destination.</i>	A country integrated in the European Union; with sustainable socio-economic development, modern infrastructure and technology, with opportunities for education for all and a skilled workforce; a country that <i>respects</i> the environment, the natural and <i>cultural heritage of its territory</i> and its neighbours; an open society that promotes diversity and the exchange of ideas while respecting the rights of all.
Strategic Objectives	SO3. <i>Ensuring physical and territorial integrity of the historic, cultural, natural and urban landscape</i> in the whole Albanian Territory	SO3: Sustainable environmental development, balanced spatial development, preservation, and respect of resources – natural and <i>cultural heritage of its territory</i> and neighbours
	Creating conditions for the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, natural resources above and below ground, as well as of natural and cultural heritage, by balancing the impacts of settlements and economic activities.	- Planning the space for rational use of the territory - Environmental Protection - Balanced spatial development - Stimulating rural development policies - Utilisation of minerals for a sustainable development - <i>Protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage</i> - Regulation of illegal constructions and informal settlements
Other Policies	Promotion of <i>regional clusters based on cultural and historic heritage</i> ; Protection and promotion of <i>cultural heritage as an asset to support urban development</i> improving <i>access to the cultural heritage</i>	The plan offers a map of protected areas and monuments; however, no reference is made to the approach that urban areas should take in terms of preserving cultural heritage.

Source: General National Territorial Plan of Albania, (2016); National Spatial Plan of Kosovo (2010).

Clearly, in both plans, cultural heritage plays an important role. While in Kosovo there is a more traditional ‘containment’ paradigm, where the plan focuses on delineating protected areas, in Albania the approach is broader. There is a general attempt not only to define protected areas, but also to integrate cultural heritage with other policies such as tourism and urban development.

After considering the spatial planning framework in Albania and Kosovo, understanding also sectoral legislation and the institutional framework in the cultural and historic heritage is important. Table 4 offers an overview of the legislation, institutions, and instruments at the national and local level:

Table 4. Legal and Institutional framework for cultural heritage

Variable	Albania	Kosovo
Legislation	Law 27/2018 “On Cultural Heritage and Museums”	Law 02/88 “On Cultural Heritage”
Definition of Cultural heritage	Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible cultural wealth, as a set of cultural values, bearers of historical memory and national identity, which have scientific or cultural significance	Architectural, archaeological, movable and spiritual heritage, regardless of the time of creation and construction, type of construction, beneficiary, creator or implementer of the work. The scope of the law should be defined for issues specifically related to cultural heritage. Cultural heritage related to or derived from religious denominations will also be governed by legislation governing the status of religious communities in Kosovo.
Institutions	- Ministry of Culture - National Council for the Management of Cultural Heritage - National Inspectorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage - National Institute for Cultural Heritage - National Institute for the Registration of Cultural Heritage - Regional Directorates of Cultural Heritage - Institute of Archaeology	- Ministry of Culture - Council of Kosovo on Cultural Heritage - Inspectorate of Cultural Heritage
Local Institutions	Municipalities	Communes (Municipality)
What is considered cultural heritage?	among others: - immovable and movable property, which have artistic, urban, historical, archaeological or ethnographic interest of special importance	Architectural heritage” consists of: a) Monuments: Constructions and structures distinguished in terms of historical, archaeological, artistic and scientific values of social or technical interest, including movable elements as part of it. b) Ensembles or totality of buildings: Groups of urban or rural buildings distinguished by historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific values, of social or technical interest, in interaction with certain topographic units. c) Areas of architectural conservation: Areas that contain combined works of human hand and nature, distinguished by historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social and technical interest.

Source: Law 27/2018 “On Cultural Heritage and Museums”; Law 02/88 “On Cultural Heritage”.

Based on this overview, one can see that the legal and institutional frameworks for both countries are similar. In Albania, the law recognises the role that spatial planning plays in terms of cultural heritage protection and promotion. The planning instruments such as GLTPs¹ and DNPANI² are considered as instruments that need to incorporate cultural heritage and policies regarding it. In Kosovo there are similar legal provisions. From the coordination standpoint, in Albania, the Ministry of Culture and other respective national institutions of cultural heritage are consulted when planning instruments are prepared.

5. CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SPATIAL PLANNING POLICIES: CASE STUDIES IN TIRANA AND PRISTINA

Tirana and Pristina are the capital cities of Albania and Kosovo, respectively. The cities were only named capital cities in the last century: Tirana in 1920 and Pristina in 1946, following the end of the Second World War, while Kosovo was still part of Yugoslavia. Following the end of the dictatorial regime in Albania (1991) and the end of the Kosovo War (1999), both capital cities faced rapid urbanisation, accompanied by a relevant economic growth tendency. During the first decades of transition, i.e. 1991–2000 for Tirana and 2000–2010 for Pristina, besides the densification of the cities with new construction, informal development also was a common factor (Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning Kosovo, 2010; Allkja, 2019). Planning institutions were unable to coordinate and manage development, even in cases where this was done through legal instruments and construction permits were issued. Planning in the initial stages of the transition was weak and could not respond to the socio-economic dynamics. Both cities quickly evolved into the socio-economic centres of their countries and their populations almost tripled in less than two decades.

The quick population growth was also reflected in the urban fabric. Uncontrolled sprawl occurred in the outskirts of the cities, while within the centres, due to unplanned development, the cities underwent densification with little regard to cultural heritage, or attempts to preserve historic or distinct urban quarters. Most of the development has produced apartment blocks, while recently there is also a growing tendency of high-rise buildings (i.e. over 20 floors) in the city centre as seen in Fig. 1. Construction and densification trends continue to remain high in both cities.

¹ General Local Territorial Plans.

² Detailed National Plans for Areas of National Interest.

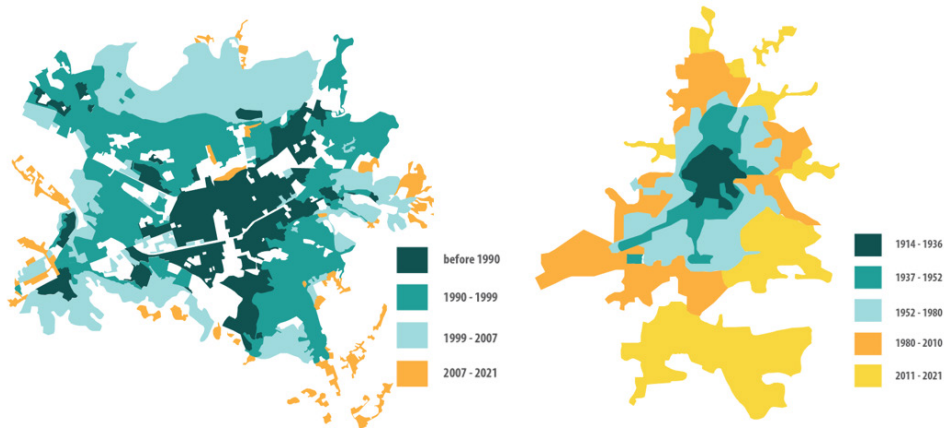


Fig. 1. Urban Development Growth and Extension through time – Tirana and Pristina
Source: own work based on Co-PLAN, 2021; CDP Pristina – Map of Urban Development.

Pristina drafted its Municipal Development Plan in 2012 for the 2012–2022 period, while Tirana drafted its GLTP in 2013, then reviewed it due to the Territorial and Administrative Reform in 2016. Both cities have key planning instruments and they are now working on detailed local plans and detailed regulatory plans. Considering that the plans were drafted and approved in similar timeframes, it is interesting to compare their visions, objectives, and policies regarding cultural heritage. Table 5 offers an overview of that:

Table 5. Vision, Objectives and Cultural protection policies at local level

Local Plans	Tirana	Pristina
Vision	Polycentric and kaleidoscopic metropole in equilibrium between urban and nature	A capital city for a new state; a city for youth; a territory with high quality
Objectives	An intensive and polycentric city an accessible city a city with biodiversity a Mediterranean centre a creative city a smart city an inclusive city A Balkan Garden a 24h city	Sustainable economic development and employment growth in an attractive and creative city Pristina in World Networks Provide citizens with an effective and quality system of public services and a comfortable urban environment Moving people and goods efficiently and steadily Strengthening identity by valuing the historical and cultural landscape Rural development and preservation of natural heritage Towards a new model of urban spatial development

Tab. 5 (cont.)

Local Plans	Tirana	Pristina
Policies on Cultural Heritage	Strategic Project 08- Protection of the Architectural Heritage of the 20th Century: protection of urban and rural landscape identification of areas constructed during different time periods such as ottoman empire; Italian occupation; dictatorial regime; areas with strong identity of villas, buildings, gardens etc collaboration with stakeholders (universities and ministry of culture) to propose new ways of treating the urban landscape	Valorisation of historical heritage (Development of regulatory plans for the city centre and the historic area; rehabilitation of religious and historical sites, etc.); Promotion and development of various forms of tourism: archaeological tourism, eco-tourism or green tourism, taking advantage of nature and beautiful landscape; cultural tourism combined with rural tourism; Expansion of tourist attractions (qualify museums, etc.); Maintenance and creation of tourist infrastructure;

Source: General Local Plan of Territorial Development of Tirana, 2015; Urban Development Plan of Pristina, 2012.

As seen in Table 5, both strategic plans offer clear visions for the development of the respective cities and at the same time have a strong component of cultural heritage. Compared to Pristina, Tirana has expressed its objectives through 13 key projects, one of them being dedicated to cultural heritage, and more specifically to the architectural heritage of the 20th century. This approach seems quite promising and shows that local authorities have an increased awareness in terms of the importance of cultural heritage for the future development of the city.

Despite their similar socio-economic development, the cities of Tirana and Pristina display distinctive typologies of culturally relevant assets and areas. In Tirana, the array of such cultural monuments ranges from traces of historic residential areas in the old city centre to more recently established low-rise housing built in the 1930s in the ‘Italian style’, and a rich catalogue of administrative and recreational buildings built in the 1920s or later. Pristina’s culturally significant areas include developments after the Second World War, which reflect a rare modernist architectural style. In both cities, religious monuments are also considered of high cultural relevance. The maps in Figure 2 show areas with cultural and historic heritage in Tirana and Pristina, as reflected in their respective planning documents. The map of Tirana shows the ‘density’ of culturally relevant buildings within each zoning area, while the Pristina map shows the location of cultural monuments in the territory.

Similarly to the city of Tirana, Pristina also has distinct areas that show a high potential for cultural and historic heritage that could be preserved and enhanced

in the wider general framework of urban development. However, unlike in Tirana, the municipality only identifies the protected historical and cultural heritage.

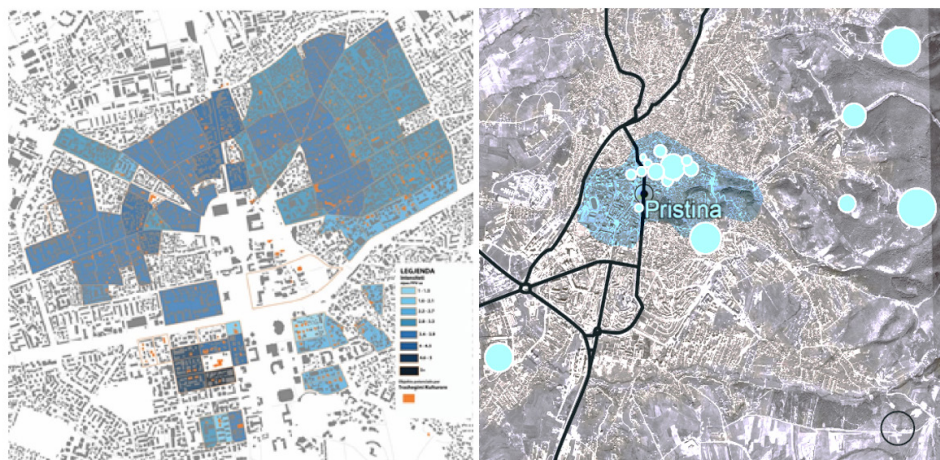


Fig. 2. Potential cultural preservation areas, Tirana and Pristina

Source: Muka, R., 2020 (based on GLTP of Tirana, 2015), edited by authors;
Urban Development Plan of Pristina, 2012, edited by authors.

The Block area in Tirana and “Qyteza Pejton” in Pristina are two of the most intriguing sites located near the city centres, with considerable relevance for cultural and historical heritage. In both locations, low-rise villas were developed in the 1950s, displaying aesthetical and stylistic innovation for the time. The Block Area was reserved for the dictatorial regime’s political leaders and their immediate families. The general public had limited access to this area, and people could only enter if they had a pass. Following the fall of the regime, the block area became one of the most vibrant destinations in the city, with a plethora of recreational sites, as well as office and service outlets. Regardless of the drastic densification processes it has undergone, the area remains one of the most interesting parts of the city, due to its architectural value and symbolism associated with the communist era. The densification of the Block Area has occurred at the plot level, rather than area level, which entails both positive and negative outcomes. In terms of the former, the recent developments have not disrupted the rectangular pattern of the site. For the latter, though, plot-based development has a strong negative impact on the existing urban tissue, it is disproportional in scale and aesthetics, and causes a loss of urban quality.

Similarly, “Qyteza Pejton” was developed with typologies of low-rise villas with high aesthetic and urban quality. During the Yugoslavian regime this was considered as a high-end area, hosting foreign embassies and administration.

After the 2000s, the area became quite a vibrant destination, with several bars and restaurants, and many recreational facilities. In recent decades, there have been several point developments in the area, which do not affect drastically the overall quality of space (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. New high-rise developments at 'Block area', Tirana, disrupting the low-density urban pattern
Source: State Authority for Geospatial Information, 2021.

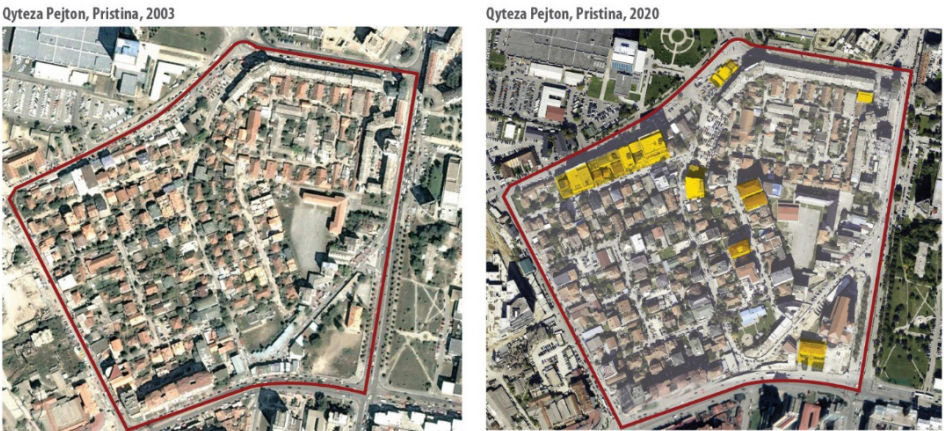


Fig. 4. New Developments disrupting the traditional urban tissue of Qyteza Pejton, Pristina
Source: Geoportal Kosovo, 2020.

If one considers the commitments of municipalities in their planning documents to preserve the cultural built environment, these two sites would thoroughly fit the criteria for cultural and heritage preservation. However, when considering the land-use and density proposals and the local detailed plans of both areas, the opposite occurs. In Tirana, the GLTP proposes for the respective units (zones) of

the Block Area³ an increase in the intensity of development (FAR⁴), ranging from 3.5 to 5.5. This number is very high in regards to the capacity of the roads and public spaces to accommodate such density. These types of intensities suggest a complete transformation of the area from low-rise villas to high-rise developments, thus destroying the existing urban fabric. Similarly, “Qyteza Pejton” is also expected to redevelop, in order to accommodate medium to high-rise developments. Looking at the Local Detailed Regulatory Plan, the area is expected to undergo a complete transformation from a low-rise neighbourhood with modern villas towards a high-rise area with apartment blocks. The Municipality states that this design (Fig. 5) is a compromise between the development needs for high-rises and the existing low-density structure. Though it does commit to preserving some of the existing facades and the general layout (Municipality of Pristina *et al.*, 2011).



Fig. 5. Development Concept for *Qyteza Pejton*

Source: Municipality of Pristina, A-Design, Atelier 4, 2011.

³ For reference, see Structural Units TR 197-TR 201.

⁴ FAR = Floor to Area Ratio, an indicator measuring the total floor area of a building, in relation to the area of the respective plot.

The analysis of these two distinct neighbourhoods shows a clear discrepancy between the expressed visions and objectives of the respective cities, and the ongoing development. On the one hand, they are potential areas for cultural heritage preservation and represent a distinct historical period of the city (though recent), while on the other, the approach by the local authorities in planning does not match the vision and the objectives of the respective local plans. Either case lacks any evaluation or awareness of the value of the places for city development, or any research or policy impact assessment whether the modernise or preserve and use these areas for the development of the city.

While urban planning should take a comprehensive and integrated approach in both countries and cities, the practice continues to regard cultural heritage in an individualistic approach, focused on buildings and objects, rather than the values that certain areas have in the city. Although the two cases presented reflect two small areas in the respective capital cities, the approach seems to be replicated, to some extent, in other cases as well. A clear example of the singular approach to cultural heritage through urban planning in Albania is the large discourse and discontent regarding the demolition of the National Theatre building in Tirana.⁵ In this case, the discussion, led by public authorities, was oriented in two main directions. The National Theatre building, although constituting part of the city centre ensemble, and built in the same time-frame as other buildings, did not have a cultural heritage status, hence the building itself was proclaimed not to have any distinct architectural value. The second direction was to exclude stakeholder groups from discussions and decision-making by directing the whole public discussion and debate towards the needs of the artists to have a performance space, rather than arguing on the building and adjacent space as public property. This ‘smokescreen’ participatory process has been very present in institutional decision-making in Albania in recent years (Imami *et al.*, 2019). The building was destroyed on 17 May 2020 amid protests of citizens and stakeholders and with highly questionable legal actions by the municipality of Tirana.

Similarly, in Pristina, there is a general approach to deal with individual buildings rather than urban ensembles. Historical neighbourhoods are being quickly transformed through private interventions of citizens to expand their living space, as well as through private investment in property development. Hence, individual buildings that do not have a recognised architectural or cultural heritage value (by respective institutions) are quickly being re-appropriated or destroyed thus creating a mixture of developments that do not fit with one another. These transformations, having become substantial covering the majority of the area, have led

⁵ Part of the public discontent was the expectation that the new theatre would be financed through PPP and that 6-7 towers would be constructed adjacent to the new modern building. After the demolition of the old theatre and the following public outcry, the developer was withdrawn from the project and the construction of the new theatre has been postponed until further notice.

to a complete revamping and change in the city structure and the historical values of the neighbourhoods, while singular buildings that have a protected status are left as stand-alone buildings in the middle of new developments. Additionally, although legal provisions allow the use of Financial Instruments of Land Development, there is no evidence of their use in either of the cities. These instruments offer great opportunities and prospect in terms of supporting certain areas with additional funding and schemes for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage areas.



Fig. 6. National Theatre of Albania

Source: Leeturtle via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Theater_of_Albania_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Theater_of_Albania_(cropped).jpg) [accessed on: 21.05.2021].

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we investigated the ways in which cultural heritage is incorporated in territorial and spatial planning in Albania and Kosovo. The focus was to examine the extent to which cultural heritage is preserved and enhanced through spatial planning practices in developing countries. Our findings suggest that there are significant discrepancies between the legal and institutional framework provided at the local and national levels and the actual development and land management processes. We discovered that cultural heritage is a priority in both Tirana and

Pristina, as specified in their respective ‘city constitutions,’ or municipal territorial plans. Nonetheless, the cities have failed to systematically incorporate cultural heritage in city initiatives or capitalise on it as an asset. On the contrary, in both cases areas of vast cultural interest have been redeveloped to accommodate new residential or commercial uses. This not only contradicts the engagement of the cities towards spatial planning at the EU and national levels (as well as the local level), but it also shows that ad hoc land development practices supersede the relevance of cultural heritage preservation, both in the eyes of land owners and local government.

In order to compensate for this pure economical factor, the municipalities need to develop capacities to enforce and implement land development instruments, such as transfer of development rights, betterment fees, Bonus Intensity, and other value capture instruments. While the legal milieu has been established for over a decade for these instruments, and their success has been continuously proven in even more challenging contexts in Latin America and Asia in the past 30 years, these implementation attempts have failed so far. Participatory planning has also failed as it has become a merely bureaucratic process. In Tirana, there are signs of a failed democracy, following the events of the demolition of the National Theatre. It is time to empower communities and capitalise on their dynamics and liveability in order to enforce better bottom-up decision-making at the city level. Fundamentally, as explained by Gunay (2008), what we leave behind today will be the living evidence of our lifestyle and knowledge for future generations.

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THE SLOVENIAN PLANNING SYSTEM 30 YEARS LATER: LESSONS LEARNT AND LESSONS NOT LEARNT

Abstract. After gaining independence, countries such as Slovenia put a lot of effort into adapting their legislations to new market conditions. While concentrating on legislation, they often dismissed several other factors which influence policy and decision making. Among them, a particularly important role is played by the Europeanisation of planning, and the turn towards a higher flexibility of processes and land uses as opposed to the predetermination via zoning. While shedding light on these issues, this paper reflects on the incremental evolution of the Slovenian spatial planning system from the approval of the first Spatial Planning Act in 2003 towards a territorial governance approach characterised by a mix of regulatory processes and plans.

Key words: spatial planning system, planning law, Europeanisation, Slovenia, territorial governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the European spatial planning community Slovenia is usually considered a “country from the Eastern block” (Maier, 2012). The country gained independence in 1991, and the ministry responsible for spatial planning focused on planning legislation as the core transformation tool of the planning system. In 1991, the existing planning legislation (originally dating back to 1984) was adapted to the then new political and market conditions, and in 2003 the first new Spatial

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Planning Act (ZUreP-1, *slo. Zakon o urejanju prostora*) was adopted. In 2007 another law, the so-called ZPNačrt (*slo. Zakon o prostorskem načrtovanju*) followed, and in 2017 yet another one (ZUreP-2, *slo. Zakon o urejanju prostora 2*). Altogether, in the 30 years of Slovenia's independence, the framework of the country's spatial planning system changed four times. From socially oriented spatial planning to strategic planning; from strategic to zoning, and in the latest change to a hybrid model. In the last ESPON project on territorial governance in Europe, the Slovenian system was similar to those of German-speaking countries, Mediterranean (Greece and Italy), Baltic and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia), categorised as following the logic of "market-led neo-performative system" (Berisha *et al.*, 2021). More precisely meaning that land use rights are established by general municipal plans, but the binding plans that assign spatial development rights are specific for small areas thus verified on a case basis.

According to planning discourses in Slovenia, there is a general agreement among professionals and in the academia as to the type of spatial planning the state should enable and support. On the one hand, policymakers (depending on the prevailing political option) and the private sector argue that a good and functioning spatial planning system supports and fast-tracks investment. On the other, planning professionals aim for more strategic-oriented, evidence-supported planning in the direction of collaborative and integrative planning (Pogačnik, 2005; Gajšek, 2018). What both sides agree on is the presumption that the change of legislation will result in these aspirational changes of the planning system – through the altering of planning practice and documents. Nevertheless, Buitelaar *et al.* (2011, p. 928) questioned this approach noting that "planning laws are usually made with good intentions but do not always lead to good results – at least not when measured against their own goals." Why is this the case? Specialists in the theory of sociology of law, such as Weber (1964), Luhmann (2008) have argued that laws should reflect the needs of society to be legitimate and effective. This contention has been confirmed by several authors in spatial planning field (McAuslan, 1980; Black, 2002; Needham, 2007; Baldwin and Black, 2008; Van Dijk and Beunen, 2009).

In addition to changes in planning law, another factor should be considered relevant to the shaping and transformation of the Slovenian planning system in last 10 years – Europeanisation. The term was first mentioned by Ladrech in 1994, who described the impact of the EU on internal political discourses in France. Nowadays, there are different interpretations of the term: some understand it as the development of different governance structures at the EU level (Boerzel and Risse, 2007), whereas others suggest that it represents the process of dispersion and the institutionalisation of rules, processes, political paradigms, and common values. More to that, it names the process when regulation, first adopted in the EU, is then transmitted to Member States (Gualini, 2003). In the planning sphere many authors have addressed this issue (Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2011; Luukkonen,

2011; Faludi, 2014); with some being country specific and discussing EU influence on national planning systems (Duehr and Nadin, 2007; Ragmaa and Stead, 2014; Tulumello *et al.*, 2020). Although planning is left to Member States to govern independently, the EU prepares some guidelines via strategic documents such as the Territorial Agenda 2030 (Informal meeting of ministers, 2020), and also provides financial support, which indirectly acts as an important tool for exchange of knowledge, learning, and, consequently, soft changes of the system as well (Purkarthofer, 2016).

In Slovenia, Europeanisation of spatial planning has been first addressed by Peterlin and Kreitmayer McKenzie in 2007, and lately by Marot in 2018, who elaborated on the EU's impact on the planning system, planning terminology, and education. Apart from spatial planning, authors have addressed various other topics: influence of the EU on states and policy making (Mansfeldova, 2011; Geddes *et al.*, 2013; Fink-Hafner *et al.*, 2015; Komar and Novak, 2020), economy (Fenko and Lovec, 2015), foreign policy (Kajnč, 2011), education system (Fink-Hafner and Deželan, 2014; Klemencic, 2015; Mikulec, 2019), and more directly connected to planning, by focusing on Natura 2000, as one of the most evident impacts of EU legislation on Slovenian territory (Marot *et al.*, 2013; Šobot and Lukšič, 2020).

Based on this, this article discusses the role of Europeanisation in the process of transforming the spatial planning system against the traditional conviction that a planning law is in the heart of the matter. By dint of its short independence path, Slovenia can serve as a good example to elaborate on the subject. The results section is divided into three parts: in the first, the evolution of Slovenian planning law is described for the whole period of 20 years. In the second, the emphasis is given to the 2000–2010 period and its evaluation with the help of Regulatory Impact Assessment, while in the third part, it is shown how Europeanisation has influenced the shaping of Slovenia's planning system since 2010. Finally, the discussion reflects on how the role of the planning law in the transformation of the planning system has lately become of lesser importance in comparison to other factors, such as Europeanisation, and what the stakeholders have or have not learnt from this.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evolution of Slovenian spatial planning is described based on the regulatory impact assessment performed in 2010 (Marot, 2010, 2011) for the 2000–2010 period, and several studies (indirectly) related to the evaluation of the planning system for the period from 2010 to 2020. The results of the studies are for both periods reported for four major topics: understanding the legislation, institutional setting, legitimacy and public participation, and new paradigms. These topics resonate with how the

role of planning law is shaping the planning system and how this corresponds to the assessment elements defined in the regulatory impact assessment from 2010.

The data for 2010 was collected using a survey conducted with municipalities (55 out of 210 participated), 11 interviews with planning professionals, and participation of the articles' author in the planning process, and planning-related events. The data from the questionnaires, interviews and legislation analysis apply to both the 2003 and 2007 laws; some components of the 2003 law remained valid until 2017. The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions regarding the comprehension of the law, administrative planning capacities of municipalities, relationships and co-operation between actors at different administrative levels, the openness of the planning process, the implementation of the planning development goals, and so on. Participating municipalities covered 34% of Slovenia's surface and 44% of its population as of 30 June 2009. These municipalities need to follow and implement the duties set in the planning law regardless of their area or population, or their individual administrative capacity. The tasks of interviewees included running the process of municipal spatial plan preparation, preparation of development plans, detailed site plans, spatial development conditions, etc.

The interviews were conducted in person in 11 planning companies, geographically distributed around Slovenia, in December 2009 and January 2010. Individual interviews consisted of 21 open questions dedicated to the state of the planning system, approaches to and experiences of the planning process, co-operation levels and the quality of the same between planning system actors, the understanding of the planning law, and an overall evaluation of the planning legislation and planning system. On average the interviewees had 17 years of planning-related experience and had, therefore, operated under the jurisdiction of all three pieces of legislation that had come into force since 1984.

The evaluation of the situation in 2020 was executed based on several studies by the author about Slovenian planning communities such as the Evaluation of the implementation of the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia (Golobič *et al.*, 2014), research on terminology of new planning paradigms (Marot, 2014), and the preparation of the last report on spatial development in Slovenia (not yet published). Unfortunately, the same comprehensive regulatory impact assessment as in 2010 has not been conducted as it has not yet been acquired by the ministry.

3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM

The law initiated in 2003 (Spatial Planning Act, 2003) introduced three administrative levels of planning, and two types of planning documents: strategic and implementation documents (see Table 1). All municipalities were required to adapt

new municipal spatial plans. The state should have prepared the national spatial development strategy (released in 2004) and develop detailed plans in case of state infrastructure projects. In an innovative way, the law foresaw the intermediate planning level, by introducing the regional concept of spatial development as a connecting link. This assumed two forms. First, horizontally, between municipalities (the administrative reform after 1991 resulted in an increase in the number of municipalities from 64 to eventually 212), and then vertically, between national and local levels of governance. Although the intention of the act/policy makers was to focus on strategic planning, the success was only partial since no such concept was adopted (three were prepared in a draft version). The Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia (Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, 2004), which was derived from the 2003 act, was one of the few constants of the Slovene planning system, and it established the national spatial development objectives and priorities that were still in place in 2020.

Table 1. Overview of planning documents according to the three Spatial Planning Acts (2003, 2007, and 2017)

Level	Main aim	2003 (ZUreP)	2007 (ZPNačrt)	2017 (ZUreP-2)
National	Strategic	The Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia Spatial Order of Slovenia	National Strategic Spatial Plan	The Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia Action programme for delivery of the strategy (Spatial Order of Slovenia)
	Detailed	National detailed site plan	National spatial plan	National spatial plan National detailed site plan
Regional	Strategic	Regional conception of the spatial development	–	Regional spatial plan
	Detailed	Intermunicipal detailed site plan	–	–
Local	Strategic	Strategy of the Spatial Development of the municipality	Municipal strategic spatial plan Intermunicipal spatial plan	Municipal spatial plan (strategic)
	Detailed	Municipal Spatial Order Municipal detailed site plan	Municipal spatial plan Municipal detailed site plan	Municipal spatial plan (detailed) Municipal detailed site plan

Source: own work.

Any attempts to rely on the strategic aspects of planning were diminished only four years later when, because of the change of the government, a new planning law was enacted. As the legislator argued at the time, the main reason for adopt-

ing this law was to accelerate the planning process and enable faster issuing of building permits. The new law (ZPNačrt, 2007) abolished the regional level of planning, and instead a rational of decision making (e.g. security of the potential investor) was seen as the one and only important principle of the planning system. Thus, the result of the planning process should be land use plans which would inform investors under what conditions land could be developed. Accordingly, the names of the plans were changed and the powers in the planning system were shuffled – the state gained more responsibility for overseeing what municipalities and other sectors were doing.

The Spatial Planning Act 2017 resembled the law from 2003; planning was once again envisioned as a three-level activity with regional spatial plans acting as strategic intermediaries between national and local levels. At the national level, two instruments were introduced with the purpose of easing the planning process, and at the local level more emphasis was placed on detailed plans and land use zoning. By now 182 out of 212 local communities have adopted municipal spatial plans. However, this has been done in the period of the last 20 years and under different spatial planning acts' jurisdiction, which means these plans are of various names (and types) and content structure. A major novelty of the 2017 Act was that it required better horizontal co-operation at the national level (two new organisational arrangements to be put in place) and the establishment of a centralised spatial information system, which would be a basis for monitoring spatial development.

4. PLANNING SYSTEM IN THE 2000–2010 PERIOD

4.1. Understanding Slovenian planning laws

In the first step of the assessment, I was interested as to whether planning stakeholders understood the substance of the law and what action they undertook accordingly. Comparison of the texts of the 2003 and 2007 laws focused on issues of terminology and highlighted certain differences between the documents. The lists of professional terms were the same for fewer than half of the items (12 out of 25 terms), and the definitions for the rest of the terms differed, thereby adding to confusion as to how terminology was used in the field. Only a few of the respondents had not encountered problems with comprehensibility related to interpreting the laws. Around 36% of the respondents were familiar with the contents of the 2003 legislation, whereas less than a third (27%) were familiar with the contents of the 2007 legislation. The difficulties experienced by the respondents are illustrated in Fig. 1. The identified problems included: an unclear division of tasks amongst actors (ministries, municipalities, etc.) in the planning system, and ambig-

uous and complicated legislative text. Confusion was also reported to have already existed with regards to basic terminology, e.g., with the words used to name plans (two possible options), defining the phenomenon of dispersed settlements, and the functional lot of a building, a construction lot, and other facilities. The survey participants revealed that they had been coping with the problems by consulting the ministry responsible for spatial planning, namely the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, neighbouring municipalities, and planning companies.

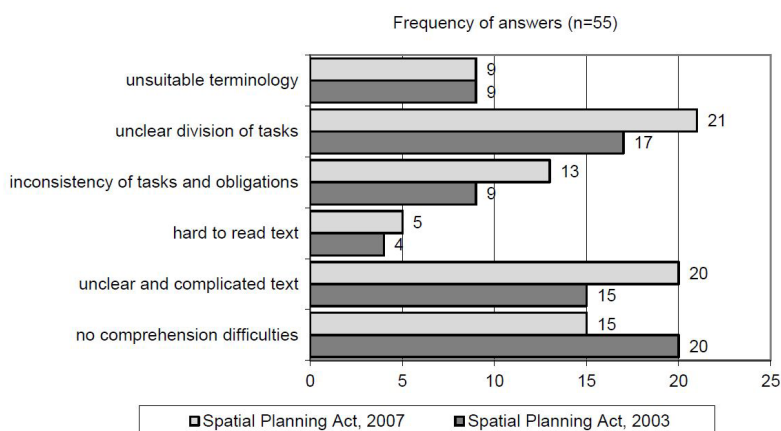


Fig. 1. Difficulties in comprehending the law, as reported by the survey participants (Marot, 2010)

Source: own work.

4.2. Institutional setting

In theory, if a legislator considers existing administrative structure and its capacity, no major obstacles should emerge during the implementation of the spatial planning law. Furthermore, the implementation of legislation is a feasible exercise. The 2003 Planning Act evenly distributed planning responsibilities across national, regional, and local levels, but from 2007 onwards, the majority of obligations have been centralised in the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. The Ministry and sectoral bodies have assumed control with regards to determining draft municipal plans and have strongly interfered with the final contents of such plans.

Research has shown that assorted municipalities (whether viewed individually or collectively) have insufficient human resources to conduct the responsibilities demanded of them (Fig. 2). Previous planning legislation mandated, for the first time ever, the employment of a municipal planner in every municipality, but this measure was not fully enforced. Municipalities also varied significantly in terms of their administrative arrangements for their planning departments. Some

of them had individual planning departments, others only employed one person who covered public utilities and infrastructure, whilst others still hired external contractors to serve as urban planners.

Due to the restrictions introduced by the public employees' law, which was formulated in response to the 2008 economic crisis, municipalities were prohibited from appointing new employees who could have confidently tackled the new challenges (e.g. climate change or mobility) that arose from spatial management. Alternatively, municipalities could act upon the low governance capacity accordingly to the Local Self-Government Act (2007) and establish joint administrations for planning. In 2010 only a few municipalities did this, which was understandable as this 'solution' was suggested to the newest municipalities who had just fought for administrative independence from their neighbourhood municipalities; given this, they were in no mood to immediately thereafter co-operate with them.

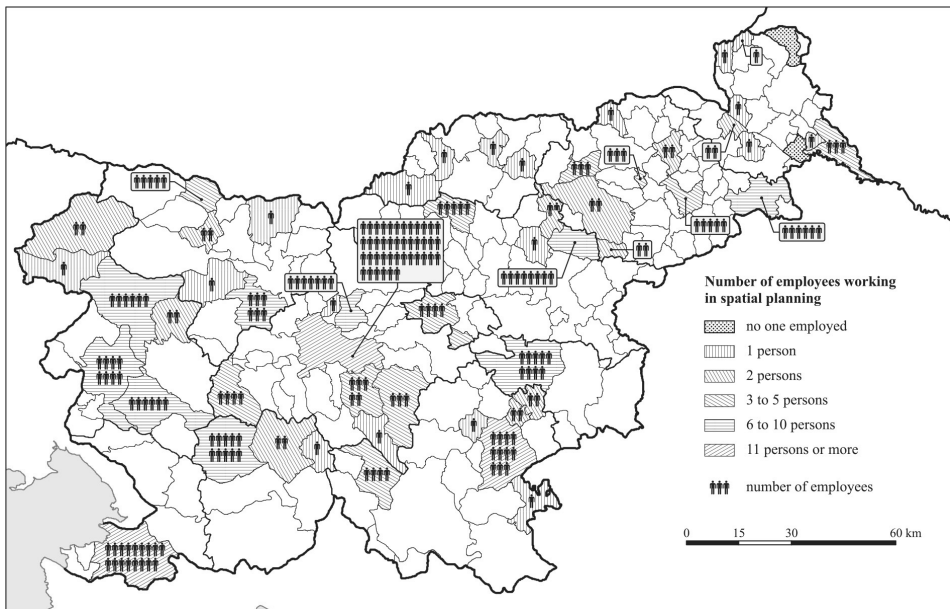


Fig. 2. Capacity of Slovenian municipalities to carry out the planning legislation (Marot, 2010)

Source: own work.

Apart from the lack of planning employees, deficiencies in funding for planning activities, e.g. studies, etc., were another problem encountered by the municipalities. Whilst their financial resources have continued to decline over the last decade, this study's interviewees suggested that the municipalities had been moderately successful in terms of how proactive they had been in gaining EU funding or attracting investors. Only 5 out of 55 municipalities which participated

in the survey had actually participated in any EU projects before. Furthermore, the municipalities which already had been EU project partners were the ones with the status of a city municipality (only 11 such municipalities among 212). Even the information gathered for all the municipalities did not show any better performance – in the period 2005–2008 only 10 out of 210 were engaged in the INTERREG IIIB project (a project which exposed those involved to processes of transnational exchange of knowledge and planning practices).

4.3. Legitimacy of the system and public participation

Legitimacy indicates the values and norms present in a planning system, and especially the perception of the planning system by its actors. With regards to the legitimacy of the legislative system, the drafting of the 2007 Act was driven by the political will of the ministry responsible for planning. Practically no or very little support for the renewal of the planning law was solicited from planners and academics since they were still in the process of delivering what the 2004 law demanded. Stakeholders were excluded from the legislative process and were only invited to public hearings, during which few of their suggestions for improvements were considered. In accordance with Arnstein's (1969) ladder, the public participation score that this process would gain would be (level) four out of eight, i.e., consultation. Furthermore, no feedback to stakeholder comments was provided, and overall, the consideration of public proposals was significantly low. As a result the associations derived from the survey for the planning legislation were either negative or neutral. The respondents mostly stated that the planning legislation was confusing and excessively complex, thereby preventing both understanding of and trust in the law.

Table 2. Phrases used to describe planning legislation

Neutral associations (21)	Negative associations (23)
– Spatial Planning Act (8)	– Lengthy procedures of municipal plan, preparation and adoption (6)
– Municipal spatial plan (5)	– Problems, difficulties (6)
– Spatial plan, spatial act (3)	– Complexity of procedures, bureaucracy (6)
– Planning (3)	– Constant changes in legislation (4)
– Construction Act (2)	– Incapacity, organisational chaos of the government (2)
– Detailed municipal plan (2)	– No monitoring
– Spatial planning framework (2)	

Source: own work.

The transparency of the planning system has been deemed relevant because it enables the examination of the level of information exchange and deliberation in the planning process, as well as in process of the formulation of planning

legislation. The planning process was more open following the 2003 legislation because it introduced the planning conference concept at the beginning of the plan preparation process. As a result, it gathered all interested parties and supported the process of (municipal) spatial plan preparation from initiation to completion. Since 2010 only basic provisions (e.g., public hearings and the public display of plans) have been implemented after a supplemented draft of the plan was made available. This accounted for approximately two-thirds of all procedural steps.

Overall, in 2010, the level of public participation in Slovenia was low and reached only the second stage – defined as consultation – of the five-level scale (from inform to empower) applied by the *International Association for Public Participation*. This was concluded based on information provided in the survey conducted among the municipalities. On the one hand, modern public communication techniques (e.g., an online interface of adopted municipal plans) were implemented; on the other, public hearings were traditionally announced in newspapers and billboards. Some planning companies have introduced alternative techniques for engaging local people, such as workshops, public lectures, and project councils. Most advanced municipalities have introduced a supervisory board, which comprises planning experts that support municipal councils and mayors in planning decisions.

4.4. The (new) paradigms in practice

In the survey from 2010 I was also interested in the extent to which to the municipalities had transferred the new planning paradigms into their strategic documents and thence into everyday practice. In 2010, sustainability and sustainable development were perceived as the main principles to be adapted by planning actors while making their decisions about strategic projects, planning interventions, and the likes. A comparison of the legislative texts (2003 and 2007) revealed similarities in the spatial planning objectives with regards to balancing development and conservation needs, controlling settlement, rational land use, and “sustainable development” goals. In addition, the 2007 law also emphasized the importance of renovation instead of building anew, the need for regeneration of degraded areas, and the importance of securing the public health of all citizens; which could also contribute to sustainability. At the time, only half of the municipalities brought forward the sustainability goal as important for their own spatial development, 14 of them mentioned quality of life, and 13 the rational use of the land as crucial spatial development objectives. The sustainable development principle was recognised as relevant, however, it was also noted that it could not be pursued in practice if the mayor was the one in charge of the planning decisions. Especially so, if the mayor usually put the investors’ wishes first.

The practitioners argued that although they saw the social appeal of the sustainability for the planning practice, the sustainable development objective was too general and strategic, and misused by the inhabitants, professionals, and politicians. According to them, these groups might use the term, though they did not really know the real meaning of it. As one interviewee stated: “You just write sustainable development as a goal (...) like they put on each product label it has no cholesterol in it”. In general, one could argue that the study showed that the principles were correctly integrated into the policy documents and plans, but that they were not put into practice.

5. PLANNING SYSTEM IN THE 2010–2020 PERIOD

In this section a reflection is provided on how Europeanisation has influenced the planning system and its elements over the last 10 years. This is achieved by discussing the progress that has been achieved upon the same thematic points raised and discussed in Section 4.

5.1. Understanding the Slovenian planning law

The last planning law was adopted in 2017, 10 years after the previous one. This is against the ‘rule of thumb’ which claims that 10 years is needed to fully implement planning legislation and make it operable in the planning system (Dekleva, 1999). With the 2017 law, the legislators aimed for comprehensiveness which resulted in a very long legal act of 303 articles in total, compared to the previous act which only had 113 articles. Furthermore, the legislature decided to redefine some of the basic terminology, and for some reason introduced two synonyms for two different types of municipal plans, namely Slovenian “občinski načrt” and “občinski plan”, thereby causing confusion. One step in the direction of solving the terminology and comprehension issues among the planning community was the publishing of the planning glossary in 2016 (Mihelič *et al.*, 2015). In addition, in order to improve understanding of the legislation, the ministry responsible for planning frequently issues FAQ explanations as official interpretations of the law and professionals discussed open issues in meetings.

5.2. Institutional setting

In comparison to the previous period, the planning departments of municipalities have not, according to observation, changed their human capacities much. However, what has transpired when compared to the previous human resources

situation, is that many municipalities have established the so-called development offices. These offices have emerged having the task to prepare applications for EU funding, e.g. Interreg, Cohesion funds, etc., and at the same time participate in EU projects when a municipality acts as a project partner. Although this change might not be directly relevant to the planning process and the planning law, it indirectly creates an added value to planning. More precisely, such projects tend to broaden the horizons and knowledge of municipal administrators and workers, who would otherwise be trapped in their daily administrative routines. The projects offer an intermediary and support exchange of good practices, as well as enable benchmarking and networking for further co-operation.

In addition to “European offices,” many municipalities have now appointed a municipal urbanist (required by law), who can be either contracted as an external consultant or a permanently employed person. A second solution for the problem of low human capacity is the establishment of joint municipal administrative offices, an option already mentioned in the section 4.2. In 2020, there were 52 joint administrative office, 9 of which are also performing the tasks of territorial governance. In addition to the planning-oriented joint offices, three administrative units address environmental issues.

5.3. Legitimacy of the system and public participation

Compared to 2010, the participative dimension of planning has improved significantly. This is mostly not an outcome of the planning legislation (the obligations for public participation are more or less the same as in the previous law), but because of the practice brought by EU projects, e.g., INTERREG, and more knowledge being available to planning actors regarding the forms of participation. Although this does not apply much to the official planning process – the preparation of plans – it does apply to other planning initiatives, such as the preparation of development strategies. INTERREG projects have, in particular, initiated further engagement strategies with the general public and the relevant stakeholders. Participation activities include: assessment of the current situation in a local community/region, expression of the population’s needs, and providing feedback on strategic proposals or on good practices. These have brought planning closer to the public, almost to the extent to which the latter are overwhelmed by all the initiatives and invitations, and do not want to co-operate anymore.

5.4. The new paradigms in practice

The last 10 years have yielded good results in the implementation of new planning concepts. Resilience, smart cities, and circular economy have all entered the planning discourse in Slovenia. Most commonly this has happened through EU

INTERREG (prevailing) and H2020 projects, which have addressed these concepts in both theoretical and practical ways.

In the case of the new planning concepts' transposition, the disagreement among stakeholders also occurs because the planning society simply does not want to deal with yet another concept when they have not sufficiently implemented the previous one yet. For example, resilience was introduced as a response to climate change, although sustainability had not been fully enforced. For Slovenia in general, one can claim scepticism to such new concepts which was also confirmed in the study about resilience, done by Marot (2014). The survey showed that 10 of the 24 respondents believed that resilience was not a new concept, instead it was just a different interpretation of existing concepts such as sustainability or vulnerability.

The practical approach to the emerging new concepts is via project activities, which usually follow the logic of analysis, strategic thinking, and pilot actions. In such projects the spatial plans or other strategic development documents are screened to identify to what extent they already integrate the elements of a singular concept. For such exercises, Kajfež Bogataj *et al.* (2014) on climate change and adaptability, Marot *et al.* (2019) on green infrastructure, and Marot *et al.* (2020) on resilience of tourism sector to COVID-19, have shown that planning concepts are not integrated in the strategic documents and if they are, they are not followed by measures or incentives which would enable implementation.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first discussion point of this paper is that Slovenians really believe in planning legislation and its power to steer institutional change. At the same time, however, practice offers no proof of this (Marot, 2010, 2020; Gajšek, 2019). In fact, they care so much about the legislation that they easily forget about other elements of the planning system which could contribute to a better planning practice. Activities intended to evolve better planning practice include the initiatives for building the administrative capacities in the municipalities, seminars about public participation techniques and/or acquiring of EU funds, etc. These measures are all related to the institutional framework, its soundness and performance efficiency, and are related to domestic matters (Cotella and Stead, 2011). The excessively frequent adoptions of completely new planning laws do not allow municipal planners to transfer the provisions of the laws into practice. As the survey by Marot (2010) has proven, they mostly just resent the law (and the legislators) and act in a "business as usual" manner; the result is that the legislature does not see its planning system transformation goals realised. As Table 3 shows this has not changed in between the periods.

Table 3. Comparison of the 2000–2010 and 2010–2020 periods and the influence of Europeanisation on the spatial planning system

Elements of the planning system	2000–2010	2010–2020
	Period with no significant impact of Europeanisation, mostly planning law influence	Period with a more significant influence of Europeanisation
Understanding the legislation	Problems with continuous changes of the law No coherence with the previous law	Problems with continuous changes of the law Glossary on planning terminology published No coherence with the previous law
Institutional setting	Planning offices mostly understaffed Only a few joint municipal administrative offices Only few municipalities participate in EU projects Minor transnational knowledge exchange	Establishment of several joint municipal administrative offices Establishment of municipal development offices in addition to existing planning offices to absorb EU fund Transfer of good practices (transnational exchange)
Legitimacy and public participation	Modest public participation Moderately opened planning process	Increase in use of participative techniques Openness of planning process increased
New paradigms	A small number of paradigms: sustainable development, cohesion General approval about the sustainable development goal	A plethora of paradigms: smart cities, green infrastructure, resilience, adaptability, cohesion, etc. Mostly disapprobation with the new paradigms, only slow transposition into the planning practice

Source: own work.

In contrast, the soft approaches advanced by the EU have proven much more effective and can be seen, according to Duehr *et al.* (2007), as an instrumental influence of the EU. For example, the reorganisation of the municipal departments to apply for EU funds and the change in the practices of public engagement offers proof that a slow shift towards a more open and collaborative system of planning is occurring. Yet again, planning legislation cannot claim responsibility for this change. Various practices of public participation have been implemented by stakeholders at all administrative levels, and the public more or less enthusiastically shares its own ideas and needs in the development process. In addition, the relationship to civil society has changed; now it is seen as an equal stakeholder in the planning process. However, as the latest governmental moves have shown, the

scale of engagement still largely depends on the current government and its view towards public opinion.

As for the transfer of paradigms and their integration into the planning process, the so-called discursive influence (Cotella, 2020), Slovenia is moderately perceptive. While researchers and the ministry's representatives are on track following the ideological shifts and narratives outside of the country, local communities do not follow the discourse at the same speed. Previous research (Marot, 2014; Marot *et al.*, 2019) has shown that the society is sceptical of the new concepts for several reasons: they more or less represent a recycling of existing concepts, and actors have no capacity to adjust to a new concept every five years.

To conclude, Slovenian spatial planning system is in a unique situation which is neither path-dependent nor Western-inflicted. The mixture of hesitancy towards system changes, contradicting expectations towards planning from opposing political parties (while they are in charge), and a traditional neglect of spatial planning as a relevant political topic have resulted in ad hoc and slow adjustments of the spatial planning system. After joining the EU, the changes of the system were accelerated by various incentives. These incentives have been both arbitrary – an obligation to transpose EU directives – and voluntary – through the implementation of EU Inter-reg projects and other transnational initiatives as argued by Peterlin and Kreitmayer Mckenzie (2007). These projects offer new knowledge, as well as the transnational exchange of spatial planning practices, instruments, and processes. As learnt from the Slovenian example, the transformation of the planning process is an on-going process, steered by many intentional and unintentional factors. As McLoughlin argued already in 1969, changes within the planning system, like a change of the planning law, take long to manifest themselves. Consequently it should not be approached in a hectic manner, e.g., by changing key legislation every seven years and naively expecting major changes to be carried effectively. A more conservative approach to legislative change is evident in, for example, Germany and the Netherlands which, in the last 30 years, have been considered to possess very rigid and persistent planning systems (see, i.a., Muentert and Reimer, 2020). In Slovenia, 30 years after gaining independence, it is evident that some positive changes have occurred, however, further work is still necessary. It can be deduced from the work of this study that a co-evolutionary, bottom-up planning is not consistent with the current stage of the development of planning in Slovenia. Yet the last legislation changes in 2017 indicate a more comprehensive role of spatial planning (regional planning level, less national sectors' interference) which does not only assign land use to lots but govern the territory in an integrative manner within a more flexible planning system.

However, as a final concluding remark and to prove the title right, I would argue that one certainly needs to mention that in autumn 2021 the new planning legislation (ZUreP-1) has been already prepared by the current government and introduced into legislative procedure. In December 2021, this law was also officially adopted.

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Sonja DRAGOVIĆ *

COMMON ACTION: CAN GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES PROPEL TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN MONTENEGRO?

Abstract. In recent years, grassroots organising has become important in advocating for the interests of local communities in spatial development processes in the Balkans. Though differing in terms of size, focus, and method, these initiatives seek to articulate dissatisfaction with the existing models of spatial governance, and to imagine, propose, and demand more just and inclusive alternatives. This paper focuses on grassroots activism contesting the top-down model of governing space in Montenegro. Based on a case-study analysis, it traces developments in the forms of organising and degrees of influence of three distinct initiatives, examining what their impact on the development of territorial governance approach may be.

Key words: spatial development, collective initiatives, planning policy, territorial governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the spatial planning system in Montenegro has become centralised (Dragović, 2021). This means communities affected by spatial development-related decisions are often bypassed when those decisions are made and they are left to grapple with the consequences. This paper examines the recent grassroots response to these processes and focuses on the local communities' activism resisting the way in which spatial resources are governed in Montenegro.

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By organising in a bottom-up manner to resist the projects imposed from the top, these communities articulate the need for creating a more inclusive, more just, and better integrated system of managing spatial development.

Spatial issues have long been a catalyst for civic action in Montenegro, from rural ecological movements (Komar, 2015; Baća, 2017a; Baća, 2017b), to collectives establishing various urban practices of commons (Čukić *et al.*, 2020). Many of these actions have been undertaken in response to the effects of the neoliberal model of spatial governance, which facilitates economic growth for narrow, privileged interests at the expense of balanced and sustainable development (Allmendinger, 2016). Golubchikov's description of the effects of the long transition process from state socialism to neoliberalism – “the economic collapse and marginalization, the rise of poverty and inequality, class division, the loss of prospects and hope for better life for many, uneven development, environmentally and ethically destructive consumerism, inter-ethnic conflicts and intolerance, the loss of social cohesion” (2016, p. 614) – is illustrative of the Montenegrin experience as well (see Djurić, 2003; Bieber, 2020). These economic, social, and political changes have a clear spatial component: “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2004), which through the privatisation of the industry, land, and natural resources has left many local communities that used to be reliant on these resources impoverished and vulnerable.¹ The bottom-up response to these pressures has also been spatial, in the form of organised protests against policies and projects founded on the extractive development model (see Baća, 2017b). As they are mounted in opposition to what can be described as a “set of politics injecting a new free-market ethic based on systematic deregulation and the radical de-politicization” (Monno, 2016, p. 7), these protest actions belong to the third wave of activism: often fragmented and lacking capacity to resist oppressive policies (Mayer and Boudreau, 2012) but necessary as the infrastructures of socio-environmental justice which continuously challenge neoliberal power (Monno, 2014). In Montenegro, such challenges have produced an array of distinctly spatialised results, from stopping the project that jeopardised the Tara Canyon in 2004 (Komar, 2015), to protecting the Valdano Bay from privatisation and commercial exploitation through continuous action during the 2008–2014 period, to preventing the construction of a tunnel in the Gorica urban park in the centre of the capital city in 2012 and the successful 2010–2014 mobilisation against illegal waste disposal in the village of Beranselo (see Baća, 2017b). Furthermore, some of these actions gave way to other forms of joint spatial practices and struggles: the one in Beranselo grew into a nationwide movement and a symbol of civil resistance (Baća, 2017a), while the protests in the Gorica urban park have led to the emergence of Mediterranean Garden as urban commons, now governed by the civic association which originated from these protests (see Čukić *et al.*, 2020).

¹ On privatisation processes in Montenegro, see Džankić (2018); on social conditions of local communities see Šarović (2012) and Vukićević (2012).

These examples demonstrate the continuous impact that various forms of civic organising have on how space is developed and governed in Montenegro. However, they also show that this impact is limited and achieved through grassroots activism reacting to decisions imposed from the top down, rather than through coordination between actors and institutions and mobilised participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies, i.e., the process of territorial governance (ESPON, 2013, p. 11). The territorial governance approach, with a focus on “negotiation and consensus-building” (OECD, 2001, p. 142), “intensive and continuous dialogue between all stakeholders of territorial development” (MUDTCEU, 2007, p. 2) and “cooperative process involving the various actors (...) at political, administrative and technical levels” (MUDTCEU, 2011, p. 15), offers a framework through which territorial development could be negotiated in a more efficient manner, ensuring spatial coherence of different policies and actions (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008) which is currently lacking in Montenegro, as the cases analysed in this paper show. While keeping in mind that territorial governance cannot be expected to solve the core problems of the neoliberal project (Gallardo *et al.*, 2019) and can eventually deepen neoliberal governance if imposed from the supra-state level (Tulumello *et al.*, 2019), it is worth considering how place-based knowledge and more tailor-made/context-sensitive/place-based governance arrangement (Oliveira, 2016) could improve the territorial development in Montenegro. Place-based knowledge does exist but remains largely untapped in the existing framework of spatial policy development and implementation, as the three cases presented here illustrate.

The cases – an activist-research group KANA / Who if not Architect, a coalition of local actions against small hydropower, and the Save Sinjajevina initiative – have been chosen for this analysis as examples of recent grassroots actions questioning the dominant model of decision-making and resisting its spatial outcomes. These three cases are not the only instances of such actions; indeed, several other examples could have been included (some of them presented in Čukić *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, this selection was made to showcase the diverse ways in which the current mode of territorial development is opposed in Montenegro through bottom-up organising. The three cases are heterogeneous, but what they have in common is the impulse to contest top-down decisions, to intervene in the process, and to attempt to change it at a point when the governing structures have already pronounced it final and immutable. Furthermore, each of these initiatives succeeded in mobilising significant public support and changing the discourse surrounding the projects they opposed. They represent the persistent communal reaction to an exclusionary and increasingly centralised system of spatial governance (see Dragović, 2021) and demonstrate why it is crucial for such a system to be changed – and to adopt a territorial perspective.

By providing an overview of the decisions against which these actions have mobilised, along with an analysis of the mobilisations, this paper aims to show how these actions are formed and organised, what their methods are, and to what

extent they have been able to influence the decision-making processes related to spatial governance. The findings stream from the analysis of three case studies, based on data collected from direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and secondary sources such as newspaper coverage and social media records. Direct observation was used as the primary method in studying the case of KANA/ Who if not Architect: the author followed their 2015/2016 campaign and visited some of their protests, making observations which became the basis for some of the findings presented here. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Denis Mekić, one of the organisers in the coalition of local actions against small hydropower, and with Milan Sekulović, one of the founders of the Save Sinjajevina initiative. As for the secondary sources, most of the media coverage used here came from the “Vijesti” daily newspaper and news portal, an independent media house enjoying the highest level of public confidence in Montenegro (Safejournalists.net, 2021). Social media records came from Facebook, which was the dominant social media platform used by the initiatives analysed in this paper. The case studies are presented in individual chapters, followed by a discussion and some concluding remarks.

2. KANA/ WHO IF NOT ARCHITECT

The group KANA/ Ko ako ne arhitekt (Who if not an architect; hereinafter: KANA), a non-governmental organisation based in Podgorica, emerged from a 2015 campaign against a controversial downtown construction project. The project proposed building a 12-floor business tower in the city centre, on the bank of the Morača river, where such a structure would disturb the delicate balance between the existing built environment and the city’s natural landscape. The closeness of the new construction site to the building of Hotel Podgorica, one of the most important objects of modernist architectural heritage in Montenegro (Alihodžić and Stamatović Vučković, 2019), though not recognised as cultural heritage, was especially problematic. When it became obvious the project with a potentially vast impact on the cityscape was approved without a broad public debate on its implications, a campaign to stop the construction and protect the hotel building was started (Vijesti, 2015a); with it, a long-overdue debate about the politics of spatial development in Podgorica also began. Prior to this, the public response to the news of historic buildings and places in Podgorica being jeopardised by dubious new private developments was a mixture of distress and disbelief (Slobodna Evropa, 2013). The KANA group seems to have emerged as a reaction to this state of inaction; it opened a space to demand accountability in spatial planning and to propose a more participatory approach to urban governance.

The campaign started at the end of 2015 with a public statement from a group of young architects, criticising the construction project as invasive and the local government as susceptible to private investors' demands (Jovićević, 2015). The statement also addressed the planners and the architects associated with the project, highlighting the problem of their role in the profit-oriented processes of city building. The critique was well-received by the public, which emboldened the group to try gather support and pressure the local government into stopping the construction. In addition to traditional media channels, they used social media (KANA's Facebook page rapidly grew to several hundreds followers) and an online petition, which collected almost 1,500 signatures in less than a week (Petitions.net, 2015). The acronym in the group's name, KANA, stands for a rhetorical question "Who if not an architect?," emphasising the responsibility of planning and construction experts towards public interest; if they do not oppose the damaging practices in decision-making related to spatial development, who will? Moreover, KANA references the name of late Svetlana Kana Radević, the award-winning designer of Hotel Podgorica and one of the most important Montenegrin architects. Hence, by choosing its name, the KANA group signalled its priorities: to use their expertise to examine the established practices of spatial development and to honour the under-researched modernist heritage in local architecture and urbanism.²

These priorities were consolidated through the campaign against the new construction and for the protection of Hotel Podgorica, during which the KANA group started developing its research and action methods. The research involved analysing the decision-making process in the case of the new tower; based on the results, various forms of action followed. The most important one was to provide detailed explanations of the process and its implications in order to make it more accessible to the general public and to attract new allies, outside of the narrow professional fields of architecture and urbanism. To achieve this, the materials were disseminated through traditional media outlets and social media, often in short or nonconventional formats (collages, posters, and memes),³ aiming to communicate efficiently and engage the audience.

Apart from analysing the process of urban governance and publicising the findings, the KANA group engaged in direct action by organising educational events and protest walks with up to a hundred participants (Vijesti, 2016a), securing support from architectural associations beyond the local context (Docomomo, 2015), and appealing to the governing institutions at the local and central levels.

² The author gained substantial information about the work of this group through direct observation and participation in the protests organised by KANA.

³ In this example, the historic clock tower of Podgorica is shown in relation to the future tower, so that the general public could understand the scale of the project; the collage was spread through social media: <https://www.facebook.com/koakonearhitekt/photos/255002168164411> [accessed on: 27.03.2021].

The campaign lasted throughout 2016, during which KANA identified irregularities in the process of granting the construction permit and discrepancies between detailed urban plan stipulations and the extent of the new construction (Vijesti, 2016b). The concerns raised by KANA resulted in an investigation by the Sector for Urbanism and Geodetic Inspection, which advised the authorities to revoke the construction permit. The advice was rejected, resulting in a series of complaints and lawsuits filed against the local authorities by the KANA group and by the Inspection. The latter won their case before the Administrative Court, which ruled the process of granting the construction permit should be re-examined (Vijesti, 2016c). However, by the time of this ruling was made, the construction was largely completed; it was never halted by the authorities, although its legitimacy was under review for an entire year. The campaign to recognise the building of Hotel Podgorica as cultural heritage was also unsuccessful; the initiative (Vijesti, 2016d) was mostly ignored by the Ministry of Culture, which maintained that the new construction was not a threat to the hotel's building.



Fig. 1. Hotel Podgorica with the new business tower in the background

Source: own work.

Even though KANA's 2015–2016 campaign did not result in the outcomes for which the group wished, it was not entirely unsuccessful: it provoked a conversation about the process of spatial planning and demonstrated how resistant it was to bottom-up challenges. Moreover, it created new connections within the community, and provided a platform for young spatial professionals to engage in the debate – with each other, with the public, and with the governing institutions – about the processes of spatial production. Finally, it helped increase the awareness of the public towards these processes and the ways in which they shape the urban environment (see Šimpraga, 2021). The business tower next to Hotel Podgorica is a constant reminder of this (Fig. 1), as is the work of the KANA group,⁴ which continues to criticise profit-oriented urban planning practices and support local spatial justice initiatives (*ibid*).

3. COALITION OF LOCAL ACTIONS AGAINST SMALL HYDROPOWER

The project of developing small hydropower plants, although promoted and implemented globally as part of the effort to secure a more sustainable and renewable source of energy, has in recent years been criticised for the environmental damage it may trigger (see Pacara, 2016; Yuebo *et al.*, 2018; Temper *et al.*, 2020). In Montenegro, the central Government's program to support the construction of small hydropower plants in the mountainous northern region of the country was met with strong grassroots opposition, which brought together local communities, environmental activists, and expert associations (Slobodna Evropa, 2020). The protests were localised and small at first, as this chapter shows, but have grown into coordinated action over the years; now, their agenda includes not only halting harmful individual projects but changing the existing spatial governance decisions and processes so that they reflect the needs of local communities and address broader environmental concerns.

The program of exploiting hydropower in Montenegro started with the adoption of the Small Hydropower Development Strategy (Ministry of Economy, 2006) and was not designed to promote or, indeed, allow the involvement of local communities, even though they are directly reliant on local water streams. Instead, the decisions on the locations and conditions of exploitation were made by the central Government. The concessions were not always granted through public tenders, and the investors who gained them were often connected with the ruling political parties, which raised questions about the legitimacy of the process (MANS,

⁴ The author became more closely involved with the work of the KANA group and started collaborating with them after the events discussed in this chapter, therefore becoming more acquainted with the practice and more active in its work process and outcomes.

2017). Therefore, the program was burdened with a lack of transparency from the start, which only worsened when the first small hydropower plants became operational and the extent of the negative consequences they caused became obvious, all while receiving large public subsidies (MANS, 2018).

As the program progressed, it became clear that the initial plans for utilising small hydropower were based on outdated or insufficient data, resulting in false predictions of environmental effects and economic results (Green Home, 2015). Although the Small Hydropower Development Strategy (Ministry of Economy, 2006, p. 10) envisioned rich hydro potential of the depopulated and traditionally underdeveloped northern region of the country as the engine of its future economic growth, the results proved the opposite: instead of creating new jobs, excessive construction disrupted the ecosystems and hurt the local economies by interrupting the streams on which local communities depended for water and irrigation (Vijesti, 2018). At the beginning of the program development, the central Government did not consider these factors and granted concessions assuming the local communities would not object. Between 2008 until 2015, 43 small hydropower plants were approved for construction on 25 rivers and streams; by 2020, the number of approved plants reached 85 (Green Home, 2015; Slobodna Evropa, 2020).

Soon after the first constructions started, local communities began organising to oppose them. One of the first protests was held in Gusinje in 2011 against the dam on the Grlja river; it continued through communal gatherings and media campaign until 2015, when the concession contract was revoked after the central Government and the investor company spent years avoiding engaging with the protest by claiming it was the other party's responsibility to secure the consent of the local population (Vijesti, 2015b). The lack of clarity in the decision-making procedure prolonged the process while keeping the most affected communities excluded.

The protest in Gusinje was ultimately successful, but not all the constructions were as persistently contested. In the first few years of the program, many projects were successfully concluded. As the number of completed dams grew, so did the discrepancy between the project's positive and negative effects. The expected positives, such as job creation, new industries, and major infrastructure improvements were mostly absent, while the negatives, i.e. dry riverbeds, ruined landscapes, and water shortages, were overwhelmingly present (Vijesti, 2018). Local communities started challenging the projects openly and often physically, in a process that gradually became more massive and better organised. The pressure influenced the Ministry of Economy's 2013 decision to withdraw several concessions, although the main reasons for this action were the investors' failures to fulfil contractual obligations, along with the lack of local-level spatial planning documents, insufficiently developed electrical transmission-and-distribution network, and the difficulties with integrating the future power plants into the electrical power grid (Vijesti, 2013). The fact that these concessions had been approved before these administrative and infrastructural aspects were analysed shows that by making decisions based on in-

complete information and by failing to integrate different government levels and non-government actors in the process the central Government actively contributed to the problems caused by the extraction of hydropower in northern Montenegro.



Fig. 2. Protest against a hydropower plant in Bukovica

Source: photo by Svetlana Mandić.

Over the next few years, the resistance to the program grew: from 2017 until the end of 2020 protests were organised in several municipalities, most prominently in Plav (the Murinska, Đurička, and Komaračka rivers), Šavnik (the Bukovica river), Bijelo Polje (the Bistrica and Lještanica rivers), and Kolašin (the Čestogaz, Ljubaštica, Crnja, Rečinska, and Skrbuša rivers). Gradually, the protests transformed into joint actions, insisting that the right to clean drinking water and the local need for irrigation were more important than heavily subsidised private ventures.⁵ Several civic initiatives and ecological organisations were formed in the process,⁶ contributing to increased media presence and an overall strengthening

⁵ From mid-2014 until the end of 2019, Montenegro has paid 13.4 million euros in subsidies to small hydropower investors (Vijesti, 2020a).

⁶ The initiatives and organisations grew out of local protest actions: NGO Save River Komarača and All the Rivers of Montenegro (Sačuvajmo rijeku Komaraču i sve rijeke u Crnoj Gori) were formed in Plav, Save Bistrica (Za spas Bistrice) civic initiative in Bijelo Polje, NGO Ecological Movement Donja Bukovica (Ekološki pokret Donja Bukovica) in Šavnik. In 2019, together with several other environmental organisations from Montenegro, these initiatives formed the Coalition for Sustainable Development (Koalicija za održivi razvoj – KOR), a platform dedicated to the protection of natural and spatial resources (Dan, 2019a).

of the movement's inner support structure. Apart from planning protests, these initiatives organised community meetings, public discussions, media campaigns, and petitions signings. They sought the expert analyses of the government concessions-granting procedures and filed lawsuits to contest them. If these actions failed, the activists formed barricades to stop construction processes; some of them were sued by the investors (Vijesti, 2018b). The protest in Bukovica in 2019 (Fig. 2) turned into a month-long sit-in, which ended only after the Ministry of Economy promised to review the protesters' demands and reconsider the decision. The local mayor did not support the protest, but he announced that small hydropower projects would be subject to a municipal referendum in the future (Dan, 2019b), thereby acknowledging the previously unheeded need for broad public consultation and responding to the demands for a more transparent and participative decision-making process.

After several years of civic action, the issue of small hydropower became an important topic of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Montenegro. The coalition led by the United Reform Action party ran on the green agenda and promoted a "Declaration on the permanent ban on the construction of small hydropower plants", signed by several thousands citizens (Vijesti, 2020b). The elections resulted in the formation of a new government, which announced the revision of all concession agreements and the introduction of a permanent ban on the construction of small hydropower plants (BalkanGreenEnergyNews, 2020). Meanwhile, environmental activists have continued to support the locals in physically obstructing the ongoing constructions (Vijesti, 2020c, Vijesti 2020d), while constructing new ways to connect in the time of COVID-19-preventive distancing measures. According to Denis Mekić, one of the movement's organisers, the strategy is to develop a platform where local communities can review the mechanisms to resist the extractive projects – which have often been presented as *fait accompli* by the decision-makers – and find the necessary support to protect local natural resources (personal communication, 20 November 2020). The Sačuvajmo rijeke Crne Gore (Save the Rivers of Montenegro) state-wide initiative⁷ was formed and the Bistrenje (Clarifying) podcast was started; these channels are used for expanding the conversation on environmental issues and cultivating the alliance between locals, organisers, and experts from Montenegro and the Balkan region. Mekić believes that in order to change political decisions regarding spatial development, the problem of environmental degradation must be articulated by the local communities first. The successes the movement has had show that persistent civic action can influence both finalised top-down plans and nascent political agenda.

⁷ Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/spasrijekacrnegore>

4. SAVE SINJAJEVINA

Save Sinjajevina is a civic initiative which started in 2018, in reaction to the Ministry of Defence's plan to establish a military training field on the Sinjajevina mountain in northern Montenegro. Sinjajevina is the most extensive mountain range and the largest limestone plateau in the country, with an area of over 450 sq. km and a wealth of plant, animal, and fungal species (EPA, 2018). Its region extends across five municipalities (Mojkovac, Kolašin, Žabljak, Šavnik, and Danilovgrad) and is inhabited by approx. 20,000 people. Sinjajevina is one of the biggest pastures in Europe, utilised for cattle grazing by generations of transhumance herders (Domínguez *et al.*, 2020). However, since traditional agricultural work has subsided over the last decades, the local population decreased, leaving the pastures underused and underdeveloped. Nowadays, most Sinjajevina settlements offer the same infrastructure that existed 50 years ago: a network of poorly maintained roads, with no water supply and no power grid. Such inaccessibility made living on the mountain difficult, but it also conserved the natural ecosystem, situated in the vicinity of the internationally recognised protected areas of the Tara Canyon and the Durmitor National Park (UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, Sinjajevina was identified as a potential regional park in the Spatial Plan of Montenegro, adopted in 2008 and binding until 2020 (Ministry of Economic Development, p. 144). However, the plans to establish a military training ground in the same area were unveiled in 2018. This demonstrates the poor coordination between different governing levels and bodies. The case of Sinjajevina epitomises the spatial consequences caused by the lack of horizontal and vertical integration between different governing bodies, just as the case of the Save Sinjajevina initiative shows how civic engagement can problematise these consequences, intervene in the decision-making processes, and change their outcomes.

Different plans for Sinjajevina have originated within the same timeframe, but at various governing levels. The idea of forming a regional park was promoted at the municipal and regional scale: from 2013 to 2018 five municipalities of the Sinjajevina region cooperated on a EUR 300,000 project aimed at laying the groundwork for the regional park and funded partly from municipal budgets, but mostly (almost 70%) by the EU (Vijesti, 2019a). The project yielded several important results (an ecological conservation study, a road infrastructure reconstruction project, etc.) and ended with a proposal for an inter-municipal mechanism for the Regional Park management (*ibid.*) However, the decision to establish the park was never adopted at the municipal level due to a lack of a management model suitable for the inter-municipal cooperation and compatible with the existing legislative framework (*ibid.*) Therefore, the process of establishing the regional park was halted due to the shortcomings of regional-level spatial planning and management mechanisms.

Meanwhile, at the central level, the Ministry of Defence proposed Sinjajevina as the location for a new military training range. The idea was presented to the government in 2014 and the consent of competent ministries was secured by 2018 when the project was officially announced. The environmental impact of this scenario has never been assessed because the provisions of the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment (Parliament of Montenegro, 2018) do not apply to defence projects (Article 4). The municipal governments in the Sinjajevina region were informed about the plan after the project was already underway (Vijesti, 2019a).

The plan to establish a military training ground on Sinjajevina pastures surprised the residents of the region. According to Milan Sekulović (personal communication, 22 November 2020), a journalist from Sinjajevina and one of the founders of the Save Sinjajevina initiative, the reaction of the local communities was to reject the project openly and publicly, for two reasons: first, it was impossible to imagine that military exercises involving artillery and explosives would not cause damage to the natural habitat on which the communities of Sinjajevina pastures depend, and second, this plan was not discussed with these communities, even though they would have to bear the most immediate impact of its execution. Hence, the local communities started organising to protest, first within their villages and then at the municipal and regional levels.

In their first year (April 2018 – March 2019), the protest activities were limited to network and capacity-building. One of the first actions of the initiative, still informal and loosely coordinated, was to establish a social media communication channel, a Facebook page,⁸ through which information could be shared and more support gathered. The community's members met with officials from the Ministry of Defence several times (Vijesti 2018c, Vijesti 2018d), but their concerns were left unanswered: the ministry refused to perform an environmental impact assessment, insisting the land of Sinjajevina was owned by the state and, therefore, should be managed as the central government intended (Vijesti, 2019b). Hence, the deliberate exclusion of the local communities from the decision-making process continued.

The Save Sinjajevina initiative was officially formed in March 2019 (*ibid.*) Throughout the following months, the initiative organised a media campaign, three protests at the mountain with several hundred participants (Vijesti, 2019c), and several performances in the capital city. It gathered national and international support from non-governmental organisations and political parties and collected more than 3,300 signatures for a petition urging the government of Montenegro to abandon the military project and establish the regional park (Slobodna Evropa, 2019). When the government decided in favour of the military project in September 2019, the initiative announced a more radical action against the planned military activities. The campaign continued throughout 2020 with increased media

⁸ Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/sacuvajmosinjajevinu>

attention,⁹ which helped turn the spatial development of Sinjajevina into another prominent issue of the August 2020 parliamentary elections.

The most challenging part of the struggle against the military project came after the elections, even though the winning majority was sympathetic to the cause. While the new cabinet was being negotiated, the central government, then acting in a technical capacity, scheduled combat shooting exercises at the Sinjajevina training field. Members of the Save Sinjajevina initiative gathered at the designated location, occupied the space, and invited supporters to join them in physically stopping the training event. Resolved to prolong the sit-in until the Ministry of Defence cancelled the military exercise, the activists occupied the space for 50 days and nights, uninterruptedly, braving the sub-zero temperatures (Fig. 3.) The protest ended after the government of the new parliamentary majority was formed and it was able to guarantee that the immediate plans for military exercises would be cancelled and the entire project reconsidered (Vijesti, 2020e). The persistent action of local communities subverted the plan imposed from the top down. At this point, it remains unclear what the final decision on this issue will be, but it is unlikely to be made without the direct involvement of the Sinjajevina communities and a consideration of their needs.



Fig. 3. Sit-in protest on Sinjajevina

Source: photo by Jelena Jovanović.

⁹ An international statement of solidarity with traditional communities in Sinjajevina was published by Land Rights Now alliance and signed by 83 civic organisations from around the world (Land Rights Now, 2020).

5. DISCUSSION

The motivations behind the grassroots actions presented in this article demonstrate the spatial incoherence of the current development strategies and policies in Montenegro, while the processes and results of these actions show the potential that a more inclusive governance model could integrate, utilise, and rely upon. The policies adopted in the current decision-making framework, criticised by these initiatives for promoting spatial inequalities and environmental degradation, lack a territorial perspective. Improvement of the framework in accordance with territorial governance principles of cooperation would require the recognition of the place-based knowledge of local grassroots initiatives and inviting, rather than ignoring, their efforts to be heard and integrated in the process.

The analysis shows that the grassroots actions have utilised a variety of forms of organising (media campaigns, petitions, expert analysis, public debates, performances, protests, barricades, sit-ins, and legal action) through which their capacities gradually increased, and their structures have extended to other similar initiatives in the region or abroad. These connections offer the opportunity to solidify actions and create alliances, thereby increasing both the visibility of the problem and the pressure on the decision-makers, and increasing the chances of success. Social media play an important role in this process by facilitating information sharing and sustaining connections, which became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results these efforts have produced by acting outside of the decision-making processes – results such as successfully contesting adopted spatial plans, changing the dominant narratives, influencing the agendas of major political parties, and turning the spatial development debate into a prominent theme of parliamentary elections – have clearly shown the necessity for and the potential of more collaborative and horizontal relations in spatial development decision-making processes in Montenegro. The territorial governance approach could be an answer to the demand for a more open and cooperative yet also more just and transparent process, through which local communities would acquire a legitimate space to be not only heard but listened to and actively involved in co-creating their spatial and social reality.

6. CONCLUSION

The centralised, top-down approach to governing the spatial resources in Montenegro has been repeatedly contested by grassroots actions of local communities, which have been deliberately excluded from important economic and political

decisions with significant territorial implications. Nevertheless, as evident from the case studies presented above, these communities have found ways to influence these processes from outside the existing system, through persistent spatial actions. By relying on communal networks and place-based knowledge, they have successfully built alliances, contested the imposed policies and projects, and demonstrated the need for a more context-sensitive governance arrangement.

The initiatives and coalitions emerging from these struggles offer important knowledge about the local and regional needs and potentials, as well as the sensitivity towards the territorial consequences of economic and political decisions. By adopting a territorial governance approach and constructing the spatial development decision-making process around full participation of local communities, Montenegro could tap into the insofar underused local potential and place-based knowledge. That kind of knowledge and awareness could be of great importance for tackling regional disparities and improving the entire system of governance in Montenegro – a system which needs to achieve functional horizontal and vertical integration, and begin to reflect the fact that each policy decision has an environmental consequence and a territorial character.

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TERRITORIAL RESCALING AND POLYCENTRIC GOVERNANCE IN ALBANIA

Abstract. Territories as relational geographical constructs are in constant formation and reformation, or rescaling, which results in spatial typologies of complex governance. The voting containers of a territory are merely one typology, often not matching the numerous functions within the other typologies. Under the assumption that voting containers are politically fixed, governance that adapts to the dynamics of territorial rescaling is required. This paper explores the relationship between territorial rescaling and polycentric governance in Albania. It concludes that polycentric governance can enable cooperation and efficiency throughout rescaling, assuming some conditions are in place for addressing the polycentricity gap.

Key words: polycentric governance, polycentricity, multilevel governance, territorial rescaling, territory, Albania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Policy responses should be tailored to the territories¹ and should not be spatially blind. But as territories are in constant formation and reformation, with a myriad of purposes (Keating, 2013), the complexity of their governance increases. Governance limited within administrative boundaries appears to insufficiently address place diversity (Keating, 2014, 2013; Faludi, 2018, 2012; Hooghes and Marks,

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¹ See Territorial Agenda 2030.

2016, 2003, 2001; Walter, 2004; Agnew, 1994; Ostrom *et al.*, 1961) because of the mismatch between government jurisdictions and proliferating, spatially overlaying territorial functions (ESPON, 2019; Behnke *et al.*, 2019; Faludi, 2012; Balderheim and Rose, 2010). Albania faces much of the same challenge. In 30 years, the government has undertaken reforms to decentralise power to promote territorial development and make the governance system more efficient and just. Yet the system is far from perfect and inequalities have been flourishing across territorial and societal strata, questioning the reforms and the quality of territorial governance (RDPA, 2018; Shutina *et al.*, 2016; Toto *et al.*, 2015; Toto, 2010).

The discourse on territorial development and regional policy in the European Union (EU) has emphasised since 1999² the need for multi-level governance and territorial polycentricity, in order to foster equity, competitiveness, and sustainability. To achieve them is a challenge that depends on institutional arrangements and on the stakeholders' ability to continuously adapt to everchanging territorial constructs and to produce cohesive growth at any spatial scale. Decentralisation has often been described as the form of territorial rescaling, which together with territorial reforms shifts power between institutions and territorial levels for higher efficiency, but has also been criticised, at least in the case of CEE countries, for not contributing to lowering disparities (Loewen, 2018). Regionalisation, then, has played a role in the EU in restructuring territorial governance, leading to the regional policy discourse and new practices and forms of power sharing (*ibid.*) in a multi-level governance system. Therefore, multi-level governance has emerged as a means to govern through territorial scales and connect interests enabling territorial development and cohesion (Benz, 2019; Behnke *et al.*, 2019; Hooghes and Marks, 2003, 2009, 2016). This ability to correct the failures of both, centralised and decentralised systems of governance, and the respective territorial constructs result from the multi-level configuration of institutional arrangements that are theoretically flexible compared to the voting containers in a territory. Such arrangements exhibit network and polycentric characteristics that may be "capable of striking a balance between centralised and fully decentralised or community-based governance" (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019, p. 928), while also mitigating the impacts of administrative and territorial reforms undertaken to satisfy electoral results and representations.

However, OECD (2016, 2011) has defined the presence of seven gaps that actors should overcome to achieve efficient multi-level governance and obtain territorial cohesion. The administrative gap – being a mismatch between political/functional boundaries and the policy gap – as fragmentation and miscoordination of politics could be overcome through cooperation. The other gaps (financial, capacity and information, and accountability and objective) interrelate with the first two, because conflicting territorial constructs and institutional designs can-

² With the adoption of the European Spatial Planning Perspective.

not yield better resources, more knowledge, or cohesion and democracy. In this paper, we add and explore an eighth gap, that of polycentricity, which indicates the embeddedness of polycentric governance's *modus-operandi* that is based on cooperation, into frequently changing territorial constructs.

The need to explore the polycentricity gap stems thus from the requirement for multi-level governance to connect territorial layers to governance and politics in a context of continuous territorial rescaling. Multi-level governance is proposed to solve issues of efficiency and cohesion, yet often being captured in territorial containers of power distribution. Early EU studies on cohesion identified territorial polycentricity as a spatial planning policy objective in Europe and a foundation for EU regional policy, aiming at sustainable development, regardless of the electoral containers. However, territorial polycentricity has yet to achieve its ambition (Rauhut, 2017; Waterhout *et al.*, 2005; Davoudi, 2003) lacking even a commonly agreed measuring methodology (see ESPON, 2005; Meijers and Sandberg, 2008; Green, 2007; Brezzi and Veneri, 2015). Furthermore, territorial polycentricity as an objective that tackles territorial disparities while boosting competitiveness (CSD, 1999) has held true among countries, but has had limited empirical validity among regions³ (Rauhut, 2017; Homsy and Warner, 2015; Brezzi and Veneri, 2015; Burger *et al.*, 2014; Meijers and Sandberg, 2008) because it focuses on proving the morphology of development and the flows of functions in a territory without considering the governance arrangements (Finka and Kluvankova, 2015).

Despite that, a growing body of literature has explored polycentric governance under various disciplines and scholarships, particularly public administration and the commons (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019), since 1961 when V. Ostrom *et al.* conceived the concept in the frame of their discourse on metropolitan-area governance. In these studies, polycentric governance is attributed a number of theoretical and empirically observed advantages, such as risk adaptation and mitigation ability, recognition of scale diversity, higher economic efficiency compared to monocentric systems (Van Zeben, 2019), or the ability to address multiple goals in complex socio-ecological systems. This is not to say that polycentric governance systems are without any drawbacks. Indeed, their inherent complex designs may lead to internal conflicts among stakeholders (Lubell *et al.*, 2020), high transactions costs due to the broad array of coordination measures, and even reduced accountability because of high dispersion or responsibilities among stakeholders (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019). Additionally, the performance of polycentric governance depends also on the specificities of the respective context, on the types of forums and cooperation arenas where stakeholders interact, and on the issues that bring them together. Therefore, polycentric governance will not succeed to the

³ According to empirical research, polycentric countries have usually a higher national GDP per capita, but lower GDP per capita in polycentric regions compared to monocentric ones.

same extent in every setting (*ibid.*), and territorial constructs are eventually part of the factors that affect its functionality.

The concept of polycentric governance could indeed benefit from further clarification (Lubell *et al.*, 2020; Carlisle and Gruby, 2019; Thiel *et al.*, 2018), and a particular area of interest are governance studies that examine the role of polycentricity in addressing failures of decentralisation and territorial rescaling to achieve the objectives of efficiency and development cohesion. As a matter of fact, polycentric governance embodies competitive vertical and horizontal network interactions of autonomous decision-making institutions (Van Zeven, 2019; McGinnis, 2011; Ostrom, 1972; Ostrom *et al.*, 1961), but the focus on territorial implications is insufficient. Even though polycentric governance raises also questions about its territorial dimension, the interaction between policy communities has remained its primary focus so far.

Our intention is to investigate whether polycentric governance can spur cooperation and efficiency throughout territorial rescaling when certain conditions are in place to address the polycentricity gap. These conditions are explained in detail in the following chapter and span from an overall decentralisation of the governance setting to the presence of multiple centres of decision-making that operate and compete within a system, and finally the territorial construct of the governance objective at stake. We formulate conditions referring to the reach scholarship on the functionality of polycentric governance, but also adding the territorial dimension. For this, we initially discuss theoretically territorial rescaling and polycentric governance to subsequently propose a model (of conditions) for analysing the polycentricity gap.

The model is applied to four governance cases (two development programs (regional and rural), participatory spatial planning, and forest common pool resources) in Albania, examined within the broader frame of Albania's territorial rescaling reforms since 1990. We have chosen the cases to represent a diversity of governance arrangements and territorial scales, from the local to the regional and the national. Each case has at least a declared multi-level governance mechanism, but with different levels of decentralisation and initiating stakeholders. Also, at least one major territorial/administrative reform has taken place along each case. The research method is that of the case study for three of the cases, and investigation through observation, mapping and semi-structured interviews with commoners for the forest common pool resources.

Based on the analysis of the cases, the paper concludes that polycentric governance is adaptable and well-suited to handle the dynamics and effects of continuous political territorial rescaling, provided that the polycentricity gap is addressed in the first place. It also recognises that the number of the explored cases is rather limited to generalise the conclusion, therefore requiring the investigation of further cases. Finally, the results are contextual due to the territorial dimension, and, therefore, the application of the model to other territorial contexts would require

a preliminary understanding of the respective territorial rescaling processes and the identification of contextual factors, including the related governance arrangements that have produced it or influenced it. This would lead to a recalibration of the model in terms of the indicators used to assess each of the polycentricity gap conditions.

2. TERRITORIAL RESCALING AND THE POLYCENTRICITY GAP IN GOVERNANCE

It is hard to think of government without territory, the latter being commonly associated with a polity exercising power and authority within a space limited by designated boundaries (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 2003; Taylor, 2003; Delaney, 2005; Keating, 2013, etc.). Originally geographically determined, territory has evolved towards being relational (Lefebvre, 1974/2003; Gottman, 1975; Harvey, 1993; Massey, 1993; Delaney, 2005; Raffestin, 2012), emphasising the social co-production. Faludi (2012) has criticised the container view on the territory as leading to the “territorial trap” (Agnew, 1994) and “poverty of territorialism” (Faludi, 2018), insufficient or ill-suited to govern the myriad of non-territorially bound social interactions and functions of an unknown or malleable spatial extent. Keating (2013) has argued between relational and deterministic approaches to the territory, maintaining both boundary and non-boundary views as valid, depending on the use purpose that a territory bears.

The territorial boundaries cause divides (Keating, 2014), best expressed through government jurisdictions. These jurisdictions are voting containers (Faludi, 2012) that seldom match functional boundaries, due to political implications, overlapping spatial typologies into ‘fuzzy territorial strips’ (Figure 1), and insufficient knowledge of the respective socio-ecological systems. Hence, territorial rescaling that favours the devolution of government as a solution to inefficiency and social-economic disparities (Mykhnenko and Wolff, 2018) instead produces further mismatch and complexity. The assumption that there exists an optimal scale for each territorial function (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, 2009) to which a government structure can be assigned is not helpful either, because once applied, it would still have to solve the governance of fuzzy strips. In addition, due to the relational character of the territory, a scale-fit, even if found, can never be permanent (Baldersheim and Rose, 2010).

To answer the question of governance efficiency for multiple and overlaying territorial levels, Hooghe and Marks (2001, 2003, 2016) have proposed in their seminal work two types of multi-level governance with logically coherent though alternative responses to coordination. The first focuses on interaction and power

sharing between structures in a vertical hierarchy (Behnke *et al.*, 2019) and the second on functional territories. Most institutional territorial rescaling involves type I, which tends to endure because of its political patronage and because it is modified only during policy and territorial reforms. With its rigid boundaries, type I cannot solve relational territorial problems, requiring ubiquitous type II arrangements – network-like, with overlapping memberships, locally and across levels. As territorial rescaling that implicates type I cannot perform the role of type II, the two systems must coexist and interact in a network of ‘policy communities’ (Clifton and Usai, 2018; Keating, 2014), embracing the conditions of polycentricity (Van Zeben, 2019; Carlisle and Gruby, 2017; Aligica and Tarko, 2012), and seeking territorial constructs that materialise the interests behind interactions. In this process, the policy communities must overcome multi-level governance gaps (OECD 2016, 2011), which emphasise the necessity for cross-scales and cross-actors cooperation, revealing a new gap, i.e., that of polycentricity. This gap entails the embeddedness of polycentric interactions into and among territorial constructs emerging from continuous rescaling processes.

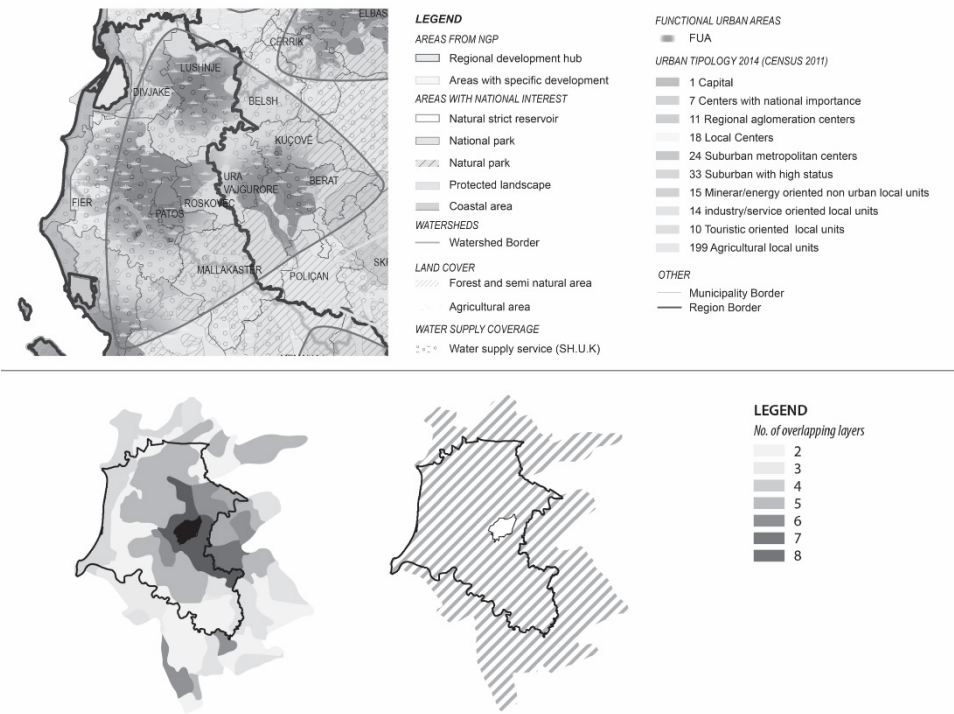


Fig. 1. Fuzzy territorial strips, Fier, Albania

Source: own work (Shutina) for doctoral research, 2018.

The need to explore the polycentricity gap in multi-level governance has already been addressed in the introduction. Here we develop the model of conditions for analysing the polycentricity gap, basing it on the common understanding and findings on polycentric governance from literature. Polycentric governance is a highly complex multi-level, multi-type, multi-actors, multi-sector and multi-functional system (Van Zeben, 2019; Araral and Hartley, 2013; McGinnis, 2011; Boamah, 2018). It brings together territorial activities, structures and institutional designs in a polycentric network of formally independent centres of decision-making, or policy communities that compete under a specific set of rules, generating added value through synergies and mitigating conflicts (Lubell *et al.*, 2020; Van Zeben, 2019; Boamah, 2018; Aligica and Tarko, 2012; Ostrom, 2008; Ostrom, 1972; Ostrom *et al.*, 1961). In polycentric governance, emphasis falls on the independence of decision-making units, i.e., (local) governments and non-state actors, to self-regulate their actions in a self-concerted effort (*ibid.*) Obviously, this does not happen spontaneously, but it is bound by an “overarching shared system of rules,” “access to information,” and “capacity to learn” (Van Zeben, 2019, p. 27).

Homsy and Warner (2015) have argued empirically on the ability of local governments to achieve their objective efficiently by simply acting independently in a polycentric interaction. They promote instead multi-level governance with national governments supporting local action to raise efficiency,⁴ by addressing the capacity and knowledge gaps with information moving up and down the levels of government (*ibid.*, p. 53). As a matter of fact, such a finding only reinforces the conceptualisation of polycentricity in governance with all of its attributes, institutional essentials and prerequisites as summarised by Van Zeben (2019), shedding once again light on the implications of territorial scales in governance. Indeed, “polycentricity is the expression of a system’s capacity for self-governance, which over time will give rise to a complex system of governance institutions” (Van Zeben, 2019, p. 14), where the polycentric interaction does not exclude national governments. Instead, “decision-making centres also exist or operate across political jurisdictions” (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019, p. 938) and the involvement of national governments as one of the actors is inherent to the governance of nested or large scale (territorial) systems. Yet, this interaction has to happen upon an overarching system of shared rules (formal and informal) and the independence of the centres of decision-making, regardless of their level or size, should be guaranteed, as an inherent attribute of polycentric governance.

We conceptualise the polycentricity gap in a model of six conditions that policy communities should succeed on and apply to enable the embeddedness of polycentric governance in a setting of continuous territorial rescaling. We

⁴ The local government objective they explored was the adoption of environmental sustainability policy.

formulate these conditions (Table 1) based on the discourses of polycentric governance and territorial rescaling analysed so far, adding also from the conceptualisation of governance networks of Bogason and Zølner (2007, p. 6), citing Sorensen and Torfing (2006, Introduction, p. 9), the important dimension of contributing to the production of public purpose. In this paper, the public purpose is articulated broadly as the efficiency of services and functions and the territorial cohesion, or reduced disparities, towards which a multilevel governance system should steer, and may therefore relate to any policy objective.

Table 1. The conceptualisation of polycentricity gap conditions versus a comparative review of sources that define features of polycentric and network governance

The polycentricity gap conditions	Carlisle and Gruby (2019, p. 20)	Van Zeben (2019, p. 27)	Bogason and Zølner (2007, p. 6)
The level of governance decentralisation	Attribute: Multiple overlapping decision-making centres with some degree of autonomy Enabling condition: Decision-making centres exist at different levels and across political jurisdictions Enabling condition: Decision-making centres employ diverse institutions	Institutional essential: Freedom and ability to enter and exit Institutional essential: Enforcement of shared system of rules Prerequisite: Access to justice	Network governance is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies.
Subject of common interest for the decision-making centres	Enabling condition: Decision-making centres exist at different levels and across political jurisdictions Enabling condition: Decision-making centres employ diverse institutions	Prerequisite: Access to information	Contributes to the production of public purpose.
Independent interacting centres of decision-making	Attribute: Choosing to act in ways that take account of others through processes of cooperation, competition, conflict, and conflict resolution Enabling condition: Decision-making centres participate in cross-scale linkages or other mechanisms for deliberation and learning	Attribute: Multiple independent centres of decision making Attribute: Continuous competition, cooperation and conflict resolution Institutional essential: Peaceful contestation among different (interest) Groups Prerequisite: Capacity to learn	Is a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors, who interact through negotiations.

The polycentricity gap conditions	Carlisle and Gruby (2019, p. 20)	Van Zeben (2019, p. 27)	Bogason and Zølner (2007, p. 6)
Common niche of genuine attraction for cooperation		Prerequisite: Access to information Institutional essential: Peaceful contestation among different (interest) groups	
Territories to materialise the common and autonomous interests	Enabling condition: The jurisdiction or scope of authority of decision-making centres is coterminous with the boundaries of the problem being addressed	Institutional essential: Peaceful contestation among different (interest) groups Prerequisite: Access to information Prerequisite: Access to justice	
A system of rules accepted by the actors in the network	Enabling condition: Mechanisms for accountability exist within the governance system Enabling condition: A variety of formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution exists within the system Enabling condition: Generally applicable rules and norms, structure actions and behaviours within the system	Attribute: Overarching shared system of rules Institutional essential: Enforcement of shared system of rules Prerequisite: Access to information Prerequisite: Access to justice Prerequisite: Capacity to learn	Negotiations take place within a common regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework.

Source: own work.

In a summary, each condition is therefore described as follows:

The level of governance decentralisation: *The national policy on governance should allow decentralisation and self-governance at sub-national levels, as well as decision-making autonomy for non-state actors* (Van Zeben, 2019; Bogason and Zølner, 2007; Ostrom, 1959, 1993). This first condition is a contextual one in the sense that the level and type of decentralisation is variable and, therefore, the way in which it is measured will also vary between territories or states. Yet, this condition is a prerequisite for the following five to be met, because each is strongly linked to independent action and networking.

The subject of common interest for decision-making centres: The actors as centres of decision-making in a network have at least one common policy objective, related to the use of the territory, such as forests, water resources, tourism, economic

development, etc., and to the governance objectives of cohesive development and efficiency. The policy objective(s) drive(s) their interaction in the network.

Independent interacting centres of decision-making: Polycentric governance brings several *centres of decision-making, independent but complementary to one-another, and highly interactive among them in a three-dimensional network governance* (Van Zeben, 2019; Carlisle and Gruby, 2019; Boamah, 2018; Berardo and Lubell, 2016; McGinnis, 2011; Bogason and Zølner, 2007; Ostrom, 1972; Ostrom *et al.*, 1961). These centres handle applicable policy objectives in a constellation of cross-territorial connections and cooperation (Boamah, 2018; Berardo and Lubell, 2016).

Common niche of genuine attraction for cooperation: To achieve cooperation, there should be some minimal need or willingness for it – *common niche of attraction for genuine cooperation* among the centres of decision-making. This may be for instance the actors' common desire to attract tourists in their area, each with specific interests. This common niche of attraction guarantees that individual actors engage in self-governance and are willing to spend considerable time and energy in crafting commonly accepted solutions and actively participating in their implementation (McGinnis and Walker, 2010). The 'engagement' in self-governance is what defines the difference between a 'common niche of attraction' and the 'subject of common interest'. The 'subject' is a broad policy area/objective, which defines the scope and if absent, then there is no need to discuss cooperation at all. But for cooperation to occur, there should be competition that drives stakeholders towards identifying a niche of attraction within the subject and start interacting to achieve their interests (see Van Zeben, 2019).

Territories to materialise common and autonomous interests: For it to happen, cooperation requires *a territory to use, to materialise the autonomous, complementary and/or competitive interests/objectives of actors*. Territorial specificities and the construct define and shape the common niche of genuine attraction for cooperation (for instance mountainous versus coastal areas). In a metropolitan region there are many common interests (natural resources, infrastructures, industrial uses, etc.) The territorial construct is also the basis for the learning, information and knowledge prerequisite (see Van Zeben, 2019) to take shape and help achieving self-governance.

A system of rules accepted by the actors in a network: In polycentric governance, the autonomy of decision-making centres is pivotal to the notion, but the nodes do not operate in isolation. First, there is a constant interaction. Second, though it may seem as there is fragmentation due to size and overlapping scopes, as long as the centres compete by engaging in mutual value-added cooperation and in conflict resolution, they are considered as functioning as a system (Ostrom *et al.*, 1961). Interaction happens based on *a commonly agreed system of formal and informal rules* (Van Zeben, 2019; Carlisle and Gruby, 2019; Boamah, 2018; McGinnis, 2011; Bogason and Zølner, 2007), avoiding overexploitation (tragedy

of the commons) and under-consumption (free riders) dilemmas (Ostrom, 1990; Alexander and Penalver, 2012) as much as possible.

In chapter four, we analyse the governance cases in terms of the above six conditions. The qualitative indicators used to unravel each condition reflect the territorial constructs, rescaling and governance setting in Albania. The indicators were developed by Shutina in the frame of his doctoral research. We do not bring the indicators in this paper because these are contextual and exceed the scope of the paper, which is to provide a conceptual model, which for further application into various contexts should be adjusted for the indicators to reflect territorial and governance specificities. In order to contextualise our use of the model, we first provide a description of territorial development and rescaling in Albania.

3. TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESCALING IN ALBANIA

The earliest study of regional disparities⁵ in Albania covered the 2000s, revealing the country's peripheral territorial development position compared to EU countries. Disparities between urban and rural areas, and among local governments were significantly higher than among regions.⁶ The situation was similar in the two following studies by Shutina *et al.* (2016) and RDPA (2018). The analysis of over 110 indicators has shown that, economically speaking, the *qark*⁷ of Tirana is always outdoing other *qarks*, while from an environmental perspective it is historically underperforming.

In addition, Albania has a monocentric territorial structure,⁸ the unit of analysis being the 18 functional urban areas (FUA) defined by Toto *et al.* (2015).⁹ The morphological polycentrism index, composed of three equal-weight sub-indices (size, location, and connectivity) has revealed a substantial level of polarisation (polycentricity index¹⁰ 65.1 versus 56.2 of ESPON space in 2005¹¹ (ESPON, 2005,

⁵ Regional Disparities Analysis of the 'Integrated Support for Decentralization 2009-2011', implemented by UNDP, funded by the EU and UNDP.

⁶ This study was conducted prior to the territorial/administrative reform of 2014, at the level of 12 *qarks* and 373 municipalities and communes.

⁷ Territorial unit equivalent of NUTS III level in Albania. Each *qark* is composed of an average of five municipalities.

⁸ The territorial polycentricity analysis for Albania was conducted based on the methodology defined by the ESPON (2005) project "Potential for a polycentric development in Europe".

⁹ Based on the urban agglomerations designated by the Institute of Statistics, on population potential and the 45-minute daily work-commuting isochrones from FUA centres (ESPON, 2017; IN-STAT, 2015; ESPON, 2005).

¹⁰ The index is measured in a scale of 0–100, where the lower an index (or sub-indices) is, the higher the polycentricity. An index of 100 indicates extreme morphological monocentricity.

¹¹ Europe-27 countries.

p. 73)). Polarisation is very high for the size index (97 – based on GDP and population according ESPON, (2005) and Spiekermann *et al.* (2015)), and high for the connectivity index (72.2). The dominant FUA is that of Tirana. The location index is low (28), revealing a “uniform distribution of cities across the territory” (ESPON, 2005, p. 60). The latter is due to historical path dependency¹² and suggests a locational opportunity for a polycentric territorial network of urban settlements in Albania. Yet, no government has supported the development of polycentrism and spatial polarisation is expected to sharpen. In addition, the functional polycentricity is low, too (Toto *et al.*, 2015).

This territorial development has occurred alongside the institutional territorial rescaling processes (Keating, 2014) of the last 30 years. The first governance shift was the introduction of political decentralisation in 1992 following half a century of centralised government under the communist regime. By the end of the communist system in 1990, Albania had its centralised government organised locally into three levels, the urban areas (67 cities), the rural areas (2,848 villages), and 26 districts (regions). The pre-1990s model had a strong influence on the territorial structure of local government’s organisation in the decade of 1990–2000. In 2000, the parliament adopted the first law on local governments¹³, organising them into two levels: municipalities (65 urban areas) and communes (309 rural areas) as the first tier; and 12 *qarks* as the second one. The district (36 such units) was maintained as a historical subdivision, merely to facilitate transition between systems, as most statistics were collected on that level, and several deconcentrated regional ministerial directorates operated at the district level. Local governments had exclusive/own and shared functions, yet, with functional and fiscal power limitations based on respective sectorial laws.

The Government of Albania revisited the decentralisation reform in 2014–2017 (Fig. 2) aiming at decentralising further functionally and fiscally. The reform, including at least three new laws, was supposed to tackle the low territorial, economic and institutional efficiency of service delivery at the local government level (Toto *et al.*, 2014; Shutina, 2015), and spatial disparities. 373 local government units were merged to form 61 municipalities, becoming larger in size (Tirana being the largest one and growing from 45 sq. km to 1,100 sq. km), but also territorially more complex, with urban and rural areas, agricultural land and natural resources. This mixture alone is the epitome of the challenges in the implementation of the reform, by increasing the number of tasks and the volume of legal framework with which municipalities should deal, while also requiring diversification and consolidation of human and financial resources.

¹² National policy of uniform spatial distribution of urban centres between the 1950s and 1980s.

¹³ Law “On Local Self-Government Organisation and Functioning”, No. 8652/2000.

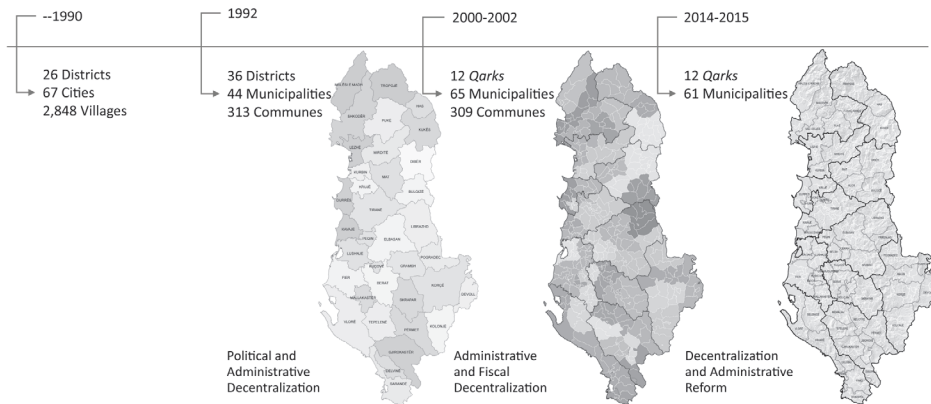


Fig. 2. Territorial rescaling processes after 1990, Albania

Source: own work.

The territorial tier that remained intact during the reforms was the *qark*. Since 2000, political actors intentionally have not given the *qark* any well-differentiated competences of governance. They merely assigned it a monitoring, coordinating and overseeing role for first-tier units to mitigate potential inefficiencies arising from a lack of cooperation, assuming that local governments have no concern for the spill-over effects of their activities beyond their administrative boundaries. To date, the *qark* is a territorial construct of a very weak governance role and weak historical identity, adding to the myriad of local government systems of Central and East European countries, characterised by weak intermediary levels of government (Swianiewicz, 2014; Loewen, 2018). Nonetheless, the *qark*'s mere presence is constantly used politically as an argument to block or contest development reforms.

These administratively-driven territorial rescaling processes have always claimed five criteria: political representation; the efficiency of service delivery; the economy of scales; local self-determination; and historical ties and boundaries. The criteria have been applied unevenly across the territory, with territorial polity dictating the final decision. The political actors declared efficiency and economy of scales as the reasons for initiating reforms, but overrode them in the course of each reform. The concept of 'functional area' was moulded to fit the political discourse and make decisions incontestable. In addition, the political language has constantly articulated historical ties merely to manipulate community sensitivities and achieve political ambitions. Finally, local self-determination would have been mere vocabulary had it not been for the existence of ethnic minorities, which were bestowed the right to govern autonomously the territories where they were set-

tled. Basically, Albania's territorial reforms emphasised the territorial dimension solely to accomplish power redistribution. Additionally, local governments were not keen either on embarking on territorial reforms, as they considered those as weakening the authority of local political stakeholders. They have continuously explored forms of territorial cooperation and, despite capacity gaps, they have come to far more rewarding solutions for their own territorial disparities and fragmentation than the top-down amalgamation. While also acknowledging urban-rural and regional disparities as problems that exceed their scale, blessed with place knowledge, local governments do not consider territorial rescaling neither a panacea, nor a one-time remedy, particularly when the political weight of a reform surpasses the genuine intention for sustainable territorial development.

In the autumn of 2021, the new government which formed after the national elections and the opposition political forces, expressed willingness to implement a new territorial and administrative reform. This potential rescaling phase has not turned into a commitment yet, but it is one of the headlines of political discourse in Albania.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF FOUR GOVERNANCE CASES

As part of institutional territorial rescaling reforms, successive governments have adopted and implemented policies, programs, and practices, in a multi-level approach, aiming at enhancing territorial development and reducing spatial disparities. After the reform of 2000, the governments have focused on deepening functional and fiscal decentralisation for efficient services provision, higher accountability, increased financial resources, and enhanced capacities. In the subsequent reform, the government framed its programs and investments within regional development and regional policy as a remedy for the efficiency and governance failures of decentralisation and as a means leading to cohesion. This chapter will analyse the six conditions for addressing the polycentricity gap in four multi-level governance cases of policies and programs spanning across the reforms, in the context of persisting failures, including territorial disparities.

Each case has specific objectives of territorial development, but all aim at cohesion. In addition, each case is intertwined differently with the territorial rescaling processes since 1990 and they do not satisfy equally the polycentricity gap conditions.

4.1. Urban Renaissance

Urban Renaissance (UR) was the regional development programme implemented by the government in the years 2014–2018, extending to almost every municipality in Albania (70 urban areas). UR, funded through the Regional Development

Fund (RDF), aimed at regenerating public spaces in urban centres, assuming these interventions would resonate causing catalytic development effects regionally. Trackable data from the Ministry of Finance and Economy helps one understand how the fund operated territorially. Thus, in 2014–2018, almost all urban centres in Albania acquired between 200,000 euros and 30,000,000 euros for public space regeneration only, totalling approx. 147 million euros, or 41% of the RDF. The government reported 159 such projects by the end of 2017. Out of 61 municipalities, Tirana received the largest number of projects (13) and funds (approx. 30 million euros), followed by Durrës with 10 projects and approx. 20 million euros.

UR intended to promote the establishment of territorial partnerships. Historically, the RDF has been distributed on a competitive basis to support infrastructure improvements and has been allocated to line ministries or other relevant institutions for capital expenditures. The major institutional change for RDF during the UR implementation was the consolidation of funds previously allocated to ministries, and distributing them to local governments on a competitive basis (Dhrami and Gjika, 2018).

A detailed expenditure track study is necessary to draw the potential effects of these investments on the local and regional economies. The disparities analyses (2014–2018) do not reveal any improvements to regional development profiles, with disparities sharpening further. Hence, the program had an effect on city/urban landscape, improving urban quality, but not necessarily on development indicators. Ultimately, UR supported projects of local relevance and effect. In addition, RDF funds for UR were allocated through top-down decision-making and in direct communication with mayors, side-stepping other stakeholders.

4.2. 100+ Villages

The Integrated Rural Development Program, known as ‘100+ Villages’ is an ongoing initiative of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Agriculture. Its aim is to coordinate development interventions in rural areas, through a cross-sectorial and multi-stakeholder approach, in line with the objectives of regional development as defined in the National Strategy for Development and Integration, and as a model that moves away from disconnected and fragmented interventions on the territory. Municipalities and the Albanian Development Fund (ADF) started gradually the implementation in 2019. According to ADF and Ministry of Agriculture reports, around 19 out of 100 villages received investments of over 81 billion euros in total¹⁴ by 2020. Though implementation is not limited to public institutions, the funds so far have been allocated from the state budget and international donors,

¹⁴ See also: <https://www.reporter.al/si-u-kthye-ne-fushate-marketingu-programi-per-zhvillimin-e-100-fshatrave/>.

with no public-private partnerships being formed around investments. The specific objectives¹⁵ of the program are: (i) Improvement of public infrastructure and public space; (ii) Economic development through diversification of activities; (iii) Development of social and human capital through rural networks, local action groups, vocational training, etc.; (iv) Establishment of the Albanian agritourism network; and (v) Creation of traditional brand store chain.

However, the projects implemented so far have focussed mostly on public space regeneration in village centres and the improvement of facades for traditional architecture buildings. Fewer investments went to agricultural activities, and the ministry of tourism invested in signs and information boards. Unlike the slow progress and fragmentation of implementation, the mobilisation of the program was strategically well-structured. Launched in early 2018, the challenge was to turn its objectives into concrete projects with a dedicated financial portfolio, reflecting the government's interests and local issues. Therefore, the government built a governance mechanism, led by an inter-ministerial committee, which approves allocation and distribution of funding. At the technical level, the advisor to the Prime Minister on planning issues and the National Territory Planning Agency (NTPA) coordinated the design process, implemented with the involvement of five universities. NTPA assigned each university a group of villages and launched in the spring of 2018 the '100+ Villages Academia', which produced development visions and proposed projects for implementation. The output of the academia guided the 2019–2020 budgetary provisions.

The fieldwork by universities, besides generating, gathering and exchanging knowledge, entailed also communication and negotiation with local communities, to justify not merely the legal requirements for participatory processes, but also a necessity to respond efficiently to territorial constructs. The proposals contained the views and requests of local communities. The management was decentralised, but decision-making remained central. Municipalities facilitated communication and knowledge exchange locally, and with the national government. Municipalities and communities did not have a say in the approval of programming documents, visions, or projects. They influenced the outcome only by being involved in the design phase.

4.3. Forest commons

To date, there has been no definitive figure regarding the total forest area in Albania, which varies between 20%¹⁶ and 30% of the territory (Toto, 2019; Global Forest Watch, 2019; FAO¹⁷, 2017). The current government's initiative of estab-

¹⁵ More information is available at: www.bujqesia.gov.al [accessed on: 17.03.2021].

¹⁶ Country dashboards and downloadable data at <https://www.globalforestwatch.org> [accessed on: 17.03.2021].

¹⁷ See: http://faostat.fao.org/static/syb/syb_3.pdf [accessed on: 17.03.2021].

lishing a forests' cadastre should provide accurate and up-to-date figures, including fragmentation and a decrease of the total area/volume over the years, but it is still ongoing. The forest area is decreasing, despite the moratorium set by the government in 2016.¹⁸

A major institutional change was the introduction in the law in 2015 of forest governance as an exclusive function of local governments. Municipalities currently manage 82% of the forest area in Albania, 3% of forest land is privately owned, and 15% are forests classified as environmentally protected areas, which are managed centrally.¹⁹ The forestry law had not recognised a regime of common forests governance, i.e. forests owned or managed in common by the adjacent living communities, until 2020. The recently approved law recognises these communities' right to use forests, establishing community structures to manage forests in cooperation with local governments.

Toto (2018) has explained that at least 30% of municipal forests, located at altitudes of 800–1,200 metres above sea level and adjacent to rural settlements, are governed through a system of common pool resources (CPR). Until 2020, forest CPRs had been rather informal, 'allowed' by municipalities due to a lack of financial and human resources to execute their own function. The proximity factor is important in linking people to forests because it makes it easier and feasible to take care of them, and local families have sufficient knowledge in doing that. In addition, people value forests' provisioning, regulatory and spiritual ecosystem services (Toto, 2019). Furthermore, before 1944, a portion of the forest land had been governed in common in Albania and this was recognised in both customary and modern laws (Gjeçovi, 1925; Ministria e Ekonomisë Kombëtare, 1930), with forest CPRs functioning through 'proprietary rights' (Ostrom, 2003). Historical ties were/have been strong and local population's memory is so vivid that forest CPRs were reborn after 70 years of missing institutional support. Local communities have established internal sets of rules upon which each family takes care of its 'share' of common forests and all families monitor together (Toto, 2019). A nested forest CPR system exists with more than 200 local forest associations, all acting on behalf of the local commoners and supporting them (whenever possible) financially. The National Forest Federation is the highest-level entity and it supports the lower levels/nodes in the polycentric system through projects, funds, technical advice, and lobbying and advocacy at the national policy-making level.

¹⁸ Figures published on official websites and in media reports, such as: <https://faktoje.al/shfrytezi-mi-abuziv-me-pyjet-rritet-edhe-pse-ka-nje-moratorium-ne-fuqi/>.

¹⁹ National Agency for Protected Areas at http://akzm.gov.al/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item-list&layout=category&task=category&id=5&Itemid=289=en.

4.4. Territorial planning²⁰ forums and networks

Territorial planning is shared between local and national institutions. Municipalities draft local plans and local councils adopt them. However, comprehensive local territorial plans that address entire local territories are approved also by the National Territory Council. Additionally, the NTPA, as a technical body, monitors local planning processes, provides advice, and issues acts of compliance with the legislation and national territorial plans. The decision-making system is pyramidal, but legislation has defined the involvement of various actors during the planning process, constitutionalising a network of territorial governance interactions. Communities and interest groups do not have any decision-making authority, but they can influence decisions.

There are currently three participatory planning mechanisms, which constitute a nested system that is partially constitutionalised, and partially agreed upon by stakeholders themselves to improve their influence in the process:

1. *The Forum for Local Planning Coordination* is established by the NTPA with the participation of public institutions (local and national) that have competencies over the territory. The aim is to promote cross-sectoral coordination at the territorial level. The forum has no decision-making power, but can resolve conflicts. It serves as a platform of strategic coordination in the frame of multi-level governance for planning.

2. *The local planning forum* is established voluntarily in each municipality, it is promoted by the mayor for planning purposes, and it has a minimum of tasks legally defined. Municipal staff take territorial plans and other development initiatives to this forum, though they can also seek other forms of citizen cooperation. The forum can remain informal as an initiative, or formalise a memorandum of understanding with the municipality. All 44 municipalities that had plans approved by mid-2018, have a local planning forum as well. However, the forum is not equally active everywhere, depending on the level of citizens' engagement and on community trust in the local government.

3. *Citizen Advisory Panels (CAP)* constitute one of the most prominent mechanisms of local direct participatory democracy in Albania. CAPs are built voluntarily after the experience of strategic planning citizen committees that operated in various municipalities during the years 2000. With only an advisory role, a CAP can influence a local council's decision-making. CAPs have 15–25 members, except for one municipality which has 40, and are composed of representatives of local NGOs, youth, women's and vulnerable groups, media, and active citizens. CAPs have played a role in urban, budget, and action planning. CAPs have internal regulations covering: agreement or acknowledgement by local government; criteria for becoming a member; identification of candidates; coordinator election; calendar of activities; rules for calling a meeting and addressing local issues through position papers and communication means.

²⁰ This is the Albanian term for spatial planning.

5. DISCUSSION ON THE CASES AND POLYCENTRICITY GAP

In Hooghes and Marks' (2003) taxonomy, the UR program and the 100+ Villages belong to type I arrangements, forest CPRs settle in the type II, while planning forums fall in between the two types. The government initiated and implemented the UR program concurrently with the territorial administrative reform of 2014. The implementation of the 100+Villages program started after the adoption of the new local government boundaries. Forest CPRs have existed since the early 2000s, surviving all territorial rescaling reforms. CAPs as part of the planning forums have existed since the early 2000s, while the other forums were born with the territorial reform of 2014.

The UR and the 100+ Villages programs were aimed at tackling spatial disparities, and creating visibility and an attractive image for the political ambition and its territorial power. As central government programs, they have had the opportunity to be territorially strategic. However, the fragmented intervention of UR, and the low number of projects implemented so far in the 100+ Villages program, make the approaches more of an injection, without regional effects. Studies on regional disparities have not reported so far any reduction of inequality. Tourism and services have been stimulated from investments, which increased confidence within respective local communities. The 100+ Villages program, though only partially implemented, was better diffused into the territory, because of its co-design process.

The purpose of the planning forums was to combine type I and type II multi-level governance approaches in one territorial planning governance system. CAPs depend particularly on a community's organisation capacity and willingness to convey local knowledge in decision-making. The other forums depend on the accountability and coordination capacity of respective government entities. Finally, forest CPRs, aim to ensure resilience and local development objectives, adapting to the evolving institutional context. The polycentricity gap is almost fully addressed in forest CPRs and the system has been resilient since before 1945. More in detail in Table 2.

The UR program was envisioned as a program of multi-level polycentric governance with bottom-up initiatives feeding top-down programming and decisions into partnership-based implementation. Yet in reality, priorities were set centrally, the network of local actors was non-existent or bypassed, and the common interest was limited to political objectives. Instead of a competitive projects' selection process, there were direct negotiations between mayors and the RDF committee. This undermined the public system of rules. Furthermore, UR was not based on the national strategy for development, or on the national territorial plan, or on any regional development policy.

The 100+ Villages program engaged numerous stakeholders during the design phase. They all had a common niche of genuine attraction for cooperation.

The central government had an interest in inner peripheries and lagging regions. Through cooperation, the government was able to pack all initiatives into one financial portfolio to control during allocation and implementation. By mobilising the academia, the network of stakeholders was inclined to agree on a set of implementation rules. The program adopted polycentric governance during planning, but not during implementation. The full assessment of the program can only be concluded when it finishes, i.e., in 2022.

The Forest CPRs system of Albania is fully decentralised and polycentric, with a nested system, where nodes and layers have various degrees of power and decision-making across the territorial scales. Commoners and local associations cooperate with municipal officials. This complex system of polycentric governance works based on a set of internal rules and legislation. All critical factors for polycentric governance are fulfilled and the system is efficient, robust and adaptable to territorial dynamics. The recent legal changes will help the system extend CPR governance to larger forest areas, and increase the commoners' opportunity to access public funds for forest maintenance.

The participatory planning forums form a system that fulfils almost all of the six polycentricity gap conditions. However, the system is not fully decentralised and the decision-making authority is shared among government institutions, with the exclusion of non-governmental actors. The latter's role is limited to influencing the design stage. All these interactions are conducted within a nested system of stakeholders and networking relations clearly defined in a territory, where powers and authority are not equally shared among participants. The management and approval structures, as well as the sets of rules are clear.

Table 2. Comparison of cases based on the conditions of the polycentricity gap

Conditions of polycentricity gap	'Urban Renaissance'	'100+ Villages'	Participatory Planning Forums	Forest CPRs
1. Governance decentralisation	No: Central decision-making; Communication to other stakeholders in the network.	No: Central decision-making; Beneficiaries and experts influenced decision during design phase.	Partially: Centralised – to – decentralised approaches; Unequally distributed across national territory.	Yes: Decentralised decision-making.
2. Subjects of common interest for decision-making centres	Partially: Urban regeneration of city centres, for central government; Local development for the urban areas.	Yes: Establish development practices for rural areas; Enhance tourism potential; Increase local economic opportunities.	Yes: The General Local Territory Plans, approved by the Municipality and the National Territory Council.	Yes: Ensure sustainable use of local forests; Maintain forests legacy.

Conditions of polycentricity gap	'Urban Renaissance'	'100+ Villages'	Participatory Planning Forums	Forest CPRs
3. Independent centres of decision-making	No: The central authorities manage the program and approve funds.	No: The central authorities manage the program; local actors influence the outcome of design phase.	Partially: All three types of planning forums as nodes of a larger participatory planning network.	Yes: Commoners; village-based groups of commoners; local forest associations; National Forest Federation.
4. Common niche of genuine attraction for cooperation	No: Weak convergence between government interest and local needs for services & economic opportunities.	Partially: Economic/business opportunities and tourism activities for local development.	Yes: Concrete proposals on housing, land use, businesses' locations and recreational activities.	Yes: Common forests, located adjacent to villages involved in the nested system of forest governance.
5. Territories to materialise the common and autonomous interest	Yes: Centres of cities as government intention for urban cores to resonate into regions.	Yes: Village centres, clusters of villages: each defining the core of a specific rural region, representing sub-regions.	Yes: Local government administrative jurisdiction area.	Yes: Forest ecosystems in the country: close to villages, owned or managed in common prior 1940.
6. System or rules accepted by actors in the network	Partially: Legal rules and implementation frameworks only.	Yes: Legal rules and frameworks mostly. Rules of participation defined <i>ad hoc</i> during design stage.	Yes: Internal rules always. A minimum of legally defined rules for the national forum and for local forums, not CAPs.	Yes: Internal rules always; fulfilment of forest legislation as well.

Source: own work.

These four cases reveal different response to the territorial reforms' dynamics, due to different levels of addressing the polycentricity gap. The more centralised the decision-making is, even in the case of capillary investments in a territory, the fewer conditions of the polycentricity gap are satisfied, and the less effective the system is. The knowledge factor is also very important. The case of forest commons is successful because knowledge about commons is available and transferable

among stakeholders and generations. In the case of forums for participatory planning, knowledge and dissemination and exchange mechanisms have not increased the trust of the participants among themselves and on local governments, nor has the participants' willingness to be involved and contribute to the planning output.

Finally, the territorial distribution of the cases is quite diverse. The cases with centralisation of power and authority have a hierarchical structure of multi-level territorial organisation. The amalgamation of local governments and the centralisation tendencies on the allocation of development funds suit the territorial display of governance in UR and in 100+ Villages. When decentralisation is high, as in forest CPRs or in CAPs, the territorial structure is also decentralised and polycentric from a functional perspective, represented by various centres of decision-making distributed across the territory. The sizes of municipalities have been irrelevant to the functioning of governance in these two cases, and the respective local government functions in each case have been effectively delivered because multi-actor cooperation and networking were at the core of the governance model, regardless of the changing administrative boundaries.

In Albania, consecutive governments have addressed local governance inefficiencies and territorial development through designation of optimal levels and sizes of government in the territory, considering network cooperation and functional interactions as institutionally sophisticated or inadequate to the context. The political discourse has almost uniquely influenced territorial reforms. The resulting arrangements of governance shifts have become more complex, without responding precisely to the needs for which the reforms were initiated all along. The government opted initially for a small-scale local government, to emphasise the need for closer links with citizens and to increase accountability. The small scale produced territorial fragmentation, which affected efficiency and redistribution negatively. Fragmented local governments can only allow for cross-subsidies, unless multi-actors' cooperation and networking are in place. The resulting amalgamation did not lower disparities either. Actually, it concealed them, showing that any efficiency improvement in service delivery did not enhance territorial development. The institutional rescaling was in search for optimal territorial levels for each task, but such areas do not seem to exist, and even if they did, there is a complete asymmetry among local contexts and use purposes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper started with the assumption that institutional territorial rescaling, implemented to eliminate governance inefficiencies, lower disparities, and boost territorial development, will still produce territorial constructs of fuzzy bounda-

ries and complex governance, while not necessarily yielding cohesion. Whether through upscaling – more consolidation, or downscaling – further subdivision, new forms of territorial fragmentation will appear, particularly due to fixed, not so swift to change voting territorial containers. Multi-level governance that builds on polycentric interaction, without searching for optimal jurisdiction sizes, may enhance territorial development if the conditions to address the polycentricity gap in governance are satisfied.

To substantiate the assumption, we explored polycentric governance and examined the conditions to close the polycentricity gap in multi-level governance in Albania, in a setting of territorial rescaling and development that has spanned the last 30 years. As most CEE countries, Albania also went through government decentralisation since the outset of the transition in 1990. The autonomy of local governments and the respective high initial level of territorial fragmentation largely prevented rescaling efforts (see Loewen, 2018) from occurring for more than a decade. Subsequently, the government embarked on two other institutional rescaling processes for government and administrative boundaries, focusing only on the local level of the government. As a result, the regional level and regional development remained in hibernation, sometimes slightly animated by the government to justify its political ambitions for territorial rescaling. In this context of continuous territorial rescaling, policy objectives such as territorial development and cohesion and governance efficiency remained unsatisfied. This was due to both, the inherent gaps of multi-level governance and the political motivation behind the reforms. Therefore, taking the voting containers as a rather rigid territorial construct, we have argued that the way forward to achieve the policy objectives of cohesion and efficiency is through the embedding of partnerships and polycentric interactions in multi-level governance.

Methodologically, we built a model of six conditions of the polycentricity gap in governance and applied it to four cases of multi-level governance. Out of the four, two cases satisfied all or most of the polycentricity gap conditions, and revealed a significantly higher level of achievement of their policy objectives, including endurance, flexibility, and adaptation during all three rescaling periods, as opposed to the remaining cases. We conclude that addressing the problems of scale in multi-level governance implies overcoming the polycentricity gap and embedding polycentric interactions into territorial constructs generated by or contributing to continuous territorial rescaling. In a polycentric governance system, no one has the ultimate monopoly (Aligica and Tarko, 2012) and policy communities have decision-making authority, which they utilise based on a commonly agreed system or rules (laws and informal regulations). The power, which is related to specific policy objectives, diffuses among social actors instead of being captured by government institutions only. Policy communities are formed at various overlaying territorial scales and represent both, government and non-government actors. In order to adapt to the territorial rescaling dynamics, policy communities

as centres of decision-making should share common interests that are materialised in territorial constructs.

On a theoretical level, this research adds to the efforts of polycentric governance scholars for “developing greater clarity around the concept of polycentric governance and the conditions under which it may lead to desired outcomes” (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019, p. 928). It does so by proposing a model that builds on the comparative deployment of dimensions, attributes, and enabling institutional conditions and prerequisites for polycentric governance identified by other authors, while bringing in a less researched dimension, i.e., the territory. The application of the model to the Albanian context yielded the expected results. However, we recognise two limitations of the research: i) the number of cases is limited – four cases, each representing a unique typology, and ii) all cases pertain to the Albanian context of territorial rescaling and development. Therefore, while the results provide a satisfying indication on the role of polycentric interactions in territorial multi-level governance, they also suggest the necessity for expanding the approach towards a larger number of cases and territorial contexts. In order to verify the validity of the model beyond the Albanian context, particularly in the Western Balkans where territorial rescaling dynamics resemble more the Albanian ones, the variables per each polycentricity gap condition should be adjusted to the territorial and governance specificities. Such a customisation is important for the validity of the model, and it basically emphasises that the territory is a contextual factor that affects polycentric interactions and, therefore, it creates variability of polycentric governance results in the different settings.

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ECONOMIC GROWTH AGENDA: THE EFFECTS OF FULL UTILISATION OF CAPITAL BUDGETS AMONG STATISTICAL PLANNING REGIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Abstract. North Macedonia can improve its economic growth by addressing the infrastructure gap by at least full capital budget utilisation. The outturn/execution of capital budget expenditures is low and in relative terms decreasing. The planned public finances for regional balanced development are also low and non-compliant with the legally set levels. A test of several hypothetical scenarios of full capital budget utilisation it is expected to positively contribute to the economic growth immediately and in the period to follow. Even if total debt increases in nominal terms, in relative terms the debt-to-GDP on a longer-run reduces through generating additional economic output.

Key words: regional development, infrastructure, external debt, North Macedonia, capital expenditure, public investments.

1. INTRODUCTION

North Macedonia as part of the Western Balkan (WB) region aspires to become an integral part of the European Union (EU). Meanwhile, the EU enlargement process continues to be the key reform-driving mechanism for the region as candidate

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countries are obliged to implement the EU *acquis*. The European Commission's strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' (EC, 2018) foresees an Action Plan with six flagship initiatives targeting specific areas of common interest. One of the flagship initiatives is the improvement of transport, and energy connectivity. Aligning the quality of infrastructure with that of the EU is one of the European Commission's (EC) priorities for the region. Public infrastructure is considered to be an essential driver for economic growth and job creation, thus the WB took steps towards greater connectivity following the 2015 WB Summit. In the period from 2014 to 2020, the EU pledged up to one billion EUR for infrastructure in the WB and has distributed over 70% (as of 2018) of those funds, providing support for 31 infrastructure projects (EC, Connectivity Agenda, 2018).

The paper focusses on the following questions: What is the size of under-executed public capital expenditures as a 'gap' reflecting the capital infrastructure needs in North Macedonia (reflected through the capital expenditure budget of the local governments) and the level of actual implementation (through the execution of capital budgets)? What are the differences in and among the eight statistical planning regions? Would the debt be significantly affected if these infrastructure finances were actually fully completed and financed through external debt? Would these potential investments have contributed positively to the economic growth?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no general consensus on the degree of importance of public investments as productivity factors in the economic development process, however, it is generally agreed that it complements productivity and thus economic output. The role of infrastructure (as a significant part of public investment) on sub-national development has also been examined. The availability and quality of infrastructure appears to have an impact on the economic productivity and the social wellbeing at least through: direct output contribution, increased aggregate demand, and influences on private sector investment location. The potential growth benefits from addressing infrastructure gaps are likely to be significant especially for developing countries and emerging markets, more than for developed economies. A study on public infrastructure for WB showed that closing the infrastructure gap by 20 pp would generate higher annual real GDP growth rates by about 0.2 to 0.3 pp over the medium term (Atoyan *et al.*, 2018).

In the framework of the Berlin Process, the EC estimated a total transport infrastructure investment volume of 7.7 billion EUR. According to estimates, over a period of 15 years, this would cause an additional GNP growth impulse of about

1 pp and a positive employment effect of up to 200,000 people or about 4% of the workforce (Holzner *et al.*, 2015).

Regarding North Macedonia, IMF (2016b) forecasted that the four ongoing highways and railway investment projects would result in 2% to 3% annual GDP growth for the period from 2014 to 2018 and were likely to raise the real GDP growth rate by 0.5 pp on average each year from 2014 to 2020; furthermore, the study forecasted that enhancing public investment efficiency could increase growth effects by up to 0.8 pp.

It should be noted that despite the fact that infrastructure projects have a positive effect on economic performance in general, one could expect their financing to have the opposite effect on the economy and that not all types of financing would be equally desirable (Pereira, 2013). For instance, since Chinese funds move in exclusively in the form of loans, this can create risks of unsustainable debt burdens for some countries in the WB region (Hurley *et al.*, 2018).

In industrial countries, infrastructure investment is decentralised to a significant extent (Estache and Sinha, 1995). However, studies suggest that revenue mobilisation efforts of local governments (and or other sub-national governments) in most developing countries need to be increased if local governments are to assume more responsibility for delivering infrastructure services. Public infrastructure is of great interest for reaching more balanced regional economic development because of the positive spill-over effects on the local economy (Fisher and Sullivan, 2016). Larger public investments, especially in infrastructure, are considered essential for long-term growth though they induce rising public deficits, and debt-to-GDP ratios, at times coupled with the inability of the public sector to deliver efficient investment spending (OECD, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and analysis of the topic of public capital budget deficiencies in North Macedonia by offering an overview of the level of public investments, compare and contrast their distribution and structure per statistical planning regions, as well as to identify the mismatch between the planned and executed capital expenditure at the statistical planning regions' level (hereinafter referred to as regions¹). Furthermore, we conclude with several hypothetical simulations of the possible macroeconomic effects of debt-financed infrastructure projects.

¹ North Macedonia has a two-tier government: central and local. Moreover, there are 8 statistical Regions for planning purposes only, and the 81 local self-government units belong to one of the eight planning regions.

The data on the magnitude of regional investments is measured through the size of capital expenditure per statistical regions, calculated as a sum of the public capital investments of each municipal budget and the final accounts within the planning region. Individual municipal data is collected from the enacted budgets and the final annual budget accounts.

Firstly, the paper gives an overview of the budgetary data on capital expenditure in North Macedonia, over the course of the last decade at the central and regional level. The data was obtained from the Ministry of Finance's final accounts of the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) for the period from 2008 to 2019, the State Statistical Office (SSO) Databases, the Ministry for Local Self-government, and the Bureau for Regional Development of North Macedonia. The capital expenditure in North Macedonia can be categorised into three groups depending on the source of funding: 1) capital expenditures financed from the central government budget; 2) capital expenditures financed through the municipal budgets, and 3) capital expenditures at the statistical planning regions' level funded by the Regional Development Programs (RDP).

As we analyse the trends related to capital expenditure we indicate the unbalanced capital expenditure size among the eight regions in North Macedonia.² The data indicates the size of the recurrent budget, capital budget, and the outturn rate of capital expenditure, overall on a central level and per region, for the period 2008–2019. Furthermore, we provide an overview of the structure of capital budget expenditure per sub-category: equipment and machinery, buildings, other construction, furniture, strategic goods and reserves, non-financial assets, vehicles, and capital subsidies to public enterprises and NGOs.

To qualify the infrastructure gap is a challenging task and beyond the scope of the paper due to limitations, thus we will assume that planned budgetary capital expenditures reflect the needs in terms of investment size. Thus we will use it as an estimate of the gap (as a difference of the planned and executed capital budget) as a value of the minimum 'mismatch' between the needs and the public sector's capacity to invest (as true data to identify the infrastructure gap is not attainable). Thirdly, under specific assumptions we estimate the possible effect over the debt-to-GDP if the full execution of the planned capital budgets in North Macedonia takes place and is financed by debt.

For the purpose of estimating the macroeconomic effect of foreign external debt financing of infrastructure mismatch (defined as the difference between the plan and the execution of the capital budget), we use the Macroabc³ model. The

² The eight statistical planning regions in the Republic of North Macedonia: the Vardar Region, the East Region, the Southeast Region, the Southwest Region, the Northeast Region, the Polog Region, the Pelagonia Region, and the Skopje Region cover all eighty one local self-government units.

³ Originally, the model was used by the Dutch CPB, and it is an aggregate demand, aggregate supply model (AD-AS model) that combines modern macroeconomic theory with pragmatic modelling.

model is a financial programming model based on behavioural equations calibrated to the Macedonian economy. We analyse several different scenarios related to debt-financing the identified gap between the planned and actual capital budgets of the local governments in North Macedonia from a regional perspective.

The Baseline scenario is calculated based on historical data, Scenario 1 measures the effect on the total debt-to-GDP if the identified infrastructure mismatch is completely financed by foreign debt during 2020, Scenario 2 measures the effect on the total debt-to-GDP if the identified infrastructure mismatch is completely financed by foreign debt during 2020 under the assumption of full capital budget execution over the next five years.

4. TRENDS IN THE CAPITAL BUDGET OF NORTH MACEDONIA

In the last decade the construction sector in North Macedonia was marked by the Skopje 2014 infrastructure project, which was estimated to a value of over 600 million EUR, primarily consisting of buildings and monuments located in the capital City of Skopje. In the meanwhile, there have been regular and significant underexecutions of the central budget's capital expenditure plans, even subsequent to the frequent supplementary budgets (almost every fiscal year), predominantly with significant capital budget cuts. The underlying reasons are manifold, starting from the absorptive capacity of institutions, a lack of fully developed programs and multi-annual planning, deficiency of performance assessments, or other structural hindrances. Overall, capital budget outturn contributed 10% to the total state budget (10-year average), ranging from the decade highest of 14% in 2008, to lowest 6% in 2018. The average annual absolute value of the capital budget of North Macedonia (central level) in the last decade (2009–2019) amounted to 17 billion Macedonian denars⁴ (MKD) or around 277 million EUR. In the same period, the planned annual average capital budget was 349 million EUR after the supplementary budgets, resulting in an average execution rate of 79%, with the lowest rate of 66% in 2018 and the highest of 88% in 2012 (Fig. 1).

During the same period, according to the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI), the quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure was moderately low and even lower compared to 2010. In 2018, investments continued to contract due to delayed large public infrastructure projects, while in 2019 the economic growth rate increased to 2.8% as a result of the continued infrastructure investment because of the lifting of moratoria on building permits issuance in large municipalities (IMF, 2016a).

⁴ North Macedonia has a fixed exchange rate regime, 1 EUR = 61.52 MKD.

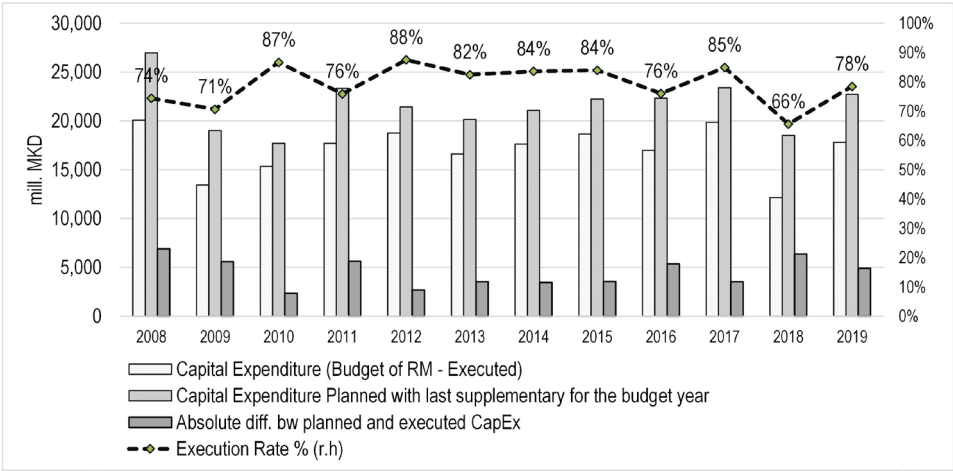


Fig. 1. Execution of the capital budget at the central government level (million MKD) 2008–2018

Source: own work based on data from the Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia's Treasury reports, Enacted Budgets, Supplementary Budgets and Final Account for the period from 2008–2019.

4.1. Regional distribution of public capital investments

Regional development imbalances in the Republic of North Macedonia have created concerns over time due to the continuous expanding of the gap since 2011, measured by the GDP variation coefficient across the eight statistical planning regions (Nikolov, 2017) and have continued to be significantly large (Fig. 2).

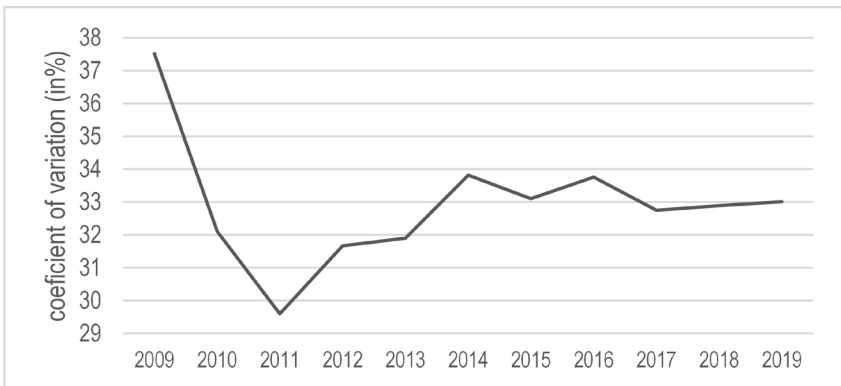


Fig. 2. Coefficient of variation of regional per capita output

Source: own work based on data for GDP per statistical region of the SSO.

One of the mechanisms in place for inducing more balanced regional development in RNM is the Balanced Regional Development Program (BRDP), which in the adequate Law (OG of RM 63/2007) stipulates that annually at least 1% of the GDP is to be allocated to the BRDP. However, neither the planned budget nor the implemented projects jointly match to the legally set amount (Fig. 3). Most of the projects financed by the program are short-termed and for basic local infrastructure (such as waste water, sewerage, local road maintenance, etc.) with low per project value (on average: 30,000 EUR). The distribution of BRDP capital expenditures per a planning region indicate that the highest absolute values in infrastructure investments are allocated in the Northeast planning region (~17%) and the lowest in the Skopje Region (8%). The underlying reason is of a methodological nature since the Northeast planning region is among the least developed, and thus absorbs the largest part of the funds, unlike the Skopje Planning Region which receives the lowest portion of capital expenditure BRDP funds as it is the most developed.

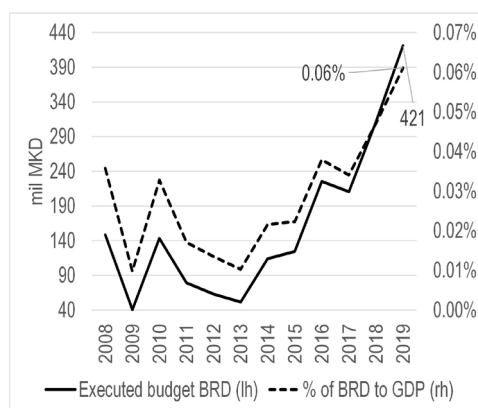


Fig. 3. Regional Development Program Funds

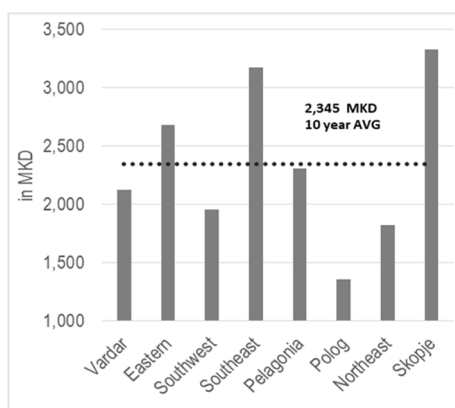


Fig. 4. Ten year average capital expenditure per capita per region

Source: own work based on data from the enacted budgets & budget final account of RNM.

Another source of public investments are the local (municipal) budgets which are part of specific statistical regions. The average capital expenditure per capita showed an increase from 1,455 MKD in 2008 to 3,078 MKD in 2019, however, with significant standard deviation among the regions, and lower per capita expenditure in the least developed regions (Fig. 4). The average contribution of capital expenditure to the total planned budget expenditure (in local budgets) increased by 6 pp from 2010 to 2017 but then it dropped again which may have reflected a slight improvement in the local governments' efforts towards increased capital budget expenditures. Nevertheless, the actual budget execution rate has remained steady at 18% on average of the total budget expenditure, with a significant gap

between the planned and actual implementation of the local investments (Fig. 5). Furthermore, the ratio between the capital-to-total budgets confirms the large differences among the least and the most developed regions. The decade average contribution of the capital budget for the least developed regions, such as Polog and Northeast planning regions' municipalities was 12% and 15% accordingly, while Skopje region with 28% (average for 2010–2019).

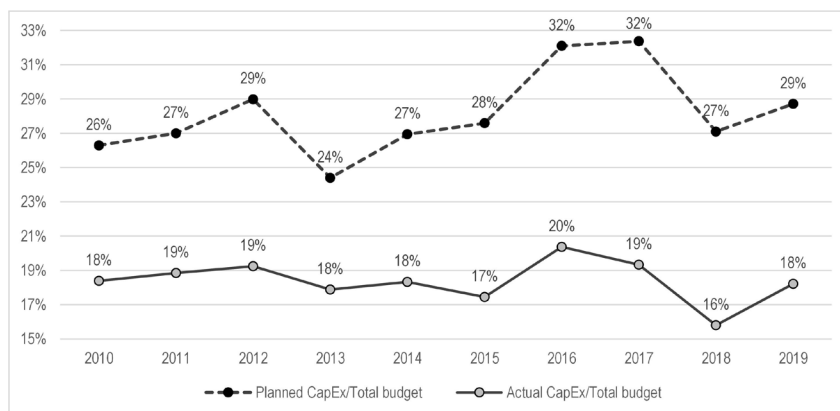


Fig. 5. Cumulative municipal planned and actual capital budget expenditure percentage of the total budget

Source: own work based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of Macedonia 2010–2019.

As shown in Fig. 6, in 2019 the Southwest Region had the highest execution rate of planned capital expenditures, with 63.5%, followed by the Eastern Region with 62.7%, the Southeast Region 59.2%, and the Skopje Region with 57.2%. The execution rate of capital budgets was somewhat lower in the Northeast with 60%, Polog and Vardar with 53%, and Pelagonia with 40%.

Overall in absolute figures, in 2017 the Skopje Region had the largest capital investments of 3.3 billion MKD, followed by the Southeast Region with 590.6 million MKD, Eastern Region with 577.5 million MKD, and Pelagonia Region with 572.5 million MKD. The value of capital expenditure was somewhat lower in the Southwest Region with 528.6 million MKD, followed by 390.4 million MKD in the Polog Region, and 382.34 million MKD in the Vardar Region, while the lowest value was recorded in the Northeast Region with only 301.9 million MKD. There was a noticeable difference between the size of capital investments between the Skopje Region and all remaining regions in North Macedonia.

The capital expenditure in Skopje region represents 50% of the total capex, i.e. all the remaining regions invest together as does the Skopje region. This confirms the severe discrepancy between the public investments in the capital and the other regions.

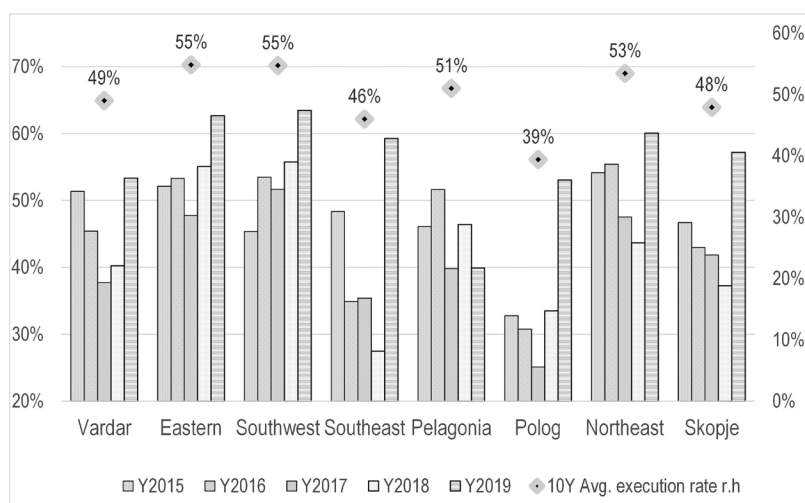


Fig. 6. Capital budget outturn in percentage per region (based on the cumulative municipal budgets)

Source: own work based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of Macedonia 2009–2019.

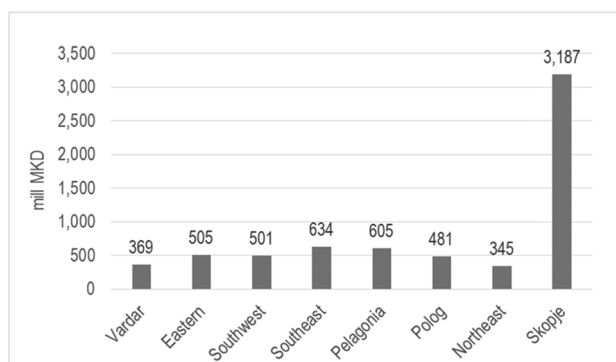


Fig. 7. 10-year absolute value average of capital expenditure per planning region (in million MKD)

Source: own work based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of Macedonia 2010–2019.

4.2. Composition of capital investment budgets

According to a local budgets' economic classification, the public capital expenditures are sub-categorised as: 1) purchase of equipment and machinery; 2) construction of buildings; 3) other construction buildings; 4) purchase of furniture; 5) strategic goods and reserves; 6) non-financial assets investments; 7) purchase of vehicles; and 8) capital transfer subsidies to PUC and NGOs.

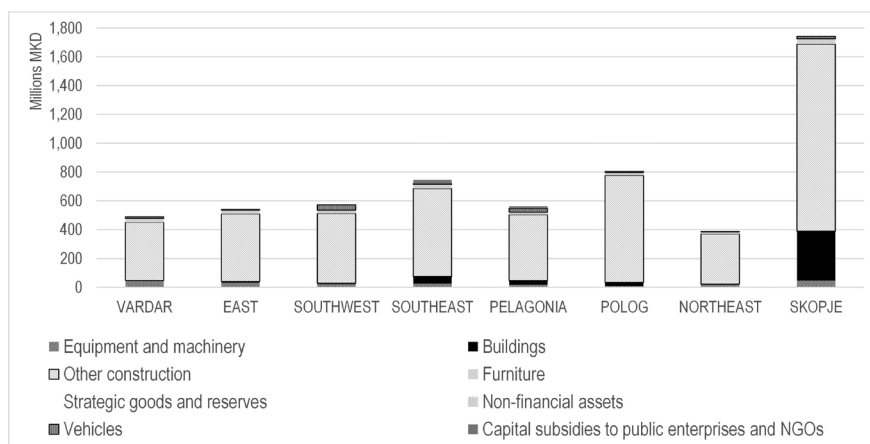


Fig. 8. Capital expenditure structure in 2019 per region and subcategory

Source: own work based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019.

The predominant sub-category is Other constructions (Fig. 7), with investment value of 5.6 billion MKD in 2019, (or 76% of total capital expenditure), which was seven times higher than the next capital expenditure sub-category – Construction of buildings, with a value of 0.76 billion MKD in 2019.

The Other construction sub-category covered a wide variety of capital expenditures, including road infrastructure, building bridges, water systems and infrastructure, waste infrastructure, sewerage systems, communication infrastructure, monuments, energy infrastructure, and other items (Fig. 8). The road infrastructure expenditure covered the design, construction and reconstruction of streets and roads and was by far higher when compared to other public infrastructure expenditure. On average, in the last five years (2015–2019), road expenditure increased by 30%, amounting to 3 billion MKD (~49 million EUR). Relative to other expenses, the second highest sub-category was expenditure associated with ‘Other buildings’, an all-inclusive and a wide category of general constructions (such as squares, maintenance of side road infrastructure, other urban equipment, etc.)

Further examination of the ‘Other constructions’ sub-category at the regional level indicates that road infrastructure expenses and other construction subcategory expenses were mainly centred in the Skopje Region and the City of Skopje as a separate local self-government unit. The highest road infrastructure expenditure in 2019 (as was the case in the previous years) was recorded in the City of Skopje, amounting to 386 million MKD or 6.3 million EUR, and the lowest infrastructure expenditure was in the Northeast Region, with 163.8 million MKD or 2.66 million EUR. However, when considered per capita in MKD, the lowest per capita expenditure was again among the least developed regions (measured as GDP per capita) (Fig. 10).

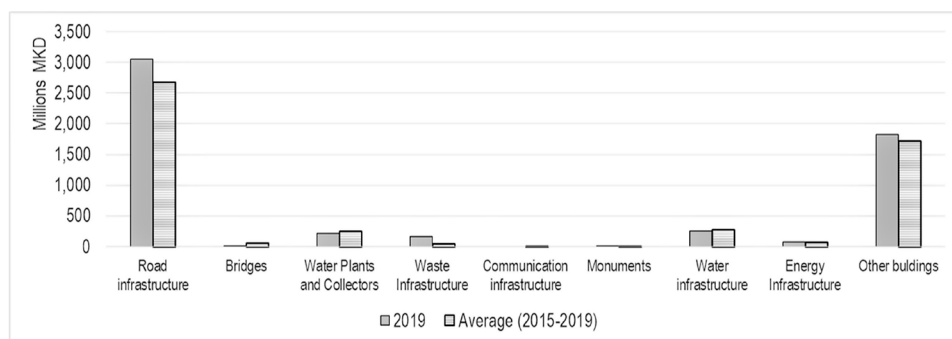


Fig. 9. Composition of sub-category Other constructions

Source: own work based on data of the State Budgets of the Republic of Macedonia 2013–2019.

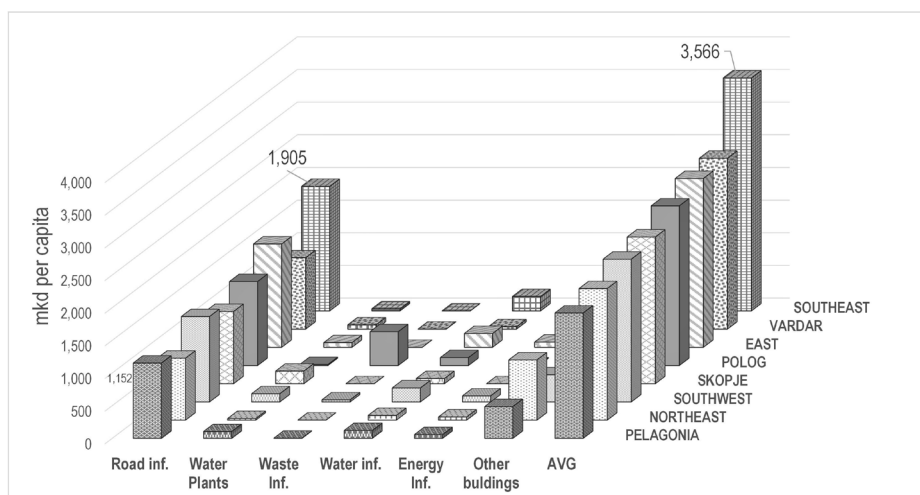


Fig. 10. Other construction expenditure in 2019 per region per capita (in MKD)

Source: own work based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of Macedonia 2019.

Since there is no one method for measuring the infrastructural gap, although as a term it is used as the difference between the estimated requirement needs and the actual level of investments, the consensus is that it is possible to achieve only approximations. We made an attempt to identify the gap as the difference between the needs based on local strategic documents of the municipalities; however, due to a lack of projected financial data it was excluded. Thus, in this text, we refer to the infrastructure gap as a mismatch, estimated as a difference between the planned capital expenditure and executed capital expenditure, under the assumption that the planned expenditures are based on previous analyses and strategic planning reflecting the needs and priorities of a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

The total cumulative financial difference between the planned and executed capital expenditure for all municipalities in 2019 in North Macedonia was 5.2 billion MKD (or 84.6 million EUR) (Fig. 11) which amounted to an average 58.2% of annually planned capital expenditure. As per the eight separate statistical planning regions' municipalities, the difference between planned and actual expenditure in its absolute value was the highest in the Skopje Region, followed by the Polog Region, etc.

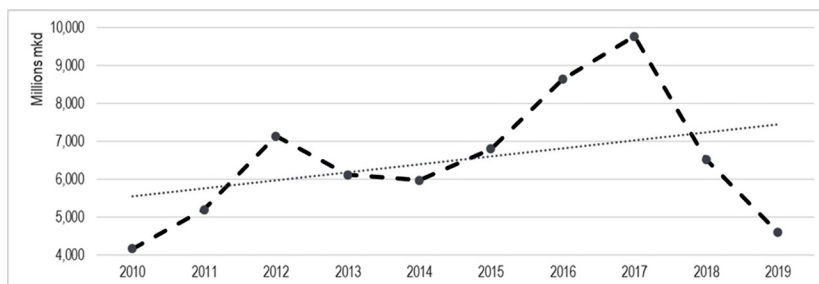


Fig. 11. Total value of under-executed capital budget (cumulative of all municipalities)

Source: own work, based on data of the State Budget of the Republic of Macedonia 2010–2019.

In relative terms, as a percentage of the total planned capital expenditure in 2019, the execution rate was the highest among the municipalities in the Southwest Region with 63.5%, followed by the East Region with 63%, Northeast with 60%, and the lowest in the Pelagonia Region with 40%.

5. SCENARIOS FOR FINANCING PUBLIC CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The difference between planned and actual capital expenditure for all municipalities in all eight statistical planning regions in North Macedonia for 2019 was 84.6 million EUR and 121.3 million EUR in 2018. Theory suggests that public investments have positive effects on the economic output, thus if the difference covered that is expected to lead to an increase in the GDP and support the economic growth in North Macedonia, and that was what actually happened. In the following simulations, we project the effect on the total government debt-to-GDP ratio in the case when this difference is 'closed' and financed by external debt.

The baseline scenario presents the status quo, i.e., historical data and estimates of future planned capital expenditure and the total debt-to-GDP ratio, based on historical data and the budget plan. Scenario 1 illustrates the effect on the total debt-to-

GDP ratio when the identified annual infrastructure mismatch is fully financed by foreign debt (*ceteris paribus*) in 2020 and Scenario 2 illustrates the potential effect on the total debt-to-GDP when the identified annual infrastructure gap is executed and the same level is maintained/continued for the following years.

The results of the simulations (*ceteris paribus*) show that under the baseline scenario where all the capital expenditures are executed as planned (all other assumptions are unchanged), the total government debt-to-GDP rises to 51.5% and then it starts to reduce. In Scenario 1, it reaches 52.7% as the assumption is that it will be fully financed by debt and thus the financing needs will increase followed by a slower pace reduction, compared to the baseline scenario, and in Scenario 2 it reaches its peak in 2022 with 53.8% after which it starts to reduce.

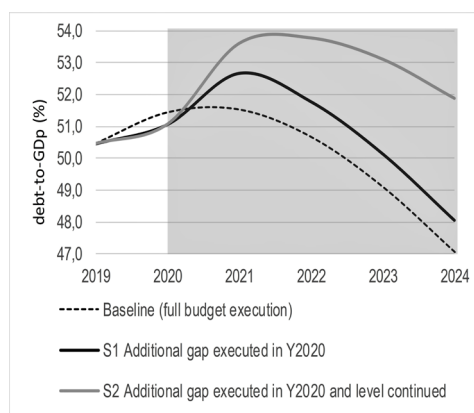


Fig. 12. Government debt-to-GDP per different scenarios

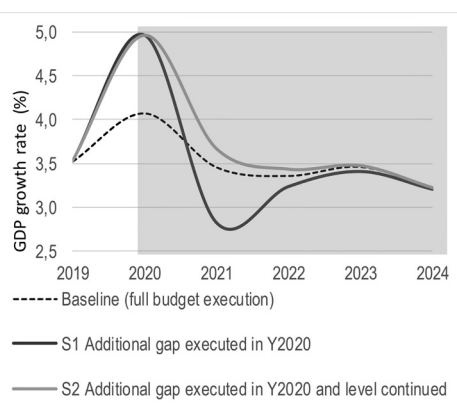


Fig. 13. GDP growth rate per the different scenarios

Source: own work calculations as per the Macroabc Model.

Despite the total debt increase in absolute terms, in relative terms (as percentage of GDP), debt decreases to levels below the levels below those when initiated. Thus, it is likely due to the economic impulse provided by increased public investments, consumption, and economic activity increase in the short run while in the longer run it contributes to enhanced productivity and higher economic output. Accordingly in the short-term, the full execution of planned capital expenditures is associated with an increase in the GDP growth rate of 0.9 p.p. under Scenarios 1 and 2 in the first year of investments. In the medium term, over the following five years, under the baseline scenario, the average annual GDP growth rate of approximately 3.5% is expected. Given that the GDP growth rate in the following five years is almost equal to that in the baseline and Scenario 1, in Scenario 2 there is an average growth of 0.25 pp per annum.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Regional development instruments used across the counties vary and their impact has not been necessarily uniform, thus it is challenging to isolate the impact of specific instruments, as balanced regional development is a complex entanglement of activities. Mutually fiscal policy, monetary policy, and public expenditures have been the norm for attaining balanced regional development.

Nonetheless, fiscal policies have traditionally focused on attracting private investments as well as investments in the public goods. In developing and emerging markets, public investments have been predominantly infrastructure investments. In the case of North Macedonia, the imbalance of regional development is significant and the gap does not narrow, as is typical in trends. One of the specifically designed programs for balanced regional development, which has been implemented for over a decade, has not been executed with the intended magnitude, as out of the intended 1% of the annual GDP, the actual size amounted to a maximum of 0.06% in 2019. Theory suggests that covering the infrastructure gap can lead to significant improvements in economic growth. Nevertheless, North Macedonia's public finances show significant under-execution of the planned public capital investments, both centrally and at the local level, in addition to the regular capital budget cuts.

The average capital expenditure execution rate at the planning region level (based on the municipal budgets) is low and in 2019 amounted to 58% (significantly lower than the state budget utilisation rate of 78% in the same year). Compared to ten years ago (2009), the rate increased by 5 pp reflecting some of the governmental efforts to increase public capital investments. Regionally, the utilisation rate of capital expenditure is in addition lower among the least developed regions compared to the more developed regions. Thus, the economic development divergence between the regions in North Macedonia, coupled with the lowest per capita investments in the least developed regions, further contribute to widening the gap of unbalanced regional development. The Skopje planning region, as the most developed among the eight regions, has manifold higher capital investments compared to the remaining regions.

The structure of the municipal capital budgets indicates investments predominantly in local roads and road maintenance infrastructure, followed by an all-inclusive subcategory 'Other buildings' without specific details on its composition. The largest road infrastructure expenditure in 2019 (as was the case in the past years) was in the City of Skopje, amounting to 386 million MKD or 6.3 million EUR, and the lowest infrastructure expenditure absolute value in the Northeast Region was 163.8 million MKD or 2.66 million EUR. Presented on a per capita level, the lowest expenditure was hitherto again among the least developed regions.

The difference between the plan and outturn of the capital expenditure budget for 2019 was cumulatively near 85 million EUR. The statistical planning region with the highest ‘gap’ or mismatch is the least developed region with low utilisation rate, demonstrating further the serious deficiency in annual planning, fortified by a lack of multi-annual budget planning framework neither at central nor local level, then the absorption capacities of institutions, the lack of fully-developed programs, the shortage of performance assessments, and other structural bottlenecks.

Loans are an underutilised funding source for capital investments, nonetheless under the current fiscal capacities and the limitations of the lower tier governance it is not a likely viable option for most of the municipalities. Under our hypothetical scenario exercise we suggest that with full utilisation of the budgeted public capital investments, i.e. by closing at least this gap even if fully covered with foreign debt funding, all else equal, the debt-to-GDP will in the long-run decrease in relative terms (as a percentage of GDP) by dint of expected contribution onto the economic productivity, output, and consequently the prospect to decrease the level of debt. Furthermore, with such a scenario, it might be expected that the GDP growth rate will gain an immediate impulse by additional 0.9 pp, followed by approx. 0.2 pp in subsequent years.

This conclusion is in line with theory and the empirical findings that public investments positively contribute to economic performance and ultimately may contribute to the convergence of the regions’ economic development.

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THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING WITH THE IMPULSE OF INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENTS IN CROATIA

Abstract. Regional development and spatial planning in Croatia are organised as parallel planning systems regulated by different legislations and coordinated by two ministries, the development of which has been strongly influenced by the European Union (EU). In the last two decades, the intensive development of strategic documentation on a local, regional, and national level regarding diverse territorial governance aspects has had extensive analytical scope but little potential for implementation due to the overlapping of responsibilities and disconnected budget and implementation instruments. The Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) mechanism of implementation contributed to the understanding of multifaceted territorial governance beyond strategic document drafting. This paper analyses the first phase of ITI implementation in Croatia, i.e. the processes which unified functional urban areas, creating the possibility to develop joint management structures and strategies, integrated projects, and common participative planning models.

Key words: strategic spatial planning, urban planning, territorial governance, ITI mechanism, Croatian case-studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines strategic spatial urban planning in Croatia considering the Regional Development Act, the new Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia, as well as legislation relat-

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ed to land use planning. The authors discuss the link between traditional land use planning and strategic planning focusing on the impact of the ITI as an opportunity in the development of strategic spatial planning. The main objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To identify the rationales and problems of strategic planning in Europe and Croatia,
2. To outline the missing link between strategic urban planning and land use planning in Croatia in comparison with other countries,
3. To explain how the ITI started and how it has evolved in urban areas/agglomerations in Croatia,
4. To finally discuss the lessons learned from the previous programming period.

All four objectives are mutually intertwined and tackled in the paper, as are regional development, urban development, strategic planning, and the ITI mechanism in Croatia. The authors showcase the impact of EU policies on the development of territorial governance models and outline specific lessons learned from the implementation process. Likewise, the article provides an overview of strategic planning in Europe and Croatia to avoid possible future shortcomings and build upon the transferability of results in the changing contexts of other countries of the Western Balkan Region. Thus, Zagreb and Zadar are presented and compared as two urban areas with different characteristics (geographical, demographical, political, social, etc.).

1.1. Methodology

The methodology comprises a thorough review of literature and legislation related to strategic and spatial planning, urban planning, territorial governance, and ITI. Relevant data was collected on European, national, and sub-national levels (office research methods), while informal interviews with public servants and officials in the sector of strategic planning and ITI implementation were conducted and used as input in the research. The process included relevant actors on the national level but more importantly actors at the local level directly involved in implementation activities with extensive experience in the field. The authors' expertise in the field of sustainable urban development and spatial policies in various territorial development issues, with a specific focus on sustainable urban development and territorial cohesion (including great involvement in the preparation and implementation of the ITI mechanism), proved crucial for understanding the connections and (missing) links in the system. Preliminary conclusions had been discussed in another round with the interviewees before the final conclusions were made.

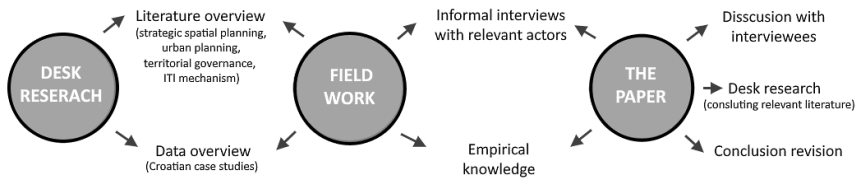


Fig. 1. Methodological and analytical illustration

Source: own work.

2. STRATEGIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

The concept of governance has been the focus of academic debates in recent decades, the shift from government to governance, in particular. Governance refers to the emergence of overlapping and complex relationships, involving “new actors” that are external, who are not only professional politicians, and the term government refers to the dominance of (state) power organised within a traditional hierarchy (Painter and Goodwin, 1995).

Territorial governance can be defined as the process of organisation and coordination of actors to develop territorial capital in a non-destructive way in order to improve territorial cohesion at different levels (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008) and this paper mostly focuses on the level of urban areas and agglomerations.

Strategic spatial planning in Western countries started to evolve in the 1960s and 70s to a system of comprehensive planning, while the shift from urban and regional planning practices to focusing on projects occurred in the 1980s. The focus was particularly on projects regarding the revival of rundown parts of cities and regions, and on land-use regulations (Albrechts, 2004). This paragraph is a terse summary of EU territorial and urban planning approaches in recent decades.

Land-use planning can be defined as the proposed use of land according to policies and regulations. At the EU level, it mainly focuses on municipalities or functional urban regions. Traditional land-use planning controls land use through a zoning system. It regulates land use and directs development by enabling desirable activities and ensuring that undesirable development does not occur (Albrechts, 2004). However, there is a gap between strategic and traditional land-use planning which we shall discuss in more detail later in the text.

Strategic spatial planning (SSP) focuses on a limited number of strategic key issue areas and has a critical approach to the planning area with a detailed analysis of resources, potentials, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Bryson and Roering, 1988; Poister and Streib, 1999). It identifies stakeholders, considers deep

involvement during the planning process and develops a long-term vision (Healey, 1997). Moreover, strategic spatial planning designs plan-making structures (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998) and develops decision frameworks for influencing and managing spatial change (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; Healey, 1997). It is focused on objectives, priorities, actions, and projects with measurable results (Faludi and Korthals Altes, 1994). According to Albrechts (2004), new, 'alternative' strategic planning is a democratic, open, selective and dynamic process that envisions and frames problems, challenges, and short-term actions within a revised democratic tradition.

Furthermore, SSP's new syntax in is sustainable development that is linked to the Cohesion (regional) policy of the EU with an aim to achieve a balanced development. It emphasises the need for change in formulating development guidelines and policies through an integrated approach to use limited resources in the most optimal way. In the 2014–2020 programming period the importance of territorial cohesion has been recognised, a fact which led to the articulation of territorial cohesion aiming to strengthen the specifics of each area. Development specifics of the European territory and the territorial dimension are important in achieving the Europe 2020 strategy goals. Thus, the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020) was elaborated as a document emphasising the need for integrated, polycentric and balanced territorial development, as well as the role of cities as its generators. The TA 2020 transformed the perspective of competitive and sustainable Europe to the concept of smart and sustainable Europe. Therefore, the economic policy has become more important than spatial planning, which indirectly caused the decrease in regional disparities. The 2030 TA follows this direction (Geppert, 2021). In addition, since the majority of the EU's population lives in urban areas (including functional regions and peri-urban areas), their significance in development planning has also been recognised through The European Urban Agenda. The need for this new and integrative approach was recognised already in 1999 in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), a document representing the spatial development policy framework. Some of the main goals of the ESDP refer to the development of polycentric and balanced urban systems and strengthening partnerships between urban and rural areas.

Strategic urban development planning cannot solely consider the planning of cities, but has to encompass wider urban areas and zones shaped through stratification of historical and spatial processes merging into one another. Although these urban areas are common in Europe, Albrechts (2000) conveyed relevant questions in relation to polynucleated urban areas.¹ The harmonisation of devel-

¹ Can spatial planning contribute to Polynucleated urban areas (PUR) development? Does a PUR really perform as a functional unit? According to the criteria used (morphology of settlement pattern, population density, commuter flows, general traffic patterns, etc.), a different picture may emerge (Albrecht, 2000).

opment processes of city centres and their functional areas leads to cooperative advantages and multiplier effects at the regional, national, and international levels. (Kaczmarek and Kociuba, 2017). As stated above, complex urban areas comprise of different social, administrative, and economic structures with unclear boundaries in need of collective solutions for various problems connected to management and spatial planning. Since it is a relatively new concept, some organisational and administrative problems and discrepancies can occur, as it is the case in some countries with more than two administrative levels. Thus, Kaczmarek and Kociuba (2017) have considered the management of functional areas of large cities as the greatest and most difficult challenge which the public policy and territorial management face.

Traditional land use planning seems unfit for solving the complexity of planning the development of urban areas and there is a need for a different type of planning aimed at intervening more directly, coherently and selectively in social reality and development (Albrechts, 2001). This new SSP can be considered as a clear shift from traditional land-use planning to a process providing opportunities to debate relevant topics.² Tasan-Kok *et al.* (2019) have discussed how contemporary urban planning dynamics are based on negotiation and contractual relations creating fragmented planning processes, whereas according to Piore (1999) the changing forms of governance have been transforming urban planning towards a process that exploits various managerial instruments. Other authors also argue that the SSP is not a well-defined process, rather a framework for: (a) different approaches to planning³ (Persson, 2020), and (b) a set of ‘concepts, procedures, and tools that must be tailored carefully to whatever situation is at hand’ (Albrechts, 2004). According to Healey (2009) the significance of strategic planning lies in shaping future development trajectories that include understanding current societal trends and what is desirable, possible and at stake. Hence, SSP borrows concepts and methods developed in business management (see Mintzberg, 1994) and by focussing on local and regional economic growth it makes cities or municipalities attractive for inward investment.

In recent years, there focus has increased on the programming of financial operations from EU Structural Funds to the specific role of cities and their functional areas, especially through ITI. ITI is discussed in more detail further in the text, as it is closely related to strategic planning in Croatia.

² Visions, key questions, selectivity, dialogue, diversity, networking, contextuality, creation of vision and frameworks, mobilising, institution-building, and action-orientation are key elements of this approach (Albrechts, 2001).

³ In his paper, Persson (2020) summarised the findings of other spatial planners and stated that a strategic plan should be able to change and provide a common frame of reference. It should re-frame institutionalised thinking and challenge current practices, have the purpose to manage an uncertain future, and give guidance on what to do with a long-term vision through selecting priorities.

3. PLANNING SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN CROATIA

In 1997, the European Commission published the Compendium of Spatial Planning Policies and Systems in the European Union, in which spatial planning systems were grouped into four categories according to the planning tradition.⁴ That classification was updated in 2006. However, it is still difficult to make a clear distinction between the categories. Nadin and Stead (2008) have stated that there is a convergence of today's planning systems due to social changes that occurred in the process of transition and Europeanisation. This is especially true for the countries of Central, South-eastern, and Eastern Europe.

Urban planning in Croatia during the second half of the 20th century (in the socialist regime) could be divided into five phases over which urban planning experienced decentralisation from the federal to the communal level, advancements in public participation, and the involvement of environmental considerations in the decision-making process.⁵ Frequent changes and reforms of urban planning acts had a great impact on the system and resulted in practicing planning in ever-changing conditions. After its introduction in 1949, the general urban plan has remained the main document of urban planning to date.⁶ Furthermore, the detailed urban plan has also been an important legacy of socialist planning. It is interesting that socialist planners cultivated active engagement with western planning theories and methods, so Croatian planning was in line with Western Europe and the USA, and the public participation and environmental concerns were introduced (at least on paper) at the same time as in other western countries. However, multi-disciplinarity was delayed by several decades and one could ask whether it is being practiced today at all. Another important remnant of the socialist system are legal urban planning procedures and tools that are still being used in modern Croatia (Tandari  *et al.*, 2019).

The current Croatian planning system is determined by the Physical Planning Act (Official Gazette, 153/13, 65/17, 114/18, 39/19, 98/19) and its by-law acts. Following the principle of an integrated approach based on a comprehensive view of the use and protection of space and an organised hierarchical system (national,

⁴ (1) Regional approach to economic planning, (2) comprehensive integrated approach, (3) land-use management, and (4) tradition of urbanism. (COMPENDIUM OF SPATIAL PLANNING POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, European Commission, Brussels, 1997)

⁵ (1) Early socialist urban planning (1944–1949), (2) the period of early planning legislation (1949–1961), (3) the period of the first republic urban planning legislation (1961–1973), (4) the period of “2000” plans (1973–1980) and (5) the period of non-expansive urban planning (1980–1991) (Tandari  *et al.*, 2019).

⁶ Apart from of the 1970s when it was called an urban plan, but was equated with the GUP adopted in both earlier and later decades (Tandari  *et al.*, 2019).

regional, and local spatial plans), the Croatian spatial planning system can be considered as the model of a comprehensive integrated approach. Land-use planning can be considered an integrated and qualitative way of planning with the location, intensity, and the form of land development required for the predefined functions such as housing, industry, recreation, transport, society, agriculture, etc. (Chapin, 1965; Cullingworth, 1972).

As different acts define different forms of planning, several ministries are responsible for their implementation (Table 1).

Table 1. Main administrative structure for planning system in Croatia

Sector	Name	Institution
Physical/spatial planning	Physical planning act (OG 153/13, 65/17, 114/18, 39/19)	Ministry of physical planning, construction and state assets
Strategic planning/development	Regional development act (OG 147/14, 123/17, 118/18) The act on the system of strategic planning and development of the Republic of Croatia (OG 123/17)	Ministry of regional development and EU funds
Post-earthquake reconstruction	The act on reconstruction of buildings damaged by earthquakes in the area of the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje county and Zagreb County (OG 102/20)	Ministry of physical planning, construction and state assets

Source: own work.

3.1. Physical/spatial planning

The Physical Planning Act of the Republic of Croatia regulates the spatial planning system and it is the legal framework for the implementation of spatial planning as a multidisciplinary profession.⁷ The integration of activities and the need for space into spatial plans is considered a common responsibility of various professions through direct or indirect participation. The spatial planning system is linked to territorial organisation, with the exception of areas whose boundaries are determined on the basis of natural, cultural, historical, and economic values. According to the Act, there are three main levels on which decisions are made for

⁷ It regulates the objectives, principles and subjects of spatial planning, monitoring of the situation in space and spatial planning, spatial planning conditions, etc. (The Physical Planning Act of Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette 153/13, 65/17, 114/18, 39/19, 98/19).

each level, i.e. efficiency, expertise, and enforcement.⁸ On the regional/local level, the ministry oversees representative bodies, while governing bodies plan enforcement. The relationship between the spatial planning system and other administrative areas (sectors) is regulated by special laws making it more challenging to establish an effective vertical and horizontal cooperation.

3.2. Strategic planning/development

Strategic planning in Croatia is mostly defined by two acts. In the Croatian territory, there are numerous developmental processes. To coherently manage these processes, the Regional Development Act was adopted in 2014.⁹ Among other things, the Act regulates the domain of strategic development planning in urban agglomerations, and in larger or smaller urban areas. The Croatian population of around 4 million is mostly gathered in cities and four largest ones¹⁰ have more than a quarter of the country's total population. To stimulate the development of all parts of the country, laws and by-laws have been enacted, prescribing the development of strategic development documents for the purpose of implementing regional development policy. Lower-level strategic development documents thus became an important tool for development management at the regional and local levels, as well as the basis for identifying projects for funding from EU funds. The Act regulates the objectives and principles of regional development management of Croatia, regional development policy planning documents, bodies responsible for regional development management, the assessment of the level of development of local and regional self-government units, the manner of determining urban and assisted areas, encouraging the development of assisted areas, implementation, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of regional development policy to make the most efficient use of EU funds. It focuses on sustainable development by creating conditions that enable all parts of the country to foster competitiveness. The above-mentioned act introduced the concept of urban areas in Croatia and defined three new territorial categories: urban agglomerations, and larger and smaller urban areas. Therefore, the biggest urban centres are four urban agglomerations, while the larger urban areas are 10 cities with more than 35,000 inhabitants

⁸ The Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Croatia (RoC) oversee the adoption of spatial plans; experts within the Ministry responsible for Physical Planning, other national administration bodies, professional governing bodies such as physical planning institutes and legal entities and licensed architects are responsible for the expertise and putting plans in action is again managed by the Ministry responsible for Physical Planning (The Physical Planning Act of Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette 153/13, 65/17, 114/18, 39/19, 98/19).

⁹ With amendments in 2017 and 2018. (The Regional Development Act of the Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette 147/14, 123/17, 118/18).

¹⁰ Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, and Osijek.

and are not included in urban agglomerations. Smaller urban areas are 19 other settlements that have more than 10,000 inhabitants or are administrative centres of their counties (2011). All urban areas may, with the prior consent of their representative bodies, include neighbouring self-government units with whom they form functional units.

The Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia regulates the system of strategic planning of Croatia and the management of public policies, e.g. preparation, drafting, implementation, reporting, monitoring of implementation and effects, and evaluation of strategic planning acts for the formulation and implementation of public policies prepared, adopted, and implemented by public bodies. The system is based on the principles of accuracy and completeness, efficiency and effectiveness, responsibility and focus on results, sustainability, partnership, and transparency.¹¹ Strategic Planning and spatial planning systems in Croatia exist within two separate regulatory frames. Spatial planning is defined by the Physical Planning Act, while strategic planning is defined by the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management and the Regional Development Act. Despite different laws, strategic and spatial planning must be harmonised.¹² Although both systems have balanced and sustainable development stated as a goal, they remain defined by different regulatory and institutional frames. The problem of implementing urban renewal in Croatia is evident in the impossibility to implement complex city projects, which is partly a result of the nature of land-use planning system and its traditional limitations. In short, it does not express what it needs, but states what it does not want (Albrechts, 2002).

Other local administrative units in Croatia are not required to develop strategic development documents but they mostly follow the directives of Regional Development Act of the Republic of Croatia and the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia, and develop their own local strategic documents. The Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRDEUF) is responsible for implementing regional development policy, which means a comprehensive and coordinated set of goals, priorities, measures, and activities aimed at stimulating long-term economic growth and overall quality of life in accordance with the principles of sustainable long-term development to reduce regional disparities. The 2030 National Development Strategy (NDS) should steer the development of Croatia until 2030 and the purpose of the NDS

¹¹ The Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette, 123/17.

¹² The Regional Development Act states that the basic starting points for the preparation of development strategies are spatial plans at the local, regional, and national levels (Regional Development Act, Official Gazette, 147/14, 123/17, 118/18) while the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 123/17) in Article 31 states the need for mutual harmonisation of strategic planning acts and spatial plans.

is to set a clear long-term vision for the country providing a strategic guidance to all development policies and lower-ranking strategic planning documents. While documents with extensive visions had been produced in Croatia in the past, this is the first time that the government has decided to employ a comprehensive and evidence-based process using a participatory bottom-up approach. Additionally, the analytical underpinning prepared for the NDS has been used by MRDEUF in the programming of the 2021–2027 European Union period.

Furthermore, a territorial approach to development is aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the economy. Strategic development documents are an opportunity to direct the development of a particular environment through the implementation of activities, programs, and projects, and to create positive long-term socio-economic effects in an area. As in foreign examples (some of which are mentioned in this paper), strategic documents contain an analysis, identify development directions (goals, priorities), and define the measures and activities that will be implemented to achieve the set goals. There is a link between planned activities (projects) and local, regional, national, or EU funding. Few documents have been developed since the adoption of the new Act and in most cases, strategies are still just a “wish list”, as they are not clearly linked to budget planning. Croatia is still far from a developed system of strategic planning that ensures strong cross-sectoral coherence of strategic goals and priorities, monitors the achievement of goals, and has mechanisms for taking corrective actions (when deviations are identified) or reformulating goals (when required) (Bajo and Puljiz, 2017). The law on strategic planning seeks to strengthen strategic planning and management of public policies through a harmonised system of planning and preparation, development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of implementation success. This is still not the case. Numerous strategic planning documents are still divided into several categories.¹³ There are three kinds of documents: long-term, mid-term and short-term, divided further into development plans and implementation programs. Likewise, it is important to note that the quality of strategic planning at the local and regional levels is dependent on a large number of local and regional self-government units mainly lacking human resources or development potential for serious strategic planning.

3.3. ITI as a planning instrument in urban areas

The strengthening of the mechanisms for the territorial coordination of intervention and management in functional areas in the current perspective manifests itself in the establishment of a new EU tool of the cohesion policy such as Inte-

¹³ Those are: (a) of national importance, (b) of local and county importance, c) related to the EU economic governance framework, and (d) related to planning the use of EU funds.

grated Territorial Investments (ITIs) under the Common Strategic Network. ITI implementation was optional and those who are doing so are implementing it differently. In fact, it is an integrated strategic approach addressing economic, environmental, social, climate, and demographic challenges in urban areas that considers the needs and simultaneously promotes urban-rural links by improving cooperation between cities and their surroundings, creating partnerships between different stakeholders, and reducing disparities within urban areas. Thus, a key feature of the ITI mechanism is parallel emphasis on sectors and territorial integrity (KaturiĆ *et al.*, 2016).

4. FUNCTIONAL URBAN AREAS IN CROATIA – ITI IMPLEMENTATION

The Regional Development Act prescribed the obligation to prepare county development strategies and also urban area development strategies as a prerequisite for using ITI funds to strengthen the role of cities as drivers of economic development and to promote territorial governance – a place-based approach, partnership, and participatory planning. The new approach to territorial development in Croatia is implemented as part of the use of the ITI in seven largest cities with the capacity and needs to implement projects under this mechanism – Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, Osijek, Zadar, Slavonski Brod, and Pula. The cities have formed urban agglomerations or urban areas with their surroundings on the basis of functional connections, and the main goal was to facilitate the implementation of territorial development strategies. The support for these areas is to be programmed by an integrated, inter-sectoral territorial strategy – the ITI (Urban agglomeration/area) Strategy. It is comprehensive and enables the execution of territory-based integrated projects to solve complex development problems, as well as to more efficiently exploit the specific potential of the urban areas.¹⁴ To summarise, the process of preparation for the ITI implementation included:

1. The establishment of urban areas/ agglomerations and partnership councils,
2. The preparation of urban development strategies,
3. The preparation of tender documentation for calls for selection of projects financed through the ITI mechanism, and
4. Implementation.

¹⁴ The Republic of Croatia has EUR 345,351,269.00 available for the implementation through the ITI of which EUR 303,351,269.00 from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund within the Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion (OPCC) and EUR 42,000,000.00 from the European Social Fund within the Operational Program Effective Human Resources (OP EHR).

municipalities in three counties.¹⁵ The average population density is over 370 inhabitants / km², which indicates a high concentration of people and goods.

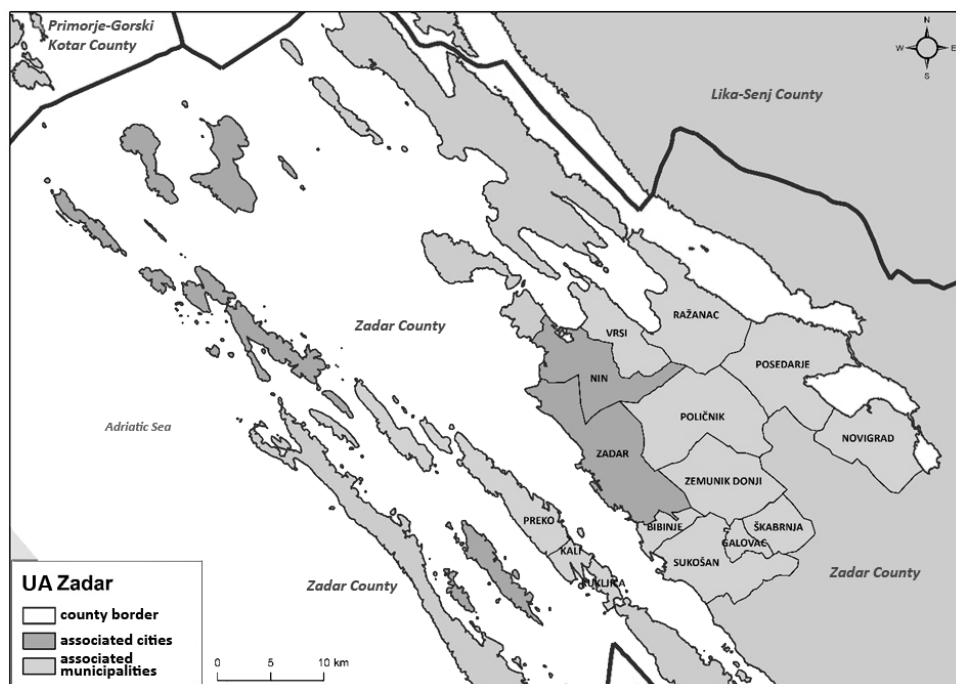


Fig. 3. Zadar Urban Area

Source: own work.

The City of Zadar is the largest Croatian city with more than 35,000 inhabitants. The Zadar Urban Area includes two cities and 13 other municipalities in the Zadar county.¹⁶ Average population density is 143.1 inhabitants/sq. km, which is almost twice as many as the Croatian average. That corresponds to a usually higher density in urban areas relative to the overall territorial average.

Moreover, the Partnership Council is a very important body in strategic planning and preparation process in ITI. Both Zagreb and Zadar (as well as others) established partnership councils as an advisory bodies that participate in all phases of preparation and implementation of the development strategy. Every local unit within an agglomeration scope has its representative in the Partnership Council,

¹⁵ Zagreb City, Zagreb County, Krapina-Zagorje County. UAZg covers an area of 2,826.5 sq. km, with 1,086,528 inhabitants, slightly more than a quarter (25.35%) of the total population of the Republic of Croatia.

¹⁶ UAZd covers 790 sq. km with 113,045 inhabitants.

which follows the need for equal representation of key stakeholders from the public, private, and civil sectors. Likewise, some urban areas have established coordination councils of mayors and deputy mayors.

4.2. Development strategies

The strategies were made using the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds. Databases have been formed and tracked, macro sectors extensively analysed, and development problems and potentials formulated. In addition, a long-term vision has been defined, as well as a strategic framework consisting of goals, priorities, and measures. There were numerous regional disparities in the contents of the strategies, but as specific objectives for EU financing were predefined, all strategies were steered in a similar direction that could be considered as an interference in independent strategic planning. When one compares the strategies, one will find that there are certain similarities in the priorities identified as key enablers of urban area development: (a) improving conditions for further economic development through a focus on high added-value branches, (b) improving the urban mobility system within the urban area/agglomeration, and (c) sustainable spatial development through revitalisation and restoration of brownfield areas (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the strategic goals in examined urban areas

Zagreb Urban agglomeration	Zadar Urban area
Improving the quality of life, public and social infrastructure, and human resources	Development of human resources and high quality of social facilities and services
Development of the competitive and sustainable economy	Competitive economy based on active cross-sectoral integration
Improving environmental, nature and space management	Sustainable management of spatial resources with improved quality of urban environment

Source: The City of Zagreb, 2017; The City of Zadar, 2016.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Urban agglomeration and urban area strategies are joint development documents based on partnership and participation of all relevant stakeholders within the territorial scope. As a prerequisite for using the ITI mechanism they were initially established using the prescribed and sometimes excessively complex methodology.

This was especially visible in case of the Zagreb Urban Agglomeration, since the regulatory framework did not entirely recognise the special status of the City of Zagreb as the capital, city and county. Complex three-level coordination proved to be a challenge itself. The experiences from the first phase of ITI implementation are generally positive, and strengthening partnership and cooperation proved to be an asset in strategic planning and ITI implementation process. Partnership has strengthened between different sectors (private, public, academia, and non-governmental organisations), different self-government units, and the ministry and cities involved. The network that has been built through ITI implementation for the 2014–2020 period is a strong base for developing other initiatives, programs and projects not necessarily linked to this mechanism.

Furthermore, with the help of ITI, cities have gained the ability not only to rethink their territorial strategic planning directions, but also to directly decide how to use the funds within their urban areas. The organisational framework gave them a wider set of responsibilities, and some seized the opportunity more successfully than others. Urban areas were given ten specific objectives for project financing from the EU, which had an influence on development strategies and priorities. In the next programming period (2021–2027), these predefined financing opportunities should be defined in close cooperation with the urban areas to meet the actual needs of ITI cities, as an adequate response to their challenges and needs. According to current MRDEUF information there will be further expansion of the ITI mechanism to a total of 14 (or even more than 20) cities to strengthen development centres in Croatia and thus contribute to balanced regional development. However, the programming for the 2021–2027 period is still ongoing, and alternations are expected. Nevertheless, the strategies were comprehensive and beyond ten ITI defined financing objectives. But when it comes to the implementation phase, only ready projects with prepared documentation and clear ownership could have been financed through ITI, which resulted in highest implementation and allocation in centres of urban areas and a certain feeling of injustice from smaller municipalities included in the planning process and urban areas. Also, some could ask whether projects were truly ‘integrated’ or ‘territorial’.

Regarding practical experiences, it is clear that the process of the implementation of the ITI mechanism in Croatia in the 2014–2020 period could be characterised as long-lasting. The main reason for this was the delay in the preparation of the ITI structure, which partly affected the later start of the absorption of ITI funds from the ESF. In mid-2021 Croatia is still in the programming phase and it remains unclear whether the described process of new territorial governance units will be continued in the 2021–2027 period. It has still not been confirmed how many urban areas will be included in ITI, how the urban agglomerations and areas will be defined or what the development strategies will look like. All this is to conclude that some lessons are still to be learned.

One of the key goals of the ITI mechanism was the strengthening of the cooperation of self- government units within the urban agglomeration scope. A new form of coordination, participation and partnership has been established, and this is the first visible impact of the ITI implementation. The impact has a long-term potential, and the first phase will be expanded with new urban agglomerations. In the 2021–2027 period larger allocations are expected for urban development. This is an opportunity for connection between cities as possible beneficiaries so they can use it for best practice insights, exchange of ideas, and policy development. More efficient implementation of integrated projects has been the second impact of the ITI implementation. Having their own administrative units responsible for ITI implementation, cities had an opportunity to create calls for specific projects that responded comprehensively to the needs and problems of their urban areas. This contributed to stimulating competitiveness and also to a better use of their resources since projects need to be co-financed from local budgets. ITI is an important tool in the decentralisation of planning but also in the implementing phase of the territorial development.

Finally, the process showed the essential need for further building of administrative capacity for strategic planning and project preparation. It is important to enhance the internal capacities of all stakeholders involved in strategic planning and implementation so they can in the best possible way contribute to developing strategic goals. Strategic planning is a long term and flexible process, and therefore it is crucial to invest in local capacities so they can be the creators of their progress and development.

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THE IMPACT OF CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION: AN EROSION OF EU CONDITIONALITY?

Abstract. The EU integration process contributes to influence the ongoing institutional changes in the Western Balkans. At the same time, the incremental inflow of Chinese capital in the region that followed the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative is progressively reshaping power relations there. This article sheds light on the interaction between these two processes, discussing whether the increasing inflow of resources may gradually erode EU conditionality and hinder the overall integration process. To do so, the authors draw on an extensive review of academic and policy documents and on selected expert interviews, upon which they compare the actions of the EU and China in the region.

Key words: Belt and Road Initiative, the Western Balkan Region, EU enlargement, China, conditionality.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last 20 years, China's global political and economic influence has grown exponentially. The Chinese government undertook its so-called *going-out strategy*, which gained further concreteness with the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 and is expected to produce “a great

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impact on global economy through the integration of a large part of the world” (Sarker *et al.*, 2018, p. 626). While some of its branches are already completed, the consequences of the BRI for Europe are still uncertain. The majority of Western states show a rather lukewarm attitude, while Eastern countries appear more open to engagement. This is especially true for the countries of the Western Balkan Region (WBR),¹ which see the resources channelled through the BRI as a potential way out of an unsatisfactory economic situation (World Bank, 2012).

At the same time, since the 2000s, the WBR countries have been engaged in a complex process that will eventually lead to their integration into the European Union (EU), and which influences them through the complex juxtaposition of conditionality logics (Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier, 2005; Borzel *et al.*, 2017; Cotella and Berisha, 2016; Berisha, 2018; Berisha and Cotella, 2021). While Slovenia and Croatia already achieved full membership, the integration of the other countries is proceeding at varying paces, as a consequence of a number of contextual contingencies that have at various moments in time altered the priorities of the actors involved (the global financial crisis, the progressive raise of euro-sceptic parties throughout Europe, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its unpredictable effects).

While the growing role that China plays in the WBR is undeniable, no assessment has been attempted yet of its impact on the integration of the region into the EU (Hake and Radzyner, 2019). In order to contribute to this direction, the authors build on the latest literature and policy documents, as well as on interviews conducted with selected stakeholders, to address and compare the role and influence of the EU and China in the WBR. Particular attention is devoted to the conditionality mechanisms that characterise the enlargement process, and to the impact that the BRI may have on them. After a brief introduction, a theoretical framework to understand EU conditionality in candidate countries is outlined, building on recent contributions in the field of European integration studies. The paper then focuses on the role that the EU plays in the WBR, discussing where the various countries stand along the process of integration. The fourth section illustrates the BRI’s vision and objectives, together with its implications for the WBR. The fifth section compares the role of the EU and China in the WBR through a number of interpretative lenses. Building on this comparison, some considerations are brought forward, reflecting on the potential implications that the increasing influence of China may have on EU conditionality in the region and, ultimately, on the region’s future integration into the EU.

¹ For the purpose of this article, the Western Balkan Region includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. While belonging to the area, Croatia is excluded from the analysis due to its membership status.

2. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND ACCESSION CONDITIONALITY

Europeanisation studies traditionally concerned the impact of European integration on Member States (Olsen, 2002; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Radaelli, 2004). However, a distinctive sub-area of research has recently emerged, focusing on the mechanisms through which the EU, by means of its enlargement process, influences the development of the rules and policies in candidate countries (Grabbe, 2002; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Vachudova, 2005; Balfour and Stratulat, 2011).

The theoretical framework adopted in these studies concerns the conditions under which the EU has an impact, and the mechanisms through which the impact is delivered (Schimmelfennig, 2011, 2012). These mechanisms are usually identified as depending on legal, economic, and cognitive conditionality (Cotella and Stead, 2011; Cotella, 2020; Cotella and Dabrowski, 2021), with the first two models being externally driven in comparison to the latter, which features a mix of social learning and lesson-drawing episodes (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). Previous researches focusing on the Eastern Enlargement have demonstrated the dominance of incentive-based Europeanisation, and suggest the need to analyse its impact through the so-called external incentives model, which conceptualises accession conditionality as a bargaining game. The decisions of the actors involved in this game depend on self-interest and cost-benefit calculations. Accordingly, through conditionality mechanisms, the EU imposes target governments with its rules, through a strategy of reward-based reinforcement. The rewards vary from financial assistance to political entrustment, with full membership that constitute the final prize. Here conditionality acts as a function of a strategic calculation of the target government, which complies with EU rules only if the benefits of the reward outweigh domestic material and political costs (Zhelyazkova *et al.*, 2018).

In EU enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, the effectiveness of conditionality mainly depended on membership incentive by the EU and rather low domestic adoption costs (Schimmelfennig *et al.*, 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2007). Credible political membership enabled EU-enthusiast governments to pursue reforms, protecting them against the opposition from EU-sceptic actors (Schimmelfennig, 2005). When it comes to the WBR, more stringent accession criteria, lower credibility of membership, weaker administrative capacity, and higher domestic costs contributed to a slowing down of the pace. EU conditionality is showing a differential impact on rules' adoption in the region. Capacity-building initiatives and intermediate rewards independent from the accession could explain the continuous progress of compliance in some Western Balkans countries. At the same time, the low absorption of EU funds and scarce institutional capacity may lead to frustration and eventually to an overall disaffection with EU logics.

Overall, in combination with 'weaker' conditionality mechanisms, other external factors may alter the strategic calculations of the national governments, and

eventually drive their choices towards immediate and less burdensome benefits (Adams *et al.*, 2011b). Our argument is that the growing volume of Chinese investments in the WBR may play a similar role, triggering alternative conditionality influences and, in turn, inducing domestic changes that are not necessarily compatible with those hoped for by the EU.

3. THE ROLE OF THE EU IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

The integration of the WBR into the EU formally started in 1999, with the stipulations of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs). Since then the process has continued at varying paces, with Croatia being the only country that effectively joined the EU while the others are still dealing with the transposition of the *acquis communautaire* (Table 1). Montenegro and Serbia initiated negotiations in 2012 and 2014, respectively. North Macedonia has been a candidate since 2005 and in 2009 the European Commission recommended opening negotiations. Albania started the analytical examination of the *acquis* in 2018. In March 2020, the Council finally decided to open accession negotiations, pending the fulfilment of a set of conditions. In July 2020, the Commission presented a draft negotiating framework to Member States. One year later, accession negotiations with Albania – and North Macedonia – have not yet been opened. Finally, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo are still at an early stage, with the former only having applied for membership in 2016, while the latter has not even apply yet.²

One must note that, when it comes to the influence exerted by the EU, the current enlargement strategy significantly enhanced its determinacy by framing its legal conditionality into a stricter and more coherent system of monitoring. Overall, the conditionality increased in terms of the breadth and scope of the reforms (Dimitrova, 2016). In contrast to previous enlargement rounds, in order to obtain EU membership, the candidate countries are now required not only to adopt the regulations and conditions set out in negotiating chapters, but also to have the most difficult *acquis* sections effectively implemented before accession.³ An additional innovation concerns the change of the suspension clause, with the Commission that now may withhold its recommendation to open/close other chapters and adapt the associated preparatory work until sufficient progress under the ‘rule of law’ chapters is achieved. In summary, the conditionality applied to candidate

² The case of Kosovo is particularly complex due to the fact that a number of EU countries do not recognise it as an autonomous republic.

³ This is an example of learning by doing, which indicates the intention to settle major rule of law, political and bilateral problems prior to accession instead of dealing with them afterwards (Müftüler-Baç and Çiçek, 2015).

countries through the new approach is formulated in such a way that the EU can exercise influence and steer reforms on issues that are politically highly sensitive. While this is expected to positively influence the compliance of Western Balkans countries, it has also led to a higher variation of determinacy of the EU conditions across the countries, with a lack of clarity in regards to the nature and scope of EU *acquis*, which has negatively affected consistency and impact (Pech, 2016).

Table 1. EU Integration steps for WB countries

Steps	Agreements	Alba- nia	Bosnia and Her- zegovina	Mon- tene- gro	North Macedo- nia	Serbia	Kosovo
Pre- adhesion Agreement	Potential Candidate	2000	2003	2000	2000	2000	2000
	SAA	2006– 2009	2008– 2015	2008	2001	2008	2014– 2016
	Application for EU membership	2009	2016	2009	2004	2009	n.a
	Candidate Status	2014	n.a.	2010	2005	2012	n.a.
Screening	Analytical examination of the <i>acquis</i>	2018	n.a.	2011	2018	2013	n.a.
Negotiation	Chapters’ Discussion Period	n.a. ^a	n.a.	2012–	n.a. ^b	2015–	n.a.
Adhesion	Adhesion Treaty	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Status	Member State	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

^a In March 2020 the European Council endorsed the General Affairs Council’s decision to open accession negotiations with Albania and in July 2020 the draft negotiating framework were presented to the Member States. However, the negotiation process has yet to start.

^b The North Macedonia negotiation phase is under discussion. However due to some regional dispute with Bulgaria, the process is now in stand-by.

Source: own work based on Cotella and Berisha, 2019.

In parallel to the varying progress achieved in the implementation of the *acquis*, in the last three decades it has been possible to witness a progressive economic convergence between the EU area and the WBR. Moreover, according to official data (EEAS, 2017) growing economic ties have been established between the EU and the WBR, with the share trade volume reaching the value of 49.5 billion euros in 2017 (EEAS, 2017). Today, EU countries represent the region’s best trading partners, accounting for 73% of the total trade volume, a leading role that is also confirmed when considering inward Foreign Direct Investments. This data confirms that the EU has a strong influence on WBR economy, trade and

investment system, and this economic interdependency is expected to consolidate further once full integration is achieved (EEAS, 2017). For this purpose, the EU has mobilised a set of funding schemes that target different sectors of WBR economy. These schemes contributed to strategic fields like transport infrastructure, energy production and efficiency, environmental protection, and greenfields.⁴ In particular, since its introduction in 2007, the so-called Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA) has delivered over 23 billion euros in the region (see Table 2), supporting regional cooperation and connectivity (Pinnavaia and Berisha, 2021).

When it comes to the 2021–27 programming period, according to the political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the new IPA III, the multi-annual financial framework will mobilise 14.2 billion euros to support economic convergence primarily through investments dedicated to inclusive growth, sustainable connectivity, and green and digital transition (EC, 2020). Moreover, a recent communication of the Commission (EC, 2020) indicated that IPA III will team up with the European Green Deal in promoting joint actions to tackle the challenges of green transition, climate change, biodiversity loss, excessive use of resources, and pollution. Importantly, apart from the territorial impacts produced through IPA's funded actions, one should highlight that these tools, similarly to the pre-accession tools implemented in Central and Eastern Europe throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, have contributed to facilitating the consolidation of EU concepts, priorities, and procedures in the region (Cotella, 2007, 2014; Cotella *et al.*, 2012; Adams *et al.*, 2011).

Table 2. IPA allocations by sector and country (programming periods 2007–13 and 2014–20)

	Sector	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia	Kosovo
2007–2013	Justice [%]	18	18	9	17	12	16	–
	PA Reform [%]	13	13	9	23	13	22	–
	Transport [%]	16	8	12	13	20	10	–
	Energy and Climate [%]	18	16	15	8	18	19	–
	Social Development [%]	10	14	34	8	12	22	–
	Agriculture and Rural development [%]	22	5	21	18	17	6	–
	Others [%]	3	26	0	13	8	5	–
	Total (M€)	512	554	802	191	508	1,213	679

⁴ During the 2014–2017 period, the EU invested more than 330 million euros in transport projects, in turn generating 930 million euros of private investments, as well as overall positive outcomes in terms of jobs' creation (EEAS, 2017). For more info see: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/western-balkans-connectivity/>

	Sector	Alba- nia	Bosnia and Her- zegovina	Cro- atia	Monte- negro	North Macedo- nia	Ser- bia	Koso- vo
2014-2020	Democracy and rule of law [%]	27	28	–	19	15	22	22
	Democracy and govern- ance [%]	16	8	–	11	11	15	14
	Rule of law and funda- mental rights [%]	10	7	–	7	4	8	8
	Competitiveness and growth [%]	23	42	–	30	35	27	28
	Environment, climate change, and energy [%]	3	6	–	6	10	10	12
	Transport [%]	2	3	–	5	10	3	0
	Competitiveness, inno- vation, agriculture, rural development [%]	14	4	–	12	11	11	10
	Education, employ- ment, and social poli- cies [%]	5	2	–	8	4	4	6
	Total (M€)	1279	789,3	–	568,2	1217	3078,8	1204,2

Source: own work based on EU data (European Commission, 2015 and DG NEAR, 2018).

4. THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: OBJECTIVE, GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS, AND INFLUENCE

Since the turn of century, China has been expanding its influence worldwide (Pu, 2016). With this aim in mind, in 2013 it launched the so-called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming at promoting economic connectivity between China and the countries involved in the initiative.⁵ Importantly, the BRI should not be regarded as a single megaproject, rather as a continuously growing initiative with a large portfolio of projects for rail, road, sea, and airport infrastructure, power and water links, real estate contracts, and, more recently, digital infrastructure (Sielker and Kaufmann, 2020). In this sense, it is seen as the most ambitious and economically relevant initiative ever undertaken,

⁵ The BRI includes 68 countries globally and, in particular, countries located in the Eurasia region. It corresponds to 65% of the world's population and over 40% of the GDP produced in the world (Cai, 2017).

comparable only with the Marshal Plan launched by the United States after the Second World War.⁶

The reasons behind the BRI have been widely debated (Liu, 2015; Grieger, 2016; Djankov, 2016; Tonchev, 2017; Cai, 2017). On the one hand, the initiative was triggered by domestic market needs, where China in order to counteract the economic slowdown caused by its internal market reaching its limits is continuously looking for new markets (Pu, 2016; Cai, 2017). Geopolitical conditions also play a relevant role, with the BRI taking advantage of the swinging stability of the EU and the US' retreat from a number of multilateral agreements under president Trump's leadership.⁷ As explicitly argued by Xi Jinping during the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference in 2013, the objective of China's economic policy is to turn the country into a world economy pivot. At the same time, the future consequences of the BRI are subject to debate, as they will depend on the attitude that the various countries will adopt in response to the structured bilateral cooperation proposed by China. Despite the launch of the EU-China Strategy 2020, the EU has not yet managed to unite its member and candidate countries on a common position and the latter engage with China through a plethora of bilateral relationships.⁸ This contributes to reinforce the Chinese influence in Europe beyond individual projects and geopolitical debates, especially in these Central and South Eastern European Countries that constitute the BRI's main entry points (Mações, 2018; Sielker and Kaufmann, 2020).

Central and Eastern Europe and WB countries signed their bilateral investment agreements with China in 2012, hoping it would support their recovery from the global economic crisis (Furceri and Zdzienicka, 2011). The "16+1 Cooperation" was then launched in 2013, to facilitate Chinese public and private investments aiming at the implementation of the BRI vision.⁹ Benefiting from a strategic position between Eastern and Western Europe, the WBR has been attracting the majority of Chinese investments in key sectors such as heavy industry, energy, infra-

⁶ For ease of comparison, while the Marshall Plan envisioned an investment of 130 billion dollars (per a 2015 valuation) dedicated to the post-war reconstruction of Europe, the BRI strategy is expected to mobilise more than 4 trillion dollars (Chen, 2014).

⁷ China's annual foreign direct investment in Europe grew from 840 million dollars in 2008, to 42 billion dollars in 2017 (Le Corre, 2018).

⁸ The situation has recently evolved with the discussion of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investments, through which the two parties have established the conditions for further peer cooperation in several sectors that will draw investments of up to 650 billion euros (EU Commission, 2020b).

⁹ The countries involved in the 16+1 Initiative are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland (Greece joined in 2017, but the original label of the programme remained) (Góralczyk, 2017). President Xi Jinping highlighted the need to create strategic synergies between the BRI and the 16+1 cooperation to facilitate investments for increasing infrastructure connectivity within those regions (Liu, 2015).

structure, and logistics (Fig. 1).¹⁰ At the same time, the cooperation also favoured the proliferation of multinational coordination platforms in different sectors like tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, logistic, energy, etc., aiming at facilitating co-operation among institutional and non-institutional actors (Jakóbowski, 2015).

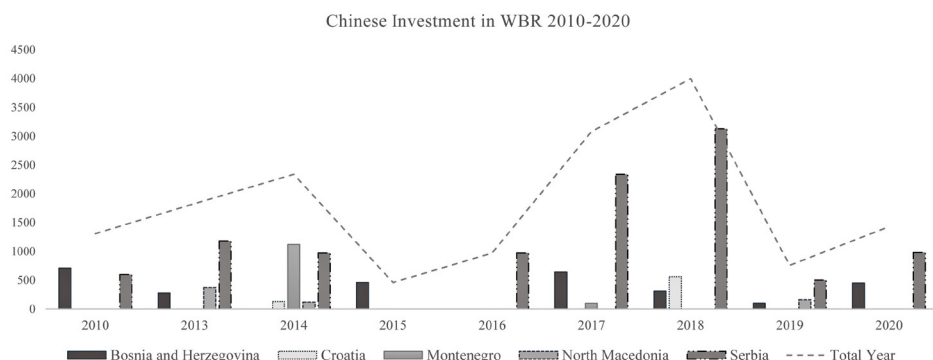


Fig. 1. BRI-related investments in the WBR in the period 2010–2020 (in M\$)

Source: own work based on AEI data (<https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>).

The 16+1 cooperation implements the vision of the BRI through the facilitation of trade investments and the acquisition of local businesses by Chinese companies. Altogether, this leads to an inflow of a growing volume of economic resources, aiming at increasing connectivity between the Chinese and the European markets. However, unlike the EU, China does not show interest in the socio-economic and environmental impacts of its investments (Tonchev, 2017), and this raises a number of challenges (Liu, 2015). The implementation of the BRI in the WBR occurs through various financial institutions that act either through direct investments, aimed at the acquisition of local companies, or through open credit lines, used to develop strategic infrastructures (the Silk Road Fund, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the China CEE Investment Co-operation Fund). While a number of authors have reported a positive impact of these investments, they have also warned against the acquisition of national debt shares by Chinese state funds, which in the long term may negatively impact the involved countries (Stumvoll and Flessenkemper, 2020; Hurley *et al.*, 2018).

In the 2011–2014 period, Chinese investments financed the construction, of, e.g., the Mihajlo Pupin Bridge in Belgrade, the Stanari thermal power plant in

¹⁰ This was a response to a delay in terms of infrastructure development suffered by the WBR countries, which have contributed to the spatial and economic isolation of the region. At present, Western Balkan countries have typically lower levels of motorway density and railway infrastructure capacity in comparison to Western countries, and the same applies to their energy production and distribution capacities (EIB, 2018).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bar-Boljare motorway in Montenegro (Jakóbowski, 2015), and the Balkan Silk Road from Piraeus to Budapest (Bastian, 2017). Detailed data provided by the American Enterprise Institute and The Heritage Foundation shows that, during the period of 2010–2020, China invested more than 16 billion dollars in the WBR, becoming one of the main investors in the region (see Table 3). The majority of the investments are dedicated to the transport and energy sectors, followed by technology, logistics, and utilities. It is particularly interesting to note that the contractors and credit providers are always Chinese companies, largely limiting the spill-over effects of the interventions on domestic economies.¹¹

Table 3. Main projects financed by China in the Western Balkan Region (M \$). No data available for Albania^a or Kosovo^b

Country	Year	Sector	Amount (M \$)	Chinese Entity
Serbia	2010	Transport	260	China Communications Construction
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2010	Energy	710	Dongfang Electric
Serbia	2010	Energy	340	Sinomach
Serbia	2013	Transport	850	China Communications Construction
Serbia	2013	Transport	330	Shandong Gaosu
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2013	Energy	280	Power Construction Corp
Macedonia	2013	Transport	370	Power Construction Corp
Montenegro	2014	Transport	1.120	China Communications Construction
Croatia	2014	Logistics	130	China National Building Material
Serbia	2014	Energy	970	Sinomach
Macedonia	2014	Transport	120	Power Construction Corp
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2015	Energy	460	Dongfang Electric
Serbia	2016	Transport	230	China Communications Construction
Serbia	2016	Energy	230	Sinomach
Serbia	2016	Technology	170	Huawei
Serbia	2016	Transport	220	Power Construction Corp
Serbia	2016	Metals	120	Hebei Steel
Serbia	2017	Energy	720	Sinomach
Serbia	2017	Energy	210	Shanghai Electric

¹¹ In particular, in the case of the 130-kilometre motorway connecting the Montenegrin city of Bar with Serbia costed over 1 billion euros to complete only 41 kilometres and now, due to the high financial exposure, Montenegro is at risk of default due to its high debt contracted with China players.

Country	Year	Sector	Amount (M \$)	Chinese Entity
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2017	Transport	640	Shandong Gaosu
Serbia	2017	Transport	520	China Communications Construction
Serbia	2017	Utilities	310	Sinomach
Serbia	2017	Transport	350	China Railway Engineering
Montenegro	2017	Energy	100	State Power Investment
Serbia	2017	Energy	230	Power Construction Corp
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2018	Energy	310	China Poly, Sinomach
Serbia	2018	Energy	140	Shanghai Electric
Croatia	2018	Energy	220	Norinco
Croatia	2018	Transport	340	China Communications Construction
Serbia	2018	Transport	1.090	China Railway Engineering, China Communications Construction
Serbia	2018	Metals	650	Zijin Mining
Serbia	2018	Transport	990	Shandong Linglong Tire
Serbia	2018	Other	260	China Communications Construction
Macedonia	2019	Real estate	160	Sinomach
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2019	Transport	100	State Construction Engineering, Power Construction Corp, China Communications Construction
Serbia	2019	Metals	120	Hebei Steel
Serbia	2019	Metals	380	Zijin Mining
Serbia	2020	Metals	800	Zijin Mining
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2020	Metals	110	Sinomach, China Nonferrous
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2020	Energy	220	China Energy Engineering
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2020	Energy	120	China Energy Engineering
Serbia	2020	Transport	180	Shandong Gaosu
		TOTAL	16.180	

^aIn the case of Albania there is no exact data. However, Chinese companies have acquired various local enterprises, e.g., the International Airport of Tirana (acquired by China Everbright Limited in 2016), and the Bankers Petroleum (by Chinese Geo-Jade in 2017). More information available at: <http://al.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t1484485.htm>

^bTo date, there has been no information about Chinese investments in Kosovo, and China has not officially recognised Kosovo as an independent state.

Source: own work based on the database of the American Enterprise Institute and The Heritage Foundation, <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.

5. COMPARING THE ACTION AND INFLUENCE OF THE EU AND CHINA IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

Despite the fact that during the recent Western Balkans Summit that was held in Sofia Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, confirmed that the accession of the Western Balkans country remains a priority for the EU, how this process is affected by the increasing influence of China in the region remains unclear. In order to shed some light on the matter, this section attempts to offer a preliminary comparison of the attitudes adopted by the EU and China towards the WBR, according to three main steps (Fig. 2): (1) identification of the analytical lenses and comparative factors; (2) assessment and (3) implications.

Step 1 consists of the identification of the analytical lenses through which to explore the main similarities and differences that characterise the approaches of the EU and China towards the region. To offer more detail, five categories have been identified, each characterised by a number of comparative factors:

- *Vision* – it offers an overview of the strategic orientations of China and the EU when it comes to highlighting the role that the WBR plays within their regional and global strategies. It concerns geopolitical, economic, and strategic factors;

- *Approach* – it explores the main differences and similarities between China and the EU in relation to the nature of the agreements adopted (bilateral or multilateral), and the mechanisms of influence that they entail (economic and/or political conditionality);

- *Priorities* – it offers the opportunity to understand the different long and short-term orientations of the two players in relation to political, economic, social, and environmental issues;

- *Sectors* – it concerns the different strategies that China and the EU adopted in relation to sectoral investments and, in particular, to initiatives related to infrastructure, energy, and industry;

- *Implementation* – it focuses on the multiple aspects that characterise project implementation phase, analysing the nature of management, the adopted financial mechanism, and the environmental and social standards that characterise the process.

For each category, the roles of the EU and China were analysed and assessed as either *convergent* (with both players adopting similar strategies), *divergent* (with players adopting different, often opposite approaches) or *unrelated* (when there is no explicit relation between the action of the EU and China) (Step 2). Finally, the implications of the results of the analysis were presented, in terms of potential opportunities and risks for the WBR (Step 3).

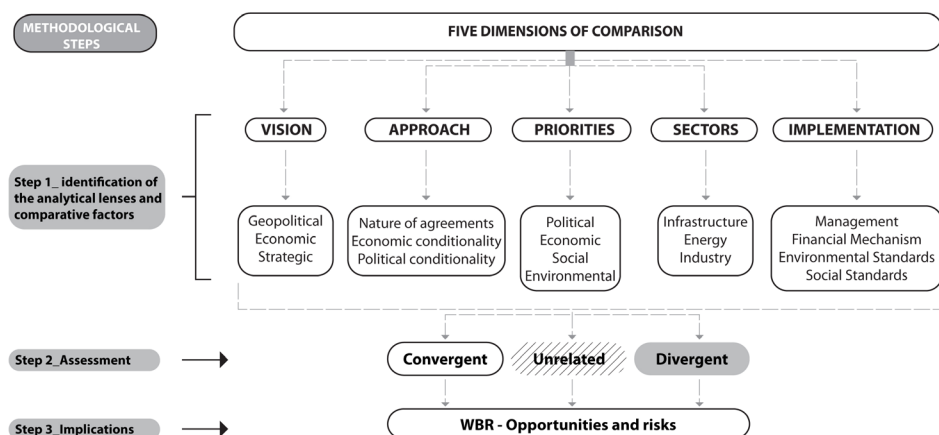


Fig. 2. Methodological approach

Source: own work.

When considering the collected evidence, it becomes obvious that the attitudes of the EU and China towards the region largely differ (see Fig. 3). More specifically, in relation to their strategic visions for the region, a substantial divergence emerges. China's 'going out' strategy is characterised by a centrally-driven approach whereby China establishes the main objectives and defines the rules of the game while the other countries are rarely included in the process. Conversely, the EU approach is founded on the vision to complete the economic and political integration of the continent. The WBR can be negatively influenced politically and economically as a consequence of the increasing tension between these two approaches, with China often acting according to *divide et impera* logic that may transform the region into a space of future geopolitical disputes (Bechev, 2020). In this perspective, the risk of turning the WBR into a transit corridor for goods and resources that remains poorly integrated into the EU is relatively high (Fruscione, 2021).

The second category focuses on the nature of the approach to the region adopted by each player. In this respect, the EU and China follow different paths in relation to the types of agreements they employ (multilateral versus bilateral), the mechanisms of resource distribution (co-financing and grants versus loans), and the direction of their political conditionality (political stability versus *divide et impera*) (Cotella and Berisha, 2019). The name 16+1 given to the cooperation platform is a symptom of how China conceives its prominent role in diplomatic relations. As recognised by Zweers *et al.* (2020), indeed, the '+1' model self-establishes China as the only extra-regional participant in the cooperative scheme. Moreover, Chinese pragmatism in international relations usually favours bilateral over multilateral agreements, aiming at accelerating the implementation of the

BRI. On the contrary, EU institutions favour complex multilateral arenas to create a broad consensus (Cotella and Berisha, 2019) and full socio-political awareness (Zweers *et al.*, 2020). In this respect, Western Balkan countries risk being left within a number of bilateral negotiations that, while producing immediate direct economic benefits, may at the same time overshadow the importance of regional integration into the EU economic market (Mardell, 2020).

The third analytical category explores the short and long-term priorities of the EU and China in the region. In this respect, the EU and China display very different political, economic, social, and environmental attitudes. While the EU views sustainability in a holistic manner through the conditions and regulations specified in its Treaties, Chinese initiatives apparently pay less attention to the environmental impact and the overexploitation of natural resources they generate, nor do they seem concerned with their socioeconomic impact on local communities (Tonchev, 2017). According to Zweers *et al.* (2020), although not directly responsible for the side effects of their implementation (i.e. low environment standards or high corruption), the investments made by China may perpetuate local networks of patronage and corruption (Doehler, 2019). Despite that, both players converge on the importance of the economic growth of the region and its capacity to convey goods and resources towards wealthier EU regions (Cotella and Berisha, 2019).

In relation to the sectors targeted by the investments, the EU has explicitly argued in favour of a joint action towards a better connection between Europe and Asia. Both players are concerned with the region's infrastructural development, and the Orient-East Med corridor planned by the EU coincides with the respective segment of the BRI. In this sense, the "Memorandum of understanding on establishing a Connectivity Platform between the EU and China" (2015) marks an opportunity to strengthen the synergies between the BRI and the Trans-European Networks. According to Zweers *et al.* (2020, p. 8), however, "China's main interest in the Western Balkans relates not primarily to the region's countries as such, but to their proximity to the EU, which is a major export market for China." In this light, the acquisition of the Piraeus harbour, the Piraeus Europe-Asia Railway Logistics (PEARL) railway company, and a share of the Budapest train terminal constitute important indicators. A number of divergences emerge also in relation to the energy and industrial fields, with the EU promoting an eco-friendly and sustainable use of resources by financing renewable energy provisions and inviting local government to adopt circular economy logics, while China continuing to finance coal power plants such as the Kakanj plant in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cotella and Berisha, 2019) or the Kostolac B3 coal power plant in Serbia (Zweers *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, while the EU introduced funding programmes dedicated to stimulate research and innovation in the WBR, China rather acquires local innovative industries, thus hampering local development dynamics.

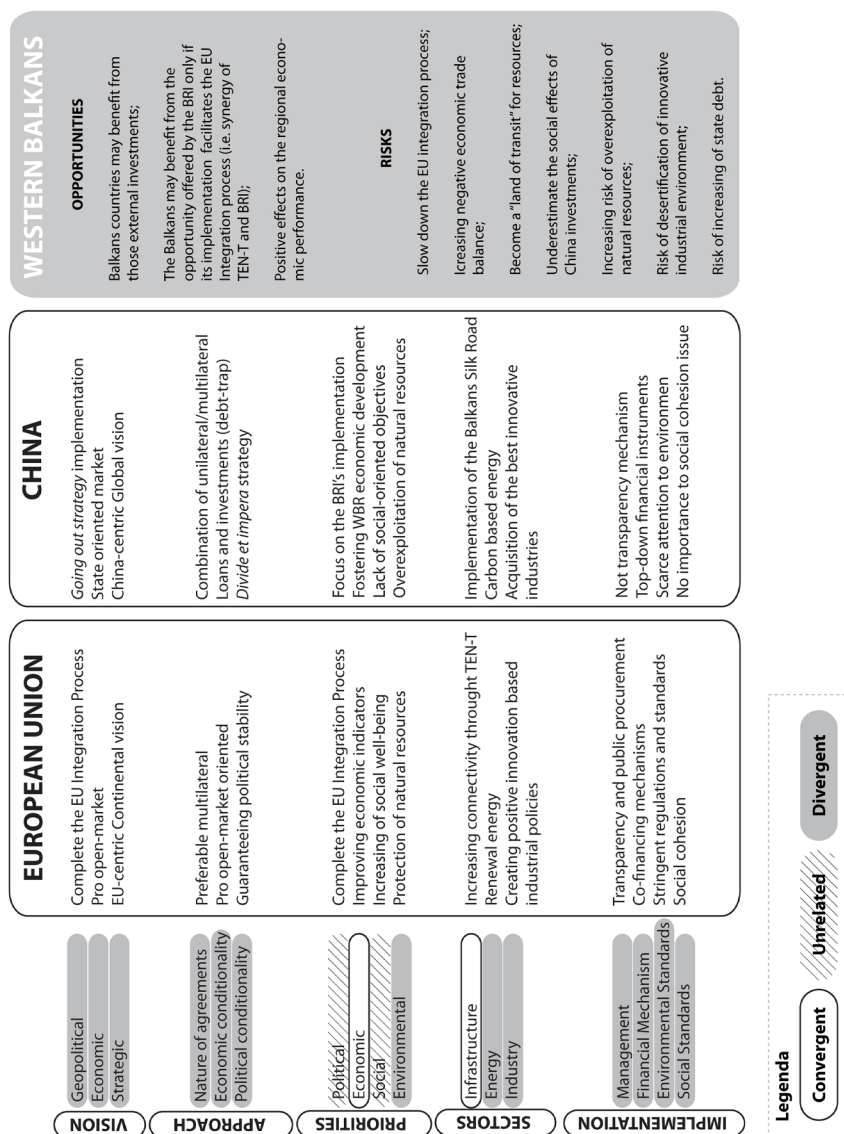


Fig. 3. Evidences of the EU and China's attitudes towards the Western Balkans

Source: own work.

When it comes to the mechanisms of implementation, evident divergences emerge in relation to the nature of management, the quality of financial mechanisms, and the environmental and social standards that are adopted. As many researchers have reported (see Bechev, 2020; Zweers *et al.*, 2020), the majority of Chinese projects activated in the WBR have been awarded to Chinese companies through rather opaque selection procedures, and concern Chinese contractors, suppliers, workers, and materials (EIB, 2018).¹² This drastically reduce the spill-over effect that this kind of interventions could activate. In contrast, the EU has established a procurement package that defines how tenders should be conducted, guaranteeing the principles of transparency and open access.

To conclude, the different attitudes of China and the EU towards the WBR carry both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, the region can benefit from two different sources of funds, which altogether increase the share of investments in the region, possibly contributing to enhancing regional competitiveness. On the other, however, this dual scenario may result in a progressive slow-down of the EU integration process, with the increase of economic inference of Chinese companies that may lead to a further overexploitation of natural resources, as well as to a progressive desertification of innovative entrepreneurship and, ultimately, to incremental indebteding of Western Balkan countries with China and a consequential increased influence of the latter on the countries' domestic politics.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is a growing literature focusing on the implication of China's action on the EU territory, in particular in relation to the future of EU integration (Bechev, 2020; Zweers *et al.*, 2020). To contribute to this debate, the article has addressed the question of whether China could support the integration of the WBR into the EU or, conversely, become an agent of 'de-Europeanisation'.

Despite the important progress made, the majority of WB countries are still struggling with the transposition of the *acquis communautaire* and the fulfilment of EU requirements (Berisha, 2018; Berisha *et al.*, 2021 a, b, c). This process will take years since there is no chance of joining the EU before 2030 (European Commission, 2018), also as a consequence of the stricter requirements. At the

¹² For example, the lack of transparency in the selection process led to a momentary stop of works for the completion of the Belgrade-Budapest railway. Another good example is the implementation of the Montenegrin motorway in relation to which it is unclear how the Chinese Eximbank funded the project, which accounts for 80% of the country's GDP, or how the China Road and Bridges Corporation won the contract without an open tender and why it is exempt from VAT and customs duties (Bechev, 2020).

same time, the role of China in the region has increased, as the EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn that recently admitted in an interview how “the EU has overestimated Russia and underestimated China”. In this light, Stumvoll and Flessenkemper (2020) have highlighted that China’s growing momentum derives from the country’s ability to meet real investment needs in the region, a dynamic that the EU has been slow to acknowledge (Cotella and Berisha, 2019). At the same time, China’s influence has also grown as a consequence of the slowing down of the EU accession process in the aftermath of the global economic crisis and, more recently, of the refugee crisis, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The credibility of EU membership is much lower than when compared with previous enlargement rounds.¹³

WBR countries that do not seem yet to possess the economic and administrative capacity to implement the EU accession requirements to a full extent, bearing at the same time higher adaption costs in comparison to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, while the number of domestic veto players appears relatively low, EU political conditionality in most cases directly affects sensitive issues of national and ethnic identity and statehood (Freyburg and Richter, 2010; Subotic, 2010; Schimmelfennig, 2008; Noutcheva, 2009; Elbasani, 2013, Gordon *et al.*, 2013).¹⁴ Similarly, even EU-supportive governments may not be willing to reform institutions that operate currently in a way that is favourable to their political and electoral interests.¹⁵ In this light, the lower domestic costs related to Chinese investments certainly offer an appealing perspective.

Overall, the BRI seems to have found a hole in the EU integration system, which it could easily fill. The growing volume of Chinese investments in the area demonstrates this and, while lowering the attractiveness of the EU intermediate rewards for the candidate countries, they at the same time may trigger alternative conditionality influences, in turn inducing domestic changes that are not necessarily compatible with those promoted by the EU. However, despite these potential pitfalls, the fact that Chinese investments do not come as an alternative to EU integration, allows WBR countries to pursue both ways at the same time – and they should do so.

While being fascinated by Chinese investments and their more pragmatic mechanisms, domestic authorities should continue to progressively metabolise EU rules and regulations in terms of transparency, quality standards, and public procurement.

¹³ According to recent surveys, the enthusiasm of the EU population in relation to the EU enlargement has been decreasing in the last 10 years, leading to a more unfavourable constellation of inter-governmental preferences regarding WBR accession (Zhelyazkova *et al.*, 2018).

¹⁴ Despite the absence of Eurosceptic parties, nationalist and non-Western identities are much stronger in some of the current candidates and make compliance with EU conditions less acceptable (Freyburg and Richter, 2010).

¹⁵ Extensive electoral reforms were only superficially implemented by national governments, and clientelist structures still put pressure on voters (Giandomenico, 2013).

The EU will remain the biggest investor in the region and this path seems to ensure the highest long-term domestic benefits. More specifically, the conditions attached to EU rewards will strengthen the WBR internal coherence, and further consolidate its links with Europe. An additional momentum to this process may come from the EU's increasing commitment towards the region, as recently argued in a number of official communications¹⁶ and demonstrated by the introduction of the WBIF – IPF7 (Western Balkan Investment Framework – Infrastructure Project Facility). Overall, the EU should aim at accelerating the integration of the region, and the recent allocation of 9 billion euros dedicated to this goal is a step in the right direction (European Commission, 2020a). However, it should be acknowledged that, in the presence of further delays, the influence of China in the region is likely going to increase, potentially triggering episodes of de-Europeanisation in the long run.

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¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/17/remarks-by-president-donald-tusk-after-the-eu-western-balkans-summit/>

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NOTES, COMMENTARIES AND REPORTS

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COVID-19 AFTERMATH AND TOURISM INNOVATION IN WESTERN BALKANS: A COMMENTARY

1. INTRODUCTION

This commentary discusses the current tourism conditions in Western Balkans (WB) and stresses the need for innovation and action-research to foster greener, more resilient and regional tourism in WB.

“We will live in a ‘new-normal’ tourism world – and it is our task to understand and explain it right now,” state Zenker and Kock (2020, p. 3) in their call for a new tourism research agenda. They have sketched six paths that constitute a starting point for a research agenda (beyond crisis-induced research areas) which are: the levels of tourism complexity; a change in destination image; a change in tourism behaviour; a change in resident behaviour; a change in the tourist industry; and longer-term and indirect effects, for example regarding sustainability. The authors call for analytical and deep research for developing new theories. Zenker and

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Kock's (2020) article adds to the recent review of innovation research in tourism, made before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Pikkemaat *et al.*, 2019). However, one could question how deep this research could possibly be, given the highly uncertain current 'post-pandemic' conditions (and it even is uncertain whether one can say that the situation is 'post-pandemic'). The proposed agenda is quite challenging, yet one key topic should be added and it ought to receive priority, namely action-orientated innovation research.

COVID-19 has had major impacts on all economic sectors in WB. Tourism and hospitality have been affected particularly seriously. The pandemic has been an exceptional occurrence, because never in past decades was the whole tourism sector at a global level so seriously affected. The 9/11 attacks in the US had a global impact, it triggered a temporary decline in global tourism and required increased safety measures (Lee *et al.*, 2005). Since the turn of the century, tourism has been exposed to health crises like SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome, 2003) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, 2015). Their impact was regional hardly affecting global tourism (Gössling, Scott, and Hall, 2020). That renders earlier research on health crises in tourism relatively less relevant as they refer to certain destination regions in a world with many alternatives. The COVID-19 occurrence is a health crisis of unknown duration (vaccines help, national policies differ, and new mutations develop) that also leads to economic, social, and political issues. For tourism, 2020 was a lost season; UNWTO's World Tourism Barometer showed a 72% fall of international tourist arrivals over the period January–October 2020. In the summer of 2021 tourism figures increased again but the uncertainty about the 'new normal' in the tourism sector is high (OECD, 2020). We use the term 'new normal' for new patterns of tourist preferences, tourist industry responses, and government actions.

WB tourism is an important sector, especially in Montenegro and Albania, where in 2019 tourism contributed an estimated 22% and 15% to GDP, respectively (UNWTO, 2020). In the other WB countries (Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and North Macedonia) tourism is less significant, but these countries also have tourism growth ambitions. The World Bank and the OECD (2018) have indicated the need for tourism with higher added value and stress improvement rather than innovation. Higher quality tourism implies standard recipes of better infrastructure, measures to prolong the short summer season, and improved hospitality skills. This vision is based on conventional tourism quality standards which Göler (2018) criticised; WB tourism has grown so far despite an 'imperfect' tourism product. The problem with universal recipes for enhanced tourism quality is that they point to tourism for specific target groups, based on tourism as it is. If universal quality standards are followed, that entails the risk of McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 2013) of tourism destinations, and thereby reduced authenticity of WB character and hence reduced attractiveness.

2. CREATIVE DESTRUCTION IN WB TOURISM?

At first glance, the ‘new normal’ economic reality has parallels with what Schumpeter (1942)¹ described as a milieu for creative destruction. Creative destruction refers to the incessant product and process innovation mechanism by which new production units replace outdated or economically weak ones (Caballero, 2008). Economic crises can reshape the innovation landscape. On the one hand, firms investing in innovation are the most dynamic firms with innovation capabilities and are likely to survive a crisis. On the other, firms not involved in innovation before the crisis cannot survive without changing products and services, but a question is whether they can afford the required financial and human resources.

When translated to present-day WB tourism this means that tourism providers will go bankrupt and after this market shake-out a new situation for tourism innovation emerges. The losers would be tourism firms that keep on doing what they used to do. Archibugi *et al.* (2012) and Filippetti and Archibugi (2011) have shown that the effects of crises do not follow Schumpeter’s theory; they found that the European 2008–2009 crisis resulted in a reduction in the willingness of firms to increase innovation investments but that a strong National System of Innovation helped firms retain their innovation investments. Caballero (2008) has also asserted that contrary to conventional wisdom, restructuring of industries falls rather than rises during economic contractions; a rise in liquidations during recessions is not accompanied by a contemporaneous increase in creation. Following this line of thinking for WB tourism, a process of *uncreative* destruction in the short term is to be expected, and the first signs can be witnessed in the real world. The results for WB are liquidations of tourism firms which are not accompanied by a contemporaneous increase in creation and innovation. In other words, the weakest companies go bankrupt, and others will try to survive, with the least possible business adjustments. They must compete in terms of prices, also because neighbouring tourism giants like Croatia, Greece, Turkey, and Italy work hard to attract tourists back, and their larger tourist sectors are in a better position to innovate.

3. LIMITED WB TOURISM INNOVATION

In WB, innovation has been limited because the tourism sector is very fragmented and mostly small-sized. Small-size tourism, as we know, has a negative impact on tourism innovation (Divisekera and Nguyen, 2018) because innovation skills and knowledge are minimal. Copying behaviour has been typical in the recent

¹ See Śledzik (2013) for an introduction to Schumpeter’s views on innovation and entrepreneurship.

goldrush-era of tourism, with Croatia and Greece as role models. Sectoral organisation for innovation is almost non-existent. The role of governments to foster innovation has been limited to marketing (Porfido, 2020; Ciro, 2019). Experience teaches us that in countries with national innovation systems, and government policy and regulation, firms and destinations are likely to innovate (Diviserka and Nguyen, 2019). “A modern innovation system is essential to help in the transition from a classic tourist sector based on providing simple accommodation and travel services to a more creative, sustainable tourism, based on innovative products and services of higher value added,” concluded Smolivič *et al.* (2018, p. 5) for the case of Montenegro. This is relevant for the entire WB.

Nientied and Shutina (2020) have argued that WB tourism innovation should work towards a transformation based on new European priorities of greener and more sustainable tourism, that is more resilient (especially diversification, alternatives to the now dominant sun-sea-sand tourism) and more based on WB wide collaboration. A lesson from the 2008–2009 financial crisis has taught us that recovery was economically driven, and that sustainability was ‘left for later’. Times have changed and now the EU and national governments are more aware of climate change and sustainability and take the Paris Agreements and later environmental laws and regulations more seriously. WB governments may not be doing that as of yet, but they cannot turn away if they want to remain competitive in tourism. Therefore, tourism innovation at various levels of firms (tourism providers), chains, tourism destinations (municipalities, regions, national), and tourism systems (the complex environment of actors) is needed. Albania started promoting agrotourism, which is a positive development, and many more such initiatives are needed. The small WB countries, with populations ranging from 0.6 million (Montenegro) to 7 million (Serbia), are not working together to start developing tourism ecosystems. Political issues still hamper more open borders and regional collaboration in tourism.

4. APPLIED INNOVATION RESEARCH

Recent review articles by Hjalager (2015), Gomezelj (2016), and Pikkemaat *et al.* (2019) discuss the state of the art of tourism innovation studies. Innovation research frequently adopts the enterprise and destination perspective. Tourism behaviour, networks and tourism systems receive far less attention.

A key point for WB tourism is that future tourism behaviour is uncertain; a key concern is to what extent tourists will adapt their behaviour and will favour greener options and search for less crowded destinations away from coastal mass tourism. However, it is possible to alter tourism behaviour. Slovenia, for example, opted for green tourism and diversification of experiences, and attracts in this way

new types of tourists.² A review by Marasco *et al.* (2018) on collaborative innovation in tourism highlighted the varied benefits associated with cooperative efforts developed at firm, network, destination, and regional levels, and stressed the need for innovation policy as a framework for tourism innovation actions.

The situation of WB tourism innovation is still unfavourable. Governmental budgets for R&D are minimal, relationships between firms and universities are weak, innovation is often considered as a technical/IT matter, and such themes as service innovation and management innovation are practically undiscovered. WB national innovation systems are inadequate (Marinkovic and Dall, 2014; Nientied and Karafili, 2016; Matusiak and Kleibrink, 2018; OECD *et al.*, 2019) and not geared towards tourism. Associations with the knowledge sector are minimal. Moreover, in the WB tourism sector, push factors for innovation have not been strong – tourism growth was realised anyway as WB benefitted from its newness factor. The issue of sustainability (Fayos-Solá and Cooper, 2019) has been of low concern in the WB tourism industry; for WB governments sustainability has been a nice word in tourism policy but without much practical application (Ciro, 2019). Innovation in organisational innovation (destination governance) has been unpopular, in both governmental and business circles (Nientied and Shutina, 2018). In WB, only a few tourism innovation studies were conducted (Bučar, 2017; Slivar *et al.*, 2016; Cerović Smolović *et al.*, 2018; Ciro *et al.*, 2019). Innovation efforts for sustainable tourism in WB have been coming from environmentally concerned entrepreneurs and hardly from the tourism business community.

The COVID-19 aftermath now puts serious pressure on the tourism sector. Pursuing the proposed agenda of greener, more WB-wide and more resilient tourism will not depend on deep research, new theories or conceptual approaches. Applied innovation research and strengthening networks and tourism systems has higher priority. In WB, researchers have hardly been able to reach tourism stakeholders and support tourism innovation initiatives. International agencies have made attempts through small projects, but such projects are not repeated and dependent on foreign funding (Nientied and Shutina, 2020). For academics, much more engagement with stakeholders will support tourism innovation and may lead to an in-depth understanding of the present situation and identification of potential drivers for tourism innovation. In business innovation studies, action-oriented approaches are applied but not in tourism innovation. We argue that such approach could be very beneficial in WB tourism, and a very sensible activity for researchers to undertake. Our applied innovation research priorities, in which practices can be improved in a co-creation effort, include: the development of frameworks for tourism innovation with public and private sector stakeholders; experiments with destination management organisations, including community based tourism; the development of scenarios regarding changing inbound tourism and tourism behaviour in especially

² <https://www.slovenia.info/en>

the EU; the development of cases showing the potential of sustainable tourism and the necessity for tourism resilience; and new marketing approaches to position WB tourism in new manners. To make knowledge accessible about the impacts of climate change, uncontrolled tourism development, and the potential of sustainable tourism to stakeholders through engagement with stakeholders (tourism providers, citizens, government, institutions) is an important task for researchers.

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PART II

ARTICLES

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IMPROVING COMPLIANCE OF THE EU COHESION POLICY VIA PREVENTION MEASURES? THE CASE OF THE POLISH OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME 'TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE' 2014–2020

Abstract. The EU Cohesion Policy was observed to be marked by financial compliance problems due to a relatively high level of irregularities. This problem brings into question the issue of how to prevent such infringements of the rules applicable to EU expenditure. Against this backdrop, this article investigates how Poland worked to prevent irregularities during the 2014–2020 programming period. Specifically, the focus is on whether prevention measures enhanced Poland's financial compliance performance. For this purpose, a novel model of 'non-compliance financial rate' (NCFR) is proposed and triangulated with qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, which has shown encouraging results that might be relevant also for other Member States.

Key words: Cohesion Policy, financial compliance, Poland, quality of government, Technical Assistance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The EU Cohesion Policy (henceforth: CP) constitutes a relevant domain to investigate financial compliance in EU expenditures. Specifically, financial compliance stands for the conformity with financial rules applicable to the EU's budgetary expenditure, such as public procurement or state aid (Mendez and Bachtler, 2017; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). Financial compliance is a crucial part of financial accountability, providing scrutiny and legitimacy of how EU Funds are spent, which is essential for the credibility of the European project (Davies and Polverari, 2011; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, CP is a "massive area of the budgetary expenditure" as financial allocations to this area exceed one-third of the EU's seven-year budget (Hoerner and Stephenson, 2012; Mendez and Bachtler, 2017).

However, compliance problems have been reported in the case of CP as evidenced by a high number of irregularities found against other areas of the EU's budgetary expenditure (Davies and Polverari, 2011; Mendez and Bachtler, 2011). Irregularities imply both fraudulent and non-fraudulent infringements of contractual obligations and rules applicable to EU expenditure (Mendez and Bachtler, 2017; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). Deficiencies in the administrative capacity of some Member States have been argued to be a critical cause for ineffective and non-compliant ESI spending (Dotti, 2016; Incaltarau *et al.*, 2020; Kuhl, 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2017). Notably, this problem concerns the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, such as Poland, where reforms in public administration did lag (Verheijen, 2007). Further, as reported by the European Court of Auditors (2019), compliance has not received enough attention due to the lack of formal requirements for Member States to assess fraud risk before adopting Operational Programmes. This requirement is critical to prevent money misuse in CP spending, thus ensuring compliance. Along these lines, detection and reporting irregularities constitute essential elements of the management and control system of ESI Funds (Kuhl, 2020; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). Next, should irregularities be detected in payment procedures, Member States' authorities are responsible for applying financial corrections and recovering ineligible expenditures from beneficiaries (Kuhl, 2020; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). In other words, financial correction refers to the recovery of undue funding by withdrawing ineligible expenditures. Notwithstanding the importance of detection and reporting irregularities, there arises the problem of how to prevent such infringements.

Against this problematic backdrop, this article addresses the following research question: "Did measures aimed at preventing irregularities in the EU Cohesion Policy contribute to enhancing Poland's financial compliance during the 2014–2020 programming period?". In other words, the analysis seeks to show whether those measures contributed to stimulating Poland's financial compliance performance in CP for the 2014–2020 programming period. Within this scope, the

article uses a triangulation method combining content documentary analysis (i.e., policy reports), semi-structured interviews with key policymakers, and statistical data on irregularities. As a result, this approach enables the addressing of the research question posed.

This article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature in the field of CP, focusing on compliance. Section 3 presents the article contribution, its research approach, and how this approach is operationalised. Section 4 and Section 5 present and discuss the empirical analysis. The final section concludes with a reflection on the findings and limitations.

2. THE CHALLENGE OF FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE IN COHESION POLICY

Research on EU law compliance has gained increased prominence over the last decade, investigating the underlying reasons for (non-)compliance, as well as analysing cross-country patterns (Börzel and Buzogány, 2019; Falkner *et al.*, 2004; Falkner and Treib, 2008; Toshkov, 2012; Zhelyazkova *et al.*, 2017). However, this research field has faced challenges in measuring compliance performance across Member States and policy sectors (Hartlapp and Falkner, 2009; Treib, 2014; Versluis, 2005). In addition to that, academics have had difficulties in providing clear-cut solutions for improving Member State compliance performance, and they mainly focused on the transposition of EU directives to measure compliance (Börzel and Buzogány, 2019; Falkner and Treib, 2008; Toshkov, 2012; Zhelyazkova *et al.*, 2017).

Regarding the financial dimension of EU law compliance, CP has been a major focus of attention because of the substantive EU budgetary investments in this domain (Cipriani, 2010; Davies and Polverari, 2011; Kuhl, 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2017). To provide a deeper understanding of EU financial compliance in CP, Mendez and Bachtler (2017) examined financial correction patterns for the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) across Member States during the 2000–2006 programming period. This assessment dismantled a commonly argued ‘fault-line’ in compliance performance between the EU-10 and EU-15. On the contrary, the highest correction rates were found in Spain, Greece, and Ireland, while Latvia, Hungary, and Cyprus were among the top five best performers regarding financial compliance (Mendez and Bachtler, 2017). Although this assessment of financial compliance was narrowed to financial corrections, not every irregularity necessarily leads to a financial corrections imposition. Davies and Polverari (2011) showed yearly trends in the number of errors (i.e. incorrect project accounting or non-compliance with contractual and legal requirements),

as detected by the European Court of Auditors. Notably, most yearly errors resulted from non-compliance with EU rules and ineligible spending (Davies and Polverari, 2011). Indeed, the level of errors during that period remained relatively high, indicating the necessity to reduce such financial compliance problems in CP expenditure.

The 2004 EU enlargement further increased the attention on CP performance due to the geographical shift of the Funds' allocation in favour of the EU-10, of which Poland is the largest beneficiary (Ferry, 2013; Incaltarau *et al.*, 2020; Manzella and Mendez, 2009). Indeed, CP has played a significant role, especially since the 2007–2013 programming period, attracting an extensive debate on its impacts and effects across CEE (Bachtler and McMaster, 2008; Dąbrowski, 2007; Dąbrowski *et al.*, 2014; Ferry and McMaster, 2005). Regarding Poland, the main reasons for academic interests include the size of the country with notable inter-regional disparities, the post-communist transition, and the strategic relevance of the ESI Funds for the regional development. In general, scholars found a positive contribution of CP to Poland's economic growth by reducing the unemployment rate and leading to a substantial extension and upgrade of the transport infrastructure (Czudec *et al.*, 2019; Rokicki and Stępnia, 2018) which is a singular case, significantly different from other regions. A dynamic panel data model was applied to investigate the impact of EU funds on the progress made towards closing these development gaps. Among the analysed development gaps, only the structural gap was not reduced in the period 2004–2015. Studies have also revealed the different impact of Structural Funds on each category of development gaps: a positive impact on reducing the regional transport accessibility gap and the investment gap, but negative – on reducing the innovation gap. However, economic growth has not been sufficient to reduce economic gaps across Polish regions, especially along the regional East-West divide (Czudec *et al.*, 2019; Dąbrowski, 2007; Do-żyński *et al.*, 2014) which is a singular case, significantly different from other regions. A dynamic panel data model was applied to investigate the impact of EU funds on the progress made towards closing these development gaps. Among the analysed development gaps, only the structural gap was not reduced in the period 2004–2015. Studies have also revealed the different impact of structural funds on each category of development gaps: a positive impact on reducing the regional transport accessibility gap and the investment gap, but negative – on reducing the innovation gap. In this regard, CP was judged insufficient in addressing the (growing) interregional disparities because of the limited administrative capacity of national and regional authorities, hampering effective CP investments (Bachtler *et al.*, 2014; Dotti, 2016; Incaltarau *et al.*, 2020).

Summing up, it is crucial to ensure EU financial compliance to achieve proper CP expenditures, which is a precondition of effective spending (Cipriani, 2010; Kuhl, 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2017). Therefore, compliance performance must accompany implementation performance. Despite some contributions to EU finan-

cial compliance in CP, two ‘gaps’ exist. First, the previous CP research has little studied the implementation of measures to improve EU financial compliance. In general, anti-fraud measures, including efficient management and control system of ESI Funds, have gained importance in the broader debate on building administrative capacity with a growing emphasis on training for managing authorities, peer-to-peer networking, and the “Integrity Pacts” (Kuhl, 2020; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020). Nonetheless, existing research has devoted limited attention to the effects of those measures. Second, CP studies have lacked a more strategic approach to assess EU financial compliance performance by triangulating qualitative and quantitative methods. In the following section, we present our approach aimed at addressing these ‘gaps’.

3. INVESTIGATING FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE IN THE EU COHESION POLICY

The article’s objective is to investigate whether measures aimed at preventing irregularities in CP spending implemented by Poland contributed to improving the financial compliance performance. Our case study focused on the 2014–2020 Polish Operational Programme ‘Technical Assistance’ (OP TA). Poland constitutes a significant case due to being the primary beneficiary of the ESI Funds since 2007. Specifically, in the 2014–2020 programming period, Poland received EUR 86 billion, amounting to nearly a quarter of all the ESI Funds. Moreover, since its pre-accession period to the EU, fraud and corruption in public expenditures have had remained a highly politicised issue among Polish authorities leading to a suspected misuse in CP expenditure. For these reasons, the OP TA is considered highly relevant to reinforce Poland’s administrative capacity in CP. Poland had a complex system of CP implementation due to the multiplicity of OPs (i.e., 6 national and 16 regional ones) co-financed by different ESI Funds. Furthermore, the East-West divide in Poland’s regional development triggered the necessity to reinforce effective management of the CP and investments in preventing irregularities were a key element for effective ESI Funds spending in 2014–2020. Therefore, the OP was conceived as an ‘umbrella’ for several relevant measures, encompassing those to prevent irregularities and stimulate effective CP performance.

Our analytical framework combined key concepts from three theories: rationalism, management, and constructivism. These particular theories differently explain why states (do not) comply with international obligations, such as EU law, and they, thus, provide different measures to solve compliance problems (e.g. Börzel and Buzogány, 2019; Chayes and Chayes, 1993; Tallberg, 2002; Versluis, 2005). Therefore, we applied these different theoretical approaches to the CP context to explore how Poland prevented irregularities in the ESI Funds

(see Table 1). These (theoretical) measures served as the first indicator under the category OP TA (cf. Table 2).

Table 1. Analytical framework

Theory	Measure to prevent irregularity	Relevance in the context of the EU Cohesion Policy
Rationalism	Controls (monitoring and auditing)	Financial controls are essential measures to fight/prevent fraud in ESI Funds. (Kuhl, 2020; Stephenson <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
Management	Administrative capacity building	The administrative capacity-building measures are considered crucial to address compliance weaknesses. (Kuhl, 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2017)
	Rules interpretation/transparency	Guidelines for beneficiaries constitute relevant supplements to clarify actors' responsibilities, protecting the EU's financial interests. (Kuhl, 2020; Stephenson <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
Constructivism	Policy learning	Policy learning is considered a crucial element of the implementation and financial accountability, stimulating performance improvement. (Dotti, 2018; Stephenson <i>et al.</i> , 2020)

Source: own work.

Second, three indicators to measure Poland's financial compliance performance in CP were proposed, as depicted in Table 2. These indicators benchmarked the two last programming periods to verify Poland's progress in financial compliance in CP. In addition, a (novel) 'Non-Financial Compliance Rate' (NFCR) indicator was developed to assess financial compliance performance. The NFCR is obtained as follows:

$$\text{NFCR} = \frac{\text{FI} + \text{FC}}{\text{BC}} \times 100\%$$

where:

FI = Total amount affected by Financial Irregularities,

FC = Total amount affected by Financial Corrections,

BC = Total Budgetary Contribution.

The NFCR is lower when a Member State complies more with applicable EU rules, namely the EU Regulations 2013/1303 and 2018/1046. Thus, the ideal value is zero, meaning a Member State is perfectly compliant. The analysis compared two programming periods to test whether Poland financial compliance has improved from 2007–2013 to 2014–2020.

Table 2. Selected indicators

Category	Indicator
OP TA 2014–2020	(1) Implementation of prevention measures
EU financial compliance assessment	(2) Number of fraudulent irregularities reported in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020
	(3) Number of non-fraudulent irregularities reported in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020
	(4) Number of financial corrections imposed in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020

Source: own work.

This article combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The documentary analysis has enabled us to measure the first indicator. The relevant documents included guidelines by Polish authorities and the European Commission on combating irregularities in ESI Funds, and Annual Reports on the Protection of EU Financial Interests (PIF Reports), which contain statistical datasets.

The findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis were triangulated with six interviews with key policymakers and experts. The interviewees were relevant policy officials from Poland’s Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Development (MDFRD), the EU Commission DG-REGIO’s Unit in charge of Poland, and the European Court of Auditors. Our analysis aims to provide a complete perspective to be triangulated with reports and data by combining stand-points from both EU officials and Poland’s civil servants.

4. ANTI-IRREGULARITIES MEASURES UNDER 2014–2020 OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The primary responsibility of ensuring EU financial compliance in CP lies with Managing Authorities (MAs), together with the ESI Funds beneficiaries, and involves preventing irregularities. In the 2014–2020 programming period, Poland undertook several measures under OP TA to reduce the likelihood of irregularities. Those measures encompassed a management and control system of the ESI Funds, fraud-awareness and training activities, and IT tools in public procurement. According to respondents from both DG REGIO’s and the Polish side, these particular measures were relevant to stimulate EU financial compliance.

4.1. Management and control system

The management and control system consisted of a three-level control mechanism, instead of the four-level mechanism common in other Member States. Specifically, Poland established a shared management system where the MDFRD was both the Managing Authority (MA) and the Certifying Authority (CA) (European Commission, 2010). Thus, the first level was both the MA and CA, while the second level was established as Auditing Authority (AA), and the EU Commission acted as the third, supreme level. Those control mechanisms encompassed independent, complementary processes of verifying ESI Funds expenditure. As explained by both the EU Commission and Polish officials, the primary control and management mechanisms were undertaken by the Polish side. They involved annual audits, year-round monitoring, and inspections of payment claims for projects co-financed with the ESI Funds. Those inspections were relevant to prevent irregularities, thus enabling an effective verification of submitted documents for project co-financing, and in turn eligibility of expenditures (European Commission, 2019; Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018a). Further, some Polish respondents stressed “very good and continuous cooperation” between the MA and the AA regarding inspections of eligible ESI expenditure. The latter “regularly audited” the management and control system to check its compliance with relevant EU and national rules (Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018; interviews 4 and 5). Summing up, those management and control measures served as ‘rationalist’ anti-irregularities measures.

4.2. Fraud-awareness and training activities

The primary objective of fraud-awareness and training activities implemented by Poland was to minimise the risk of irregularities, particularly those of fraudulent nature (European Commission, 2015). These activities targeted MA’s staff and beneficiaries. They encompassed different aspects of fraud prevention, such as interpreting relevant financial rules, MA’s guidelines issued to beneficiaries, and annual bilateral meetings between the MA and beneficiaries. Specifically, the bilateral meetings were relevant to beneficiaries to explain how to avoid irregularity-related mistakes. Similarly, bilateral, regular cooperation meetings were held jointly by the MA and DG REGIO. Interviewees identified all these bilateral meetings as particularly relevant to discuss irregularity-related matters.

Furthermore, the MA staff participated in the Working Group for irregularities in CP, as well as in national and European conference series on “Control and irregularities in the spending of resources from Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund” (European Commission, 2015; Ministry of Investment and Development,

2018a). Those activities enabled the exchange of knowledge and experience, contributing to further improvements in irregularities prevention (Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018; interviews 2 and 5). In addition to that, the MA implemented the Government Anti-Corruption Programme, whose primary measure was a successive improvement of a system for countering corruption threats (European Commission, 2015; Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018a). Finally, training, workshops and conferences played a relevant role in raising awareness regarding fraud and exchanging best practices to prevent irregularities (European Commission, 2014; Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018; interview 4). Thus, those activities enabled the MA and beneficiaries to ‘learn’, which stimulated administrative capacity-building.

In conclusion, those fraud-awareness and training measures served as ‘management measures’ boosting Poland’s administrative capacity. Furthermore, those activities constituted ‘constructivist’ measures facilitating policy learning, thus, exchanging knowledge and best practices to avoid irregularities-related mistakes.

4.3. The Competition Data Base as an IT tool in public procurement

IT tools were fundamental in preventing irregularities, as some respondents reported. For instance, the MA established and launched a ‘Competition Database’ intended for ESI Funds beneficiaries. The Competition Database constituted an IT tool for implementing competition rules regarding the eligibility of expenditure under ESI programmes in 2014–2020 (European Commission, 2017, p. 54). Notably, that IT tool served as a fraud prevention measure ensuring compliance with competition and public procurement rules, specifically, this tool was effective for those irregularities not covered by the Public Procurement Act (European Commission, 2017; Ministerstwo Funduszy i Rozwoju Regionalnego, 2015). Furthermore, the Competition Database was a relevant control tool providing greater transparency of those relevant rules and public scrutiny.

To conclude, the IT tool concerned served as two types of measures. First, it was a ‘rationalist’ measure considering its inspection purpose. Second, it was a ‘management’ measure to facilitate public procurement rules, interpretation, and transparency.

4.4. Poland’s financial compliance performance in Cohesion Policy

Table 4 presents Poland’s financial compliance performance in CP for two programming periods, namely 2007–2013 and 2014–2020.

Table 4. Financial compliance assessment

INDICATOR	PERIOD		
	Unit	2007–2013	2014–2020
Amount of fraudulent irregularities reported in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (Indicator 2 in Table 2)	(mn EUR)	€ 422.41	€ 45.70
Amount of non-fraudulent irregularities reported in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (Indicator 3 in Table 2)	(mn EUR)	€ 1,318.93	€ 121.99
Total Irregularities (Indicator 2+3)	(mn EUR)	€ 1,741.35	€ 167.69
Amount of financial corrections imposed in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (Indicator 4 in Table 2)	(mn EUR)	€ 621.19	€ 659.50
Total budgetary contribution	(mn EUR)	€ 66,907.18	€ 76,345.21
NFCR (Indicators (2+3)/4)		3.54	1.08

Source: European Commission, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020; D.-R. European Commission, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, own work; O. European Commission, 2020.

First, in each programming period, non-fraudulent irregularities significantly exceeded fraudulent ones. Those irregularities did not necessarily result from ineligible expenditures but, for instance, ‘unintentional’ mistakes in documents. Second, lower numbers of both fraudulent and non-fraudulent irregularities were reported under 2014–2020 against 2007–2013. Both findings confirm the results emerging from the above section about the effectiveness of prevention measures on Poland’s financial compliance performance. According to both institutional documents and interviews, those prevention measures were identified as the primary source of this improvement.

However, in 2014–2020, CP Funds spending by Poland were more affected by financial corrections imposition against 2007–2013. The reason behind this phenomenon was that, under the shared management, the MA was expected to identify irregularity and impose corrections before a payment was approved to reduce the number of ineligible expenditures. This ex-ante mechanism significantly reduced non-compliance. Furthermore, only the irregularities above EUR 10,000 were reported to the European Commission, which imposed financial corrections to enforce compliance with EU financial rules (Ministry of Investment and Development, 2018b). Finally, as a result of annual audits, the EU Commission was empowered to impose financial corrections if the Polish MA and AA authorities did not detect the irregularities.

Although compliance covers all irregularities, a distinction between a missing document and a fraudulent action must be carefully made (Interview 6). Not every financial correction is imposed because of fraud, as shown by lower fraud contribution in 2014–2020 against 2007–2013. This substantial amount of financial corrections imposed in 2014–2020 could have resulted from different reasons, such as ex-ante controls or ‘administrative’ irregularities (e.g., improper configuration of documents or ineligible claim for reimbursement of items). All these findings demonstrate progress in Poland’s financial compliance performance in CP because fewer ESI Funds were affected by ineligibly spent expenditures. Lastly, NFCR was considerably lower in 2014–2020 when compared to 2007–2013. This cumulative finding demonstrates that fewer CP expenditures were affected by ineligible spending in 2014–2020 compared to the previous period. Thereby, this indicates Poland’s significant progress in financial compliance performance in CP.

To sum up, the findings presented throughout this section constitute relevant evidence on the improved EU financial compliance performance in Poland. Thus, the anti-irregularities measures concerned have indeed contributed to improving Poland’s compliance performance in CP.

5. CONCLUSIONS

“Compliance in terms of legality and regularity is a precondition of good spending,” an interviewee reported to us. This statement perfectly sums up the significance of EU financial compliance in CP. These findings showed that prevention measures contributed to Poland’s financial compliance performance in CP. First, as our analysis demonstrated, there is no single measure preventing irregularities. Instead, various ones (i.e. ‘rationalist,’ ‘managerial,’ and ‘constructivist’) need to complement one another to improve compliance performance. Our findings showed that the amount of non-compliant CP expenditures reduced in 2014–2020 compared to the previous programming period. Therefore, Poland can be considered a successful case of improving its financial compliance performance in CP.

Second, the cooperation between multiple actors at Poland’s national level and the EU level was found to stimulate EU financial compliance. Thereby, against the previous research identifying adverse effects of the shared management on ensuring compliance (Cipriani, 2010; Stephenson *et al.*, 2020), this system may actually enhance Member State financial compliance performance in CP if an integrated, multidimensional approach is adopted to prevent irregularities. Nonetheless, further research comparing Member States and sectors should be conducted to investigate such a relationship.

The main article limitation is the focus on a single country. In contrast, comparison with other Member States, especially those that joined the EU after 2004, might be relevant to offer a more comprehensive perspective. Further, a benchmark with other policy fields (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy) regarding EU financial compliance assessment might provide a deeper understanding of this topic.

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ANNEX

Information on the interviews		
#	Role	Period
1	Representative of the Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy: Department of Assistance Programs.	April 2020
2	Three Representatives of the European Commission's DG-REGIO: Unit F3 in charge of Poland.	April 2020
3	Representative of the European Commission's DG-REGIO: Unit supervising operational programmes on Technical Assistance.	April 2020
4	Representative of the Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy: Department of Assistance Programs.	May 2020
5	Representative of the Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy: Department of Assistance Programs.	May 2020
6	Policy officer: the European Court of Auditors.	May 2020

Revaz GACHECHILADZE , Giorgi GOGSADZE 

2020 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA: RESULTS AND GEOGRAPHICAL PECULIARITIES

Abstract. The article aims to show the main political-geographic trends of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia. The political systems of the post-Soviet counties are still imperfect and fragile. Although international observers recognised the vote results in Georgia as legitimate, many opposition parties boycotted the parliament for almost six months. It took several western officials to engage in regulating the post-election crisis. The work focuses on analysing turnout and voting patterns pointing to the changes that occurred in the last decade. A geographical study of elections enables one to identify the merits and drawbacks of the electoral process from the regional standpoint. The findings of the work underline the complexity of the election outcomes. While certain legal and political changes bring Georgia closer to European democracies, the country still lags in terms of several electoral/geographical features.

Key words: Georgia, parliamentary elections, voter turnout, voting, election districts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mapping of election results and identification of the geographic aspects of voting behaviour are still among the major topics of electoral geography (Kovalcsik and Nzimande, 2019, p. 10). A territorial overview of elections may serve as a good illustration of the progress that Georgia has made towards more democratisation.

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The article deals with the main political/geographical trends of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia which are compared to those of the previous three elections, i.e. in 2008, 2012, and 2016. The research focuses on analysing regional data on election turnout and voting patterns pointing to the changes that occurred during the last decade.

The research employs the following methods: collection–processing–analysing official data provided by the Election Administration of Georgia and National Statistics Office of Georgia; a review of academic works on the subject, as well as reports of international organisations and NGOs; GIS technologies for preparing and integrating maps through ESRI ArcGIS; and visual presentation of the results – Adobe Illustrator.

The main research method consisted of collection, processing, and analysis of official data. The major portion of the election data was obtained from the official website of the Election Administration of Georgia. The supreme body of the Election Administration of Georgia is the Central Election Commission (CEC), which directs, manages, and controls work of all (territorial) levels of election commissions (Election Administration of Georgia, 2021). In few cases, data provided by the Parliament of Georgia was used.

A significant part of the paper is dedicated to the analysis of voter turnout (VT). In order to measure VT, we used the method of registered turnout (the ratio of those who voted among those registered as eligible voters) which is traditionally used by the Georgian election authorities.

In order to review and assess political and legal variables of the elections, we considered reports and results of exit polls of the following international organisations/NGOs: OSCE – ODIHR, International Republican Institute (IRI), National-Democratic Institute (NDI), Edison Research, IPSOS, etc. One of the approaches of the research was based on the method of critical review and analysis of the academic literature on the subject.

For data storing, processing, and preparation for visualisation Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standards were used. For the integration of the collected/received and spatial data RDBMS (PostgreSQL/PostGIS) was used. This approach enabled us to create plan links between electoral districts/precincts and statistical data. Data preparation for mapping was based on GIS (QGIS): this tool permitted us to create a mapping model according to the aforementioned plan. The final design of the maps was done by Adobe Illustrator. As a result, we received static maps without interactive possibilities, however, a further implementation of internet technologies, based on the existing data, can offer much more flexible possibilities.

2. OUTLINE OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA: SYSTEM AND PRACTICE

The 10th parliamentary elections in Georgia were held on 31 October 2020. There have been 150 members in the single-chamber Parliament of Georgia since 2008. Until 2016 it was elected through a mixed system – half or little more of the MPs as per party lists and the remaining portion as direct candidates, normally nominated by parties, who ought to receive 50% + 1 vote in their election districts.

Before 2003 the results of the elections were easily predictable: the winner always was the ruling party/political bloc. The so-called Rose Revolution of 2003 staged by opposition parties led by the United National Movement (UNM) under Mikheil Saakashvili changed the pattern. But the Rose Revolutionaries who declared the parliamentary elections of November 2003 rigged and triggered snap elections in March 2004, followed double standards from the very beginning: the snap elections easily won by the UNM concerned just a half of the Parliament and were held according to party lists only.

Georgia was a presidential republic since April 1991. After changes in the Constitution in 2010, the country gradually became a parliamentary republic. Thus the elections to the Parliament which has a fixed term of four years became the most important political event in the country.

The 2012 parliamentary elections were won by a newly established political bloc Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (GD) under Bidzina Ivanishvili. The former ruling party, the UNM, retained a substantial base of supporters and became the strongest opposition party. Throughout the 2010s there was a political competition in Georgia between the two largest parties – GD and the UNM – which combined received approx. 95% of all votes in the 2012 parliamentary elections and 75% in 2016 and 2020 elections.

A negative attitude of a substantial number of the Georgian voters towards the UNM has been successfully used by GD to mobilise their base to win all elections since 2012. But Georgians became somewhat tired of the same party (GD) running the country for 8 years. This trend could be seen in the results of the 2020 elections in the largest city, Tbilisi (see below).

There was a common demand from several parties to change the mixed electoral system into an entirely proportional one. The GD-majority Parliament adopted changes in the Constitution in 2018 which established the elections to the parliament on an entirely proportional basis to be held from 2024. Opposition parties demanded the introduction of the proportional system already in 2020. It took the joint mediation of the Council of Europe Office, the EU Delegation, and the US Embassy in Tbilisi to reach a compromise political agreement between all political stakeholders on the electoral system in Georgia on 8 March 2020. According to the new law, 120 members of the 2020 Parliament were to be elected by proportional representation and 30 members – in single-mandate districts. In order to

permit a larger representation of parties and restrict the dominance of one party, a temporary electoral threshold of 1% was introduced. A capping mechanism for the number of mandates for a single party was established. A complete change to the proportional system is planned for 2024.

3. TURNOUT

Formally, participation in elections is a civil duty of citizens and, therefore, VT indicates the level of involvement of the population in the political life of a country.

Table 1 reveals that the absolute number of eligible voters remained more or less stable in Georgia throughout the 2010s. According to national legislation, all citizens residing abroad and having valid Georgian passports are enrolled in electoral lists. Georgian voters living abroad are eligible to vote in electoral precincts, opened on the premises of Georgian diplomatic missions in many but not every foreign country. Many eligible voters, if residing far away from an electoral precinct or staying abroad on an illegal basis, avoid voting.

Table 1. Voter turnout: parliamentary elections in Georgia (2012–2020)

Year of elections	Registered voters	Actual votes	Voter turnout (%)
2008	3,465,736	1,850,407	53.39
2012	3,621,851	2,215,661	61.31
2016	3,473,316	1,814,276	51.63
2020	3,501,931	1,970,540	56.11

Source: Own work based on data of the Election Administration of Georgia [parliamentary elections 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020].

Some scholars (e.g., Blais and Rubenson, 2012; Kostadinova, 2003; Kostelka, 2014; Solijonov, 2016) have argued that VT has a declining trend in post-communist societies. Statistics show that an average decline of VT in such societies amounts to 1% per year. M. Comsa's research revealed that the decrease in VT is characteristic for a majority of post-communist countries, but six exceptions were mentioned: VT remained stable in Hungary, while in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Tajikistan it even increased (Comsa, 2017, p. 31). VT decreased significantly in Georgia from approx. 70% in the early 1990s to 53% in 2008. However, during the last 12 years, a steady decrease in VT has not been observed.

Based on an overview of theoretical works in this field several sets of concepts/hypotheses could be proposed to explain the VT decline.

In the first set, we include two intertwined concepts: “post-honeymoon effect” and “post-communist demobilisation” (Inglehart and Catterberg, 2002; Kostadinova, 2003). The former implies that soon after the downfall of communist regimes the citizens of these countries got disappointed with the worsening of the socio-economic situation which did not meet their high expectations. This could be an explanation of the rapidly growing electoral absenteeism in such societies. In the case of the latter, a sort of demobilisation was observed: after decades of the communist rule a part of people simply decided not to participate in the elections at all. The latter phenomenon was apparent for a short period of time, mainly the 1990s, therefore it cannot serve to explain why VT declined steadily in the following decades.

The second set of concepts explaining a long-term decline of VT is related to deteriorating economic and political conditions. The first years of the new democracies have been characterised by severe and growing economic hardship (such as hyperinflation and increasing unemployment), which had a negative impact on VT (e.g. Bell, 2001; Pacek *et al.*, 2009). However, other studies indicate that there is no obvious correlation between VT and the economic situation. Despite the facts of political instability, e.g. “colour revolutions”, corruption, scandals, and intrigues within parties, there is no clear link between political conditions and the decline of VT (e.g., Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Geys, 2006, Kostadinova, 2003).

The third set is related to the importance of elections or to the concept of “electoral (political) stakes” (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Tullock, 1967), which shows that the electorate tends to differentiate between important and less important elections. This became more obvious soon after the fall of communism. Voters in the new democracies would participate more actively in the elections when more was at stake. The hypothesis has found empirical support (e.g., Pacek *et al.*, 2009). In this paper, we argue that in contemporary Georgia VT highly depends on political stakes.

The fourth set includes such institutional variables as mandatory or compulsory voting, voting system type, voting age, population size, and income inequality (e.g., Power, 2009; Stockemer, 2017). We believe that none of the mentioned variables affect significantly VT in Georgia.

A fifth set of factors leading to VT decline are linked to economic globalisation. This hypothesis has been more widely applied in highly developed countries (Brady and McNulty, 2011; Steiner, 2010) and the concept may be applicable to few post-communist countries. As far as Georgia is a country with a less developed economy, the influence of global economic trends on its VT seems negligible.

A sixth set is linked to migration. We argue that migration to a large extent contributed to turnout decline in former communist countries. A significant number of migrants from such countries remain citizens of the country of their origin retaining strong ties with it. They send remittances to their families and try to build businesses in their homelands. In other words, having far-reaching goals the migrants are ready to play an important role in political decision-making. Meanwhile, in the receiving countries many migrants live relatively far from the places where voting takes place

(in the case of Georgia, from its embassies or consulates) and due to low accessibility to ballot boxes, an insignificant part of them participates in elections.

To sum up the discussion on the factors affecting VT in Georgia, we came to the conclusion that mass emigration and political stakes played the most influential role in determining the level of voter participation in the parliamentary elections.

It ought to be noted that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union two ethnic conflicts, civil standoff, and economic dislocation ensued in Georgia. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians left the country mostly for Russia and the EU. In the mid-1990s net migration rate amounted to -40 (per 1,000 inhabitants). The negative net migration figure remained high up to 2013 (about -10 per 1,000 inhabitants). Later the figure stabilised at the level of -2 per 1,000 inhabitants (Net Migration Dynamics, 2021). Therefore, during the last 7–8 years migration was still an important but no longer a decisive factor affecting the level of VT.

With migration remaining more or less stable, in the last 12 years voter turnout has no longer been steadily decreasing in Georgia and it sometimes even increased. This could be explained by an approach that argues that post-communist societies actively participate in elections when political stakes are high (Johnston *et al.*, 2007; Matsubayashi and Wu, 2012; Reif and Schmitt, 1980). One research has proven that it happens in 90% of cases, especially in poor countries (Pacek *et al.*, 2009). Further, VT is higher in closely contested elections (Blais, 2006, p. 122) or when the political environment is polarised.

Out of four parliamentary elections in Georgia since 2008, those of 2012 seemed to be important to the majority of voters who desired a change of power in the country. The 2020 elections were also politically important as they were held in a situation of harsh confrontation of political forces: despite the pandemic, 56.1% of people eligible to vote went to polling stations. In contrast, 2008 and 2016 parliamentary elections were held in situations when a substantial part of voters were confident that “nothing would change!”

Georgia is no longer a country with artificially boosted voter turnout. In the recent past, this was quite a problem. For example, in the 2004 presidential elections the officially recorded level of voter turnout was 88% (Saakashvili Declared..., 2008). The inadequacy of 2008 parliamentary elections results is demonstrated by the difference between the districts of the lowest and the highest turnouts which was almost double: in five election districts the voter turnout exceeded 80% and in the other five districts it was below 45%, while the average figure for the country stood at 53.4% (Voter Turnout, 2008).

In the 2020 parliamentary elections none of the election districts reported a turnout level exceeding 65% or below 45%. Higher than average turnout was reported in ten election districts, and lower than average – in four (Voter Turnout, 2020) (see Fig. 2).

It must be noted that parts of the internationally recognised territory of Georgia, i.e., Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia), are left blank on Figures 1,

3, and 4, as elections are not being held there: they are beyond Georgian jurisdiction due to the deployment of Russian troops and are considered as occupied territories.

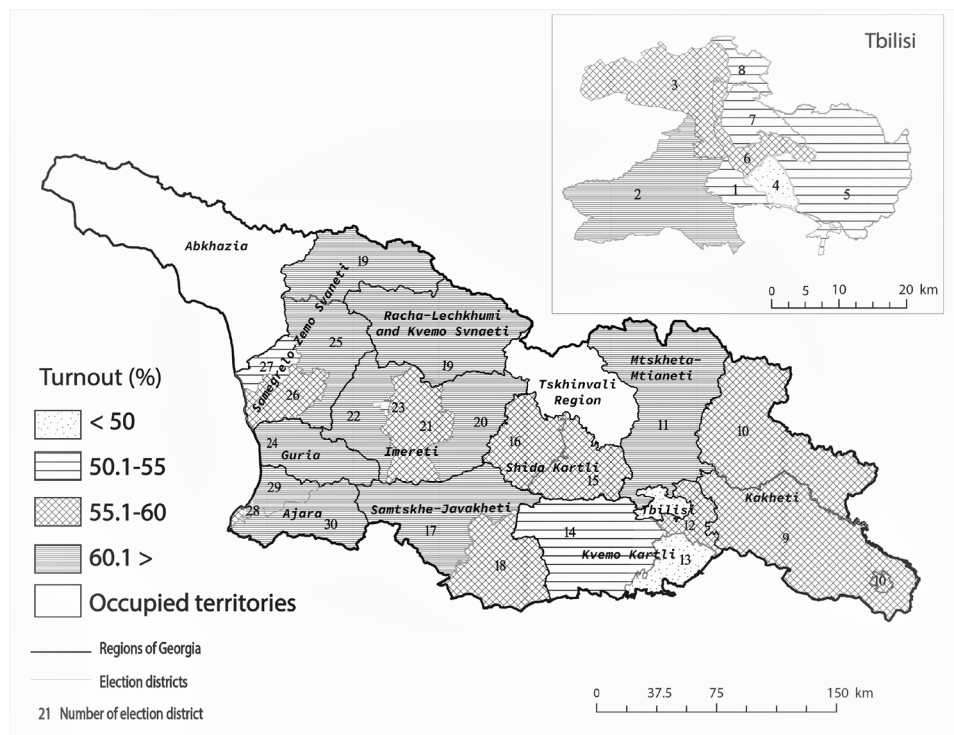


Fig. 1. Voter turnout by election districts: 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia

Source: own work based on data of the Election Administration of Georgia, 2020.

As a rule, Georgia's rural voters are more active. In the 2020 parliamentary elections voter turnout in all big cities, Tbilisi, Kutaisi (#23), Batumi (#28), and Rustavi (#12), was below the national average (Voter Turnout, 2020). In Georgia's election history, 2012 parliamentary elections were the only elections when voter turnout was higher in three big cities (Tbilisi, Batumi, and Rustavi) compared to the rest of the country (Voter Turnout, 2012).

The relationship between VT and the incumbent's performance is another issue for electoral studies. There is no scientifically-supported correlation between VT and an incumbent's share of the votes (Grofman *et al.*, 1999; Jordan, 2017; Vaishnav, and Guy, 2018). However, empirical evidence in post-Soviet countries suggests that higher voter turnout means higher votes for the incumbent party. Indeed, the voter register in many countries has been used as a tool for manipulating election results in less democratic societies. Georgia followed the same pattern before 2012. For example, in the 2008 parliamentary elections, the ruling

party (UNM) received over 70% of the votes in each of those districts where VT was 70% or higher (Georgian Election Data: Parliamentary, 2008; Voter Turnout, 2008). It is noteworthy that this post-Soviet trend has changed in Georgia during the last two parliamentary elections, a fact which could be attributed to the improvement of the electoral administration.

4. 2020 ELECTIONS: RESULTS AND AFTERMATH

The low electoral threshold for the 2020 Parliament contributed to the participation of a large number of parties in the elections: there were 48 parties and two electoral blocs registered. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, which implied many restrictions for mass gatherings, there was an ample possibility for parties to conduct their electoral campaigns. The elections were observed by the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). Despite some irregularities before and during the elections reported by the IEOM and some observers, the general consensus was that the elections were competitive with fundamental freedoms respected and that parties could campaign freely. The OSCE and the EU were to some extent critical of the elections but cast no doubts about the results (Final Report: OSCE–ODHIR, 2021).

Multiple polls predicted victory for GD, second place with half the votes – to the UNM, and less than 3–4% of votes to 6–7 other parties. On the day of elections, 31 October, four separate exit polls, commissioned by different television stations, all gave the lead to GD and second place to the UNM. The closest to the actual results was the exit poll conducted by Edison Research commissioned by an opposition-leaning TV Formula, which predicted 46% of votes for GD and 28% for the UNM (Diverging Exit Polls Give Lead to GD, 2020).

The actual results were very close to what was predicted. GD garnered 48% of votes according to party lists, and the second was the UNM with 27.2% (Results, 2020). None of the other seven political parties which passed the electoral threshold were able to gather more than 3.8% of votes. For example, European Georgia (EG) created by former members of the UNM who left the latter in 2016 had 21 MPs in the 2016 Parliament but won just 5 mandates in 2020. That was because during the election campaign EG failed to demonstrate it differed from the UNM.

For some, however, the fact of gathering even 2–3% of votes was a certain success, i.e. for the new parties established several months before the elections (Girchi, Lelo, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, or Citizens). These parties were more successful in big cities than in rural areas.

All 30 MPs elected as direct candidates represent GD in the 2020 Parliament. Actually, in the first round, GD had won in just 14 out of 30 electoral districts. The second round in 16 districts where no candidate passed the threshold of 50% had

been scheduled to be held three weeks later. In at least 8 districts a strong competition was envisaged among the ruling party and opposition candidates. But opposition parties recklessly boycotting the elected Parliament (see below) did not participate in the second round of the elections, and permitted GD to win easily in all 16 districts. Thus, the number of mandates of GD in the Parliament increased to the pre-set limit for a single party – 90 seats.

The decision by opposition parties led by the UNM to discredit the results of elections by refusing to enter parliament, boycotting the second round of elections, baselessly demanding snap elections could be considered a political mistake. Attempts to organise anti-government rallies were supported by a very small number of people. The tense political situation in the country lasted for almost six months and was finally resolved with substantial diplomatic help of the EU and the USA. The absolute majority of opposition political parties eventually joined the Parliament.

5. GEOGRAPHY OF VOTING

GD received 48% of votes in proportional parliamentary elections, the result almost similar to that of the 2016 elections (see Fig. 2).

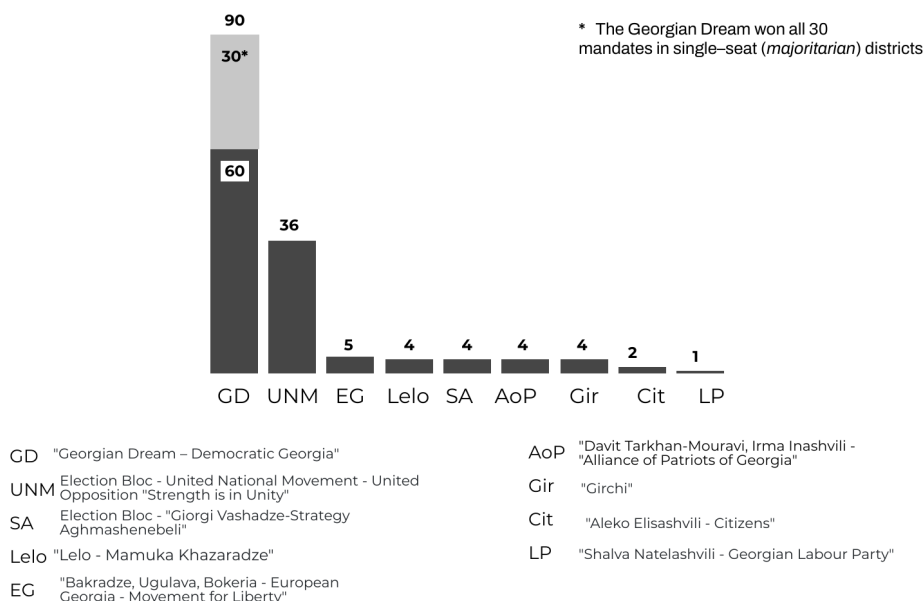


Fig. 2. Distribution of Mandates: 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia

Source: own work based on data of the Election Administration of Georgia, 2020.

A considerable reduction of single-mandate electoral districts did not allow GD to gain a constitutional majority (75%) of parliamentary seats. However, in the 2020 parliamentary elections the ruling party won all 30 single-seat districts.

GD traditionally garnered high numbers of votes in Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi, Svaneti, and Mtskheta-Mtianeti. It also solidified its positions in Samegrelo and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

However, its popularity declined in all big cities, as well as in the Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, and Ajara regions (see Fig. 3).

It is important to note that the ruling party did not receive high support in any of the districts in the 2020 elections, something that had been an acute problem before 2012. GD got over 60% of the votes only in two districts: in Javakheti (district 18) and the easternmost part of the Imereti region (district 20). Javakheti remains an area that traditionally supports all ruling parties, as for district 20 – it is the place where the founder of GD, Bidzina Ivanishvili, was born.

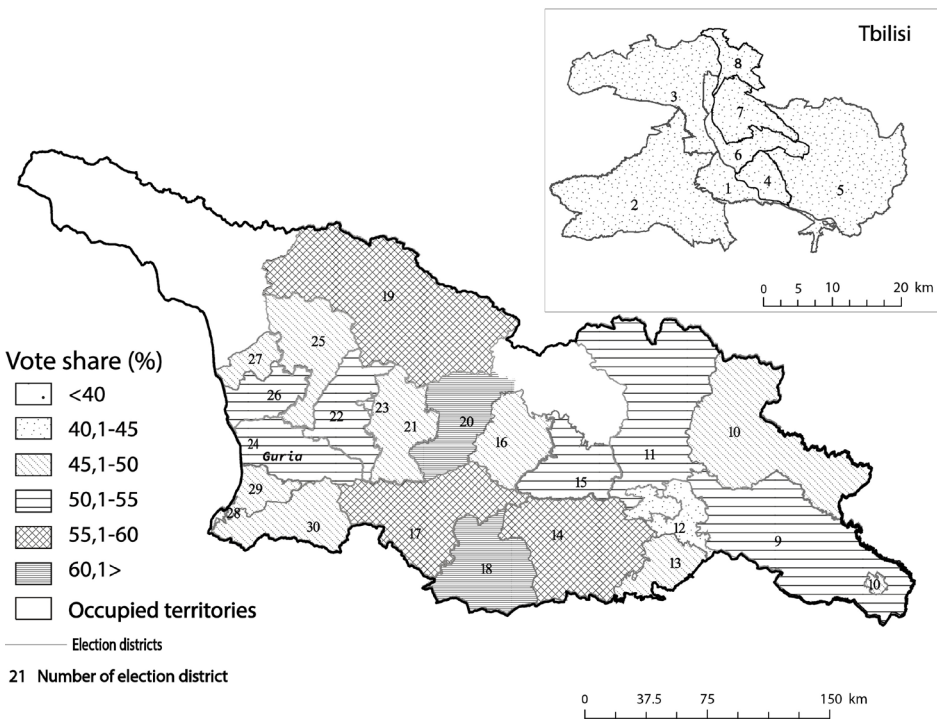


Fig. 3. Votes received by Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia

Source: own work based on data of the Election Administration of Georgia, 2020.

The 2020 elections have proved that the UNM has remained the major opposition force in Georgia. The party suffered a serious intellectual loss soon after the 2016 par-

liamentary elections when experienced politicians left party ranks. However, the charisma of the ex-president Saakashvili (who has lived in Ukraine in 2013–2021, became its citizen but actively interferes with the policy of Georgia) proved to be strong enough to garner 50,000 more votes to the UNM in 2020 than in the previous elections.

Support for the UNM varies between 20–35% throughout the regions of Georgia. The party achieved better results in Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, and Ajara in 2020 compared with those in 2016, but lost positions in Samegrelo, Imereti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti (see Fig. 4).

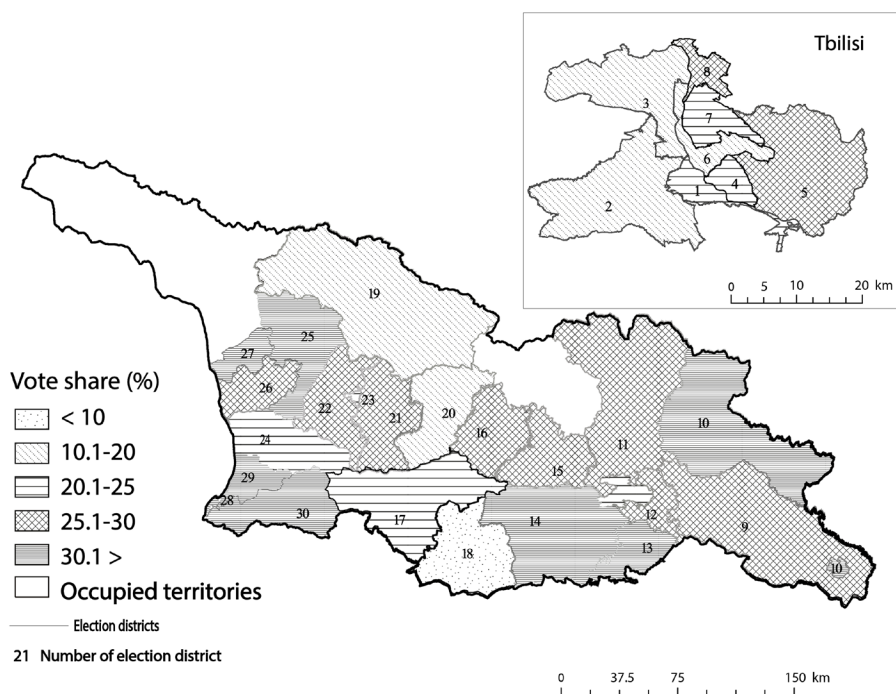


Fig. 4. Votes received by the election bloc United National Movement – United Opposition “Strength is in Unity”

Source: own work based on data of the Election Administration of Georgia, 2020.

The UNM received very low support (3.9%) in Javakheti, settled predominantly by ethnic Armenians (Results, 2020). There is a possible explanation: after hostilities erupted in Nagorno Karabakh in September 2020 between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Mr. Saakashvili intervened from Ukraine and stated: “Nagorno-Karabakh is a sovereign territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and nothing will change that” (Saakashvili: Nagorno Karabakh..., 2020). Although the statement was in line with international law, most probably it irritated ethnic Armenian voters in Javakheti and backfired against the UNM.

Political integration of ethnic minorities is gradually improving in Georgia. The case of Kvemo Kartli (districts 13 and 14) is notable from this standpoint. Before 2016, this region, where the majority of the population are ethnic Azeri, unconditionally supported all ruling parties. However, in 2020 that was not the case: the UNM garnered almost 37% of the votes in the mainly ethnic Azeri populated election district #13 (it was the second-highest result for the UNM among the election districts). The increasing political activity of the representatives of ethnic minorities of Georgia and their support for different political parties and not only the ruling one is a positive development.

Tbilisi, being the capital and by far the largest city has a special place in Georgia's elections. The history of Georgia's parliamentary elections has proven that Tbilisi is a "protest city". Ruling parties never enjoyed the absolute majority of votes there. Furthermore, in the 1990 and 2012 elections overwhelming support of the Tbilisi electorate for the united opposition played a decisive role in a power change through the ballot box.

In the last decade, the support for GD among the Tbilisi electorate has been diminishing. As the main opposition force in the 2012 parliamentary elections GD received 68.3% of votes in the capital city, but being the ruling party, it received much less support in the next elections: 47.1% in 2016 and 40.8% in 2020 (Results, 2016; Results, 2020).

Analysis of the last three elections enabled us to identify one more important feature of the Tbilisi electorate. Local voters have a disapproving attitude not only towards the ruling party, GD, but towards the UNM as well. In the 2012 elections the UNM (then ruling party) received much lower support in Tbilisi (27.1%) than in other regions of Georgia. The figure decreased even more during the 2016 (23.3%) and 2020 (22.6%) parliamentary elections (Results, 2016; Results, 2020). In other big cities of Georgia, such as Kutaisi, Rustavi, and Batumi, the UNM had about 10 percentage points higher support than in Tbilisi in 2020.

Tbilisi's electorate is quite pluralistic. Traditionally, even relatively small parties enjoy some support there. The majority of the votes which were gained by the new parties in 2020, came from big cities, e.g., Girchi received the support of 8% of the Tbilisi electorate, Strategy Aghmashenebeli and Lelo – 6–7% (Results, 2020).

6. CONCLUSIONS

A time/space analysis of recent parliamentary elections has enabled us to conclude that Georgia's election patterns are now closer to those of European democracies. However, despite some progress, Georgia still lags behind in terms of several electoral-geographic features.

In the last four parliamentary elections in Georgia, the voter turnout varied between 50–60%. For a country of intensive emigration, it is hardly possible to have a higher level of electoral participation.

The history of Georgia's elections demonstrates that VT was in direct correlation with two main factors: (I) mass emigration (especially during the first 15–16 years after independence had been achieved in 1991), and (II) the domestic political context, i.e. dependence on what the odds at stake are (since 2012).

Improvements to both election legislation and electoral administration have resulted in the elimination of a practice where voter turnout and support for the ruling party were artificially boosted. Thanks to the achievements in election monitoring by political parties, NGOs, and international observers, none of the districts reported unrealistically high turnout or very high support for the ruling party in 2020.

It has been for three parliamentary elections already that two political parties dominate the Georgian political arena. GD and the UNM together garnered three quarters of the votes in 2020. But the opposition, in general, remains weak: it has failed to win even in a single constituency both in proportional or single-mandate elections. In this regard, Georgia is still behind the post-communist countries which are now EU Member States, where the political spectrum is more diverse.

A geographical analysis of electoral behaviour indicates that electoral regions are still in the process of formation in Georgia, although some exceptions could be observed. The Samtske-Javakheti region, where an ethnic minority (Armenians) prevails, traditionally supports the ruling party. On the other extreme, the Kvemo Kartli region with another ethnic minority (Azeri) is turning into a politically pluralistic area, which is a positive development.

The political system of post-communist (especially post-Soviet) countries is fluid, and, therefore, making predictions tends to be difficult (Redžić and Everett, 2020, p. 231).

The purpose of this paper was not to analyse the 2020 elections from a legal or administrative points of view. We would like to note that international monitoring missions positively assessed the recent elections in general, although their reports (Final Report: OSCE-ODIHR, 2021; Parliamentary Election Interim Report: IRI, 2020; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2021) also highlighted problems and challenges.

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Patrick COLLINS *

PEOPLE-POWERED PLANNING: PLANNING FROM THE BOTTOM UP IN A TOP-DOWN SYSTEM

Abstract. This paper is concerned with spatial policy in Ireland. It adopts an historical lens to help explain why Ireland currently finds itself at the bottom of the European league table with regard to local governance. After categorising the Irish political and planning system as highly centralised, bureaucratic and linear, the paper uses a case study of the Moycullen village plan to show an alternate path towards place development in Ireland. This case study sets out to contrast the desire of a people to collaborate in the authorship of their place with the top down nature of spatial planning in Ireland. By making clear the methods and results of the project, this paper highlights the latent demand that exists in a community that is subject to national planning system that reduces their ability to affect change. Through the use of some innovative approaches, this project has sought to fire the geographic imaginary of a people with respect to their place.

Key words: spatial planning, centralisation, collaboration, village planning, Ireland.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ireland is a small open economy in Europe's north-western periphery. Over the three decades prior to 2008, it had experienced a level of economic and social prosperity that made it the envy of many small nations. However, the openness of its economic model was called into question when Ireland became exposed to the chill winds of financial collapse resulting from the credit crunch of 2008. Ten

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years later, Ireland had returned to growth. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 it enjoyed high levels of GDP growth (8.2% in 2018) while also bearing the scars of the collapse, most notably in the areas of housing and public service provision.

A recent report from the Irish Central Bank (2020) highlighted the dual economies that exists in Ireland. One is the more traditional economy associated with domestic activity, the other reflects Ireland's unique relationship with foreign direct investment (reaching the equivalent of 80% of GDP in 2015). The presence of large multinational corporations in Ireland skews national accounting. In their questioning of the attractiveness of Ireland for foreign direct investment (FDI) (see Barry, 2019; Collins, 2020) many cite the country's (often times controversial) low tax rate. Others see the picture slightly differently, making reference to educated workforce and a business-friendly environment as determinants of FDI location.

In short, the role played by FDI is determining, not just of economic success, but of the Irish approach to policy making also. For much of the country's history, its geography was a negative factor, an island on the edge lacking any significant natural resources. Now, geography is one of Ireland's biggest advantages, it is the landing point for US MNCs who wish to gain access to the EU's 400 million strong market.

Internally, the picture is not so straightforward. Ireland's pursuit of a service-led economic development has had massive impacts on the country's spatial configuration. While not unique to Ireland, the contrast between bustling cities and vacant rural towns is stark. Ireland's growth, led by the pursuit of an open, outward facing development model has led to a severe spatial imbalance. Irish cities are succeeding after economic downturn, but its towns and villages are left with the physical scars of the last economic boom, speculative land development and the rise of the ghost estate phenomenon (see Grist, 2014; O'Callaghan *et al.*, 2013).

This paper sets out to examine the process of collaborative place authorship in one of Europe's most centralised countries. It utilises a case study approach to highlight the latent demand for active place authorship in a highly centralised country. It focuses on the village of Moycullen in the Galway county, and details the methods adopted in the delivery of a village plan for the area. The Moycullen village plan can be considered unique in its use of a broad consultative approach. The primary objective of the paper is to situate this approach in the broader context of planning in Ireland and reflect on the results of people-authored plan for development at the local level. More broadly, the paper sets out to reflect on the Irish approach to spatial planning. It is one that has been dominated by a highly centralised state that is foremostly concerned with its attractiveness to foreign investors. The lack of any form of regional autonomy together with the urban bias of the Irish industrial policy has brought about a severe spatial imbalance. The next section situates planning in the broader theoretical debate on develop-

ment, then I shall explore the planning context in Europe and in Ireland before introducing the new method and a case study. The paper concludes by making recommendations as to how Ireland might approach development in a more sustainable and equitable way.

2. PLANNING, POWER, AND PRACTICE

Planning is a small word with many connotations. For the purposes of this paper I shall consider planning as the formulation and implementation of spatial public policies. While straightforward, it contains a multitude. It contains aspirations, ideologies, solutions, and imaginaries, it can also be seen as the true manifestation of a state's control over its people. For others, it is the only answer to the impending climate crisis. Indeed, the ongoing ecological crisis has brought planning and the role of planners into sharper focus over the past decade (see Albrechts, 2010).

The practice of planning owes much to the broader evolution of development studies over the past half century. Planning has acted as a key differentiator between economies that tended towards a centralised planning practice and those that abided by the development of economies through more liberalised and free market approaches. One could go as far as to say that planning acted as the incarnation (physical manifestation) of the economic and political ideologies that have defined the world since the end of Second World War. For Yiftachel (1998), the voluminous historical and conceptual literature that describes the emergence of planning over this time can be divided into three main accounts: equity, efficiency and rationality. Here, equity refers to a broader social reform where planning can be seen as a tool to assist the socially disadvantaged and opening up public discourse in a truly democratic sense (see Burgess, 1993; Healey, 1992). Second, planning can increase efficiencies by the use of public intervention to address market failures (Hall, 1998). Finally, planning is a tool for rational and strategic decision-making with respect to environmental and spatial imperatives (Faludi, 1983).

Of the three, it is perhaps the search for efficiencies that has held the greatest sway in recent past. This is most easily identified by the shift from managerialism and Fordism to entrepreneurialism and flexible accumulation that occurred throughout the world's advanced capitalist from the 1970s on (Harvey, 1987, 1989a, 1989b; Brenner, 2006). Planning at the national and sub-national level has been interpreted as a competitive pursuit, with planners tasked with the development of places that 'win' in the competition for global capital flows, what Scott (2006) has termed global interstitial competition. For Holgersen (2020) a clear tension exists between equity and efficiency planning theories. Following on the

work of Foglesong (1986), Holergosn has contended that planning must be understood as rooted in a political economy defined by capitalist social relations.

In some part a response to the proliferation of private interests benefiting from the entrepreneurial approach to planning (see Logan and Molotoch, 1987), attempts at wresting control from capital interests can be seen in what has been termed a communicative planning approach, imbued with the ideas of deliberative democracy. Based on the Habermasian ideals of openness and truth seeking, communicative planning seeks an enlargement of egalitarian values, through consideration of a wider range of human and natural communities (beyond capital interests) (see Sager, 2007).

2.1. Collaborative Planning

The top-down approach to planning as described by Keeble (1952) has more recently been replaced by the bottom-up, more collaborative practice that has itself been inspired by Habermasian ideas of communication. For Fainstein (2000) the function of this planning approach was seen to be a diverse set of practices in shaping places through consensus building. For Fox-Rogers *et al.* (2002), communicative of collaborative planning has become the dominant discourse in planning theory in recent years. Collaborative planning was seen as the antidote to distortion that resulted from the increased power of capital in development discourses. Best recognised in the work of Healey, the collaborative approach invokes Habermasian communicative techniques by adopting styles of discussion where the points of view of a diverse range of stakeholders can be explored. Here, the role of the planner is that of facilitator, one who is also responsible for the identification and eradication of misinformation of communicative distortion (see Healey, 1996, 2012; McGuirk, 2001).

For Long and Woods (2001) this bottom up approach is a more flexible and efficient way of looking after the needs of places. It involves a commitment from planners and politicians to include multiple stakeholders' viewpoints and experimenting with various methods to ensure effective and open communication (workshops, focus groups, and town hall meetings) (see Healey, 2012). In it we see a change in the role of the planner, constituting something of an about turn from its quantitative roots in the 1950s.

2.2. Critiquing collaboration

Adopting a Marxist perspective Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2011) question the role that class plays in the collaborative planning approach. This is part of an established body of work that highlights the nature of power in planning. Adopting

a Foucauldian approach, theorists such as Flyvberg and Richardson (2002) have contended that the Habermas-inspired approach to collaboration is rooted in an insufficient consideration of power. While agreeing that work inspired by Habermas (i.e. Healey, 1997) does enable a break with instrumentalism, the dominant critique of collaborative planning is that it unwittingly serves as a legitimising strategy for powerful interests and over-emphasises the process rather than producing more equitable outcomes.

In their work on informal strategies of power in the Irish planning system, Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2011) interviewed 20 urban planners and have highlighted how the importance of economic power constitutes what they described as a shadow planning system in Ireland. Purcell (2009) has argued that collaborative approaches have proved attractive for neoliberals to maintain the status quo while also ensuring political sustainability. Explored in further detail in the next section, this chimes with recent work by Collins (2020) who highlighted the enforced entrepreneurialism in Irish local authorities, part of what Molotoch (1976) termed the ‘growth machine politics’ that has emerged in an attempt to secure new locational advantages in attracting international capital investment (Harvey, 1989; Bartley and Treadwell Shine, 2003; Brenner, 2006). While particularly relevant to the Irish case, my intention here is to consider an augmented approach to collaborative planning at the micro-local level in Ireland. This case study is not naive to the constant multitude of power presences in the Foucauldian sense, but intends to pit collaboration not against a shadow planning system but against a highly centralised one. This is a case study, then, that strives to highlight the shortcomings of the centralised nature of the planning system by encouraging all actors (through a variety of methods) to engage in a collective imagining of a future for their place.

3. THE PLANNING CONTEXT

3.1. The European Approach

Often referred to as an ‘experiment’, the binding of nations in a Union of Europe has taken many tracks since the European Coal and Steel Treaty of 1951. The forging of stronger ties has been central to this experiment and one way that this has been attempted is through planning. The development of a cohesion policy (bringing together EU regional and social policy) promotes balanced development, sustainability, and policy coherence across the nations and according to Faludi (2010) acts as a kind of spatial planning seeking to integrate forms of spatial development “by the back door.” Further, cohesion policy helps legitimise

the EU and its institutions. In terms of visibility, the co-funding of new infrastructure developments from roads to libraries across the continent has enabled a form of branding of the Union in the forms of plaques and roadway signs referring to the importance of cohesion policy and structural funding in making such initiatives happen.

For Faludi (2015) the document resulting from the most sustained attempt at planning is the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999). The ESDP reflects the diversity of national planning initiatives across the Union and the variety of starting points from which Member States participated in the process. From the Irish perspective, the ESDP together with its outshoot ESPON served as influential documents in national spatial planning (see below). From a critical perspective it served to highlight how much the country could learn from other Member States when it came to planning at the sub-national level.

In their comprehensive compendium of planning approaches both in the US and the European Union, Knapp *et al.* (2014) reflect on the supra, national and sub-national approaches to planning. While the broad trend is towards greater influence of the global flows of capital in affecting development at all spatial scales, Ireland has much to learn from its European neighbours. The EU examples offer clear and unambiguous evidence of devolution in the formulation of planning (especially lands planning). In Denmark, for example, local governments have more responsibility for and discretion over land and spatial planning than at any time in Danish history (Needham, 2016). The second trend noted by (Geppert, 2016) is towards rising regionalism that has become obvious across the continent with France leading the way. The situation is similar in the Netherlands where regions remain the medium for the implementation of the national long-term program for infrastructure, land use and transport investments. A third trend has been the movement away from hierarchy towards territorial governance. This has led to increased co-ordination of actors and institutions, the mobilisation of stakeholder participation, and the realisation of place-based/territorial specificities (Needham, 2016).

3.2. The Irish Approach

The history of spatial planning in Ireland has been explored by a number of writers (see, e.g., Laffan, 1996; Breathnach, 2010, 2013; Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2011; Grist, 2014; MacFeeley, 2016; Murphy, 2019). For the most part these reflections highlight a range of shortcomings and cite aspirational policy documents that rarely become reality. Many such reflections identify the centralised nature of the Irish state. Relative to the European average of close to one quarter, Ireland spends 8% of government finances at the local level (Murphy, 2019). Much of the blame for this lies at the feet of the Irish political system, which

is highly clientelist in nature. National elections are seen as an opportunity to “send a local representative to Dublin” to win opportunities for the locality. Local elections suffer from a double edged sword of decreasing funding / power and increasing voter apathy.

Some argue that the root cause of Ireland’s centralist state, one that is dominated by strong (and increasingly professionalised and privatised) public administration, can be traced back to its colonial history (Grist, 2014; Ferriter, 2020). After the turbulent birth of a new nation, the 1920s was a decade dominated by civil war. The absence of a strong government with any real mandate saw development power rest in administrative hands. Nearly a century later, some believe that those hands have only strengthened their grip (Ireland has a proportion of locally elected representative to the public of 1:4,400; equivalent ratios in France and Germany are 1:120 and 1:350 respectively) (*ibid.*). Add to that a political system that veered towards the technocratic and localist, and it becomes easier to understand the disparate nature of spatial development in Ireland (Lynch, 2008; Murray, 2010; Breathnach, 2010).

In terms of legislation, the most recent local government act (2014) saw the merger of city and county councils, as well as the abolishment of town councils. This was the latest in a long line of legislative acts that served to increase power to the national level at the expense of that at the local and regional. From the Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924, through various amendments to the original Local Government Act of 1898, autonomy at the local level has been undone, leading to what Murphy (2019) termed the dead hands strangling local government in Ireland. Yet that is not to say Ireland has not made attempts to address the spatial imbalance. Let us consider two of these in more detail.

The *Buchanan Plan* of 1968, informed by international best practice, was considered a new and radical approach to regional development in Ireland. Informed by leading contemporary spatial theory, it proposed the development of a growth centre/pole approach to development in Ireland. This was to serve the dual purpose of bettering regional development and ensuring against the overheating of the Dublin city region. The central tenets of the plan were later referred to in the much lauded Kenny Report (noted for its attempts to better manage sprawl in Irish cities, Committee on the Price of Building Land (1973)). The Buchanan Plan saw regional development requiring a reorganisation of subnational local government in Ireland.

The changing geographies of economic development in the 1970s made reports like these all the more necessary. As Ireland entered the EU, it needed to confront the changing nature of the rural. Entry into the ‘post-productivist’ (Halfacree, 1997) phase of the rural together with decades of mass emigration made the increasing rural urban divide a political issue in Ireland. Ultimately, the urban-led approach of both plans proved too radical for a country that still considered itself rural (Hourihan, 1989).

In the place of a coherent spatial policy, Ireland turned to an industrial policy to spread the wealth. The work of the Irish Industrial Development Agency (IDA) aided better balanced regional development through the dispersal of foreign investors in the country. By the 1970s, a new era of globalisation had seen (primarily US-based) corporations stretch their production networks across ever increasing geographies. A low corporation tax, an educated, English-speaking workforce, and access to the EU market made Ireland an attractive proposition for external investors. The branch plant model of development, aided through a process of regional dispersal by the IDA, saw the establishment of manufacturing in towns and villages across the country (Breathnach, 2013). The 'regional' plans of the IDA ran veritably opposite to the growth centres approach of the Buchanan plan. In essence, Ireland witnessed the cannibalisation of spatial policy by the much more politically palatable industrial policy of job dispersion.

The *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) of 2002 is another example international best practice, informed by leading contemporary theory, undone by political expediency. Since its accession to the EU, Ireland was required to develop a series of multi-annual development plans. Through their structural funds, the EU helped foster what MacFeely (2016) termed 'pragmatic regionalism' in Ireland. Tantamount to a top-down approach, regional policy was conceived nationally but delivered regionally. It is also widely acknowledged that EU influence on enacting spatial policy in Ireland was best recognised in the development of the NSS. While the influence of the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999) was obvious in the NSS, shadows of Buchanan's 1968 were also evident. New regionalist thinking was to the fore and with that the NSS sought to replace the hierarchical urban structure of core and peripheral regions with a more balanced poly-centric system (see Richardson and Jensen, 2000). The NSS proposed the creation of a poly-centric national urban structure with regional "gateway cities driving a more balanced economic development" (Breathnach, 2013).

While admirable and indeed timely, the NSS suffered from the same underlying issues as the Buchanan Plan. Both were undone by the shadow cast by an industrial policy that was unapologetically neoliberal in its outlook. Sub-national spatial development proved difficult to reconcile with the globalist outlook of an exogenously led economic development model. Timing also played a role on both occasions. A foreign investment spike in the 1970s and the housing development led boom of the 2000s masked the inherent spatial inequalities in infrastructure and service provision in Ireland. The neoliberal logic adopted by successive Irish governments became more influential. Balanced development was left to the market. The rate of housing construction stretched beyond the cities, and towns and villages welcomed the construction of large scale housing developments. Those that were still under construction in 2008 led to the phenomenon of 'ghost estates' (O'Callaghan *et al.*, 2013) the scar borne by a country that had experienced a speculative property bubble. The Planning and Development Acts in 2000 and

2006 adopted a similar hue to the market-led approach to economic and industrial development more broadly. Part V of the Planning Act that acknowledged the need for more public (social) housing placed the onus for their delivery on private developers.

The 2008 crash saw balanced regional development fall further behind in the list of priorities. As the economy began to recover, much was made of the urban location of the green shoots (Collins, 2020). The return to growth coincided with the end of the planning timeline of the National Spatial Strategy. The relative growth of the greater Dublin area concentrated the minds of policy makers. Balanced spatial development returned to national attention with the publication of the National Development Plan.

Sustainable development is one of the main pillars of the Irish government's recently published National Development Plan (NDP) (Department of the Environment, 2018). Owing to its poor standing in terms of its environmental record, a strong statement was needed from the Irish government. The NDP proposes compact growth strategies for large urban areas to address problems associated with economic growth such as urban sprawl, uneven population patterns, and the associated infrastructure pressures. Place-based development plans are also encouraged to address the specific needs of rural locations, enhance social and economic vibrancy, and create a sustainable living space. 116 billion euro will be set aside for development projects throughout the lifetime of the Ireland 2040 project – the National Planning Framework, ninety-one billion of which will be funded by the exchequer. Regional assemblies, county councils and local community development committees are all expected to play a role in planning and developing Ireland over the next decade.

The NDP is an important document in that it acts as the foregrounding of all sub-national planning documents. At the regional level, these are the recently published Regional Spatial Economic Strategies (RSES), under the auspices of the Regional Assemblies in Ireland. The recent Local Government Act gives more power to regional assemblies, who can use the RSES as a way to better define the future direction of the region.

The North West Regional Assembly sits in Ballaghderreen and acts as a coordinator between national and local plans. County Development Plans and associated Local Area Plans (for places with populations over 1,500) are authored by county councils (local authorities). Section 9 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires local authorities to make development plans for its area every six years. These plans should be consistent with the National Development Plan and the regional spatial and economic strategies at the time in question. On the face of it, this can be seen as the kind of planning coherence witnessed in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands (see Knapp *et al.*, 2014), however, such is the weak level of governance at the sub-national level in Ireland, it can only be seen as increased centralisation.

While still in its infancy, the NDP must consider two existant realities in Ireland; the first is the overriding economic/ neoliberal logic in Ireland, the second is that historically all spatial planning in Ireland has been undone by a lack of any meaningful representation at the sub-national regional level. According to Breathnach (2013) The Regional Authorities in Ireland (set up in 1994) have neither the power nor the status that is necessary for the policentric approach of spatial planning. At the more local level, local authorities have neither the money nor the expertise required as active agents of developmental change. Ultimately, the centralised nature of the Irish state meant that the structures were never in place for it to be anything other than a highly centralised state. Planning in Ireland is conducted at a remove. Local Area Plans, the work of the Local Authorities in Ireland are inaccessible documents laden with exclusionary language. At its most local level, planning in Ireland needs to change.

What this review of spatial policy in Ireland has attempted to make clear is its hierarchical nature. While a critical take, acknowledgement must be given to some attempts to lead development from the bottom-up. Notable here is the work of Lynch 2008 and Murray 2010, who highlighted a participative approach, often aided through numerous iterations of the LEADER programme. Similarly, village plan experiments such as that in Cloughjordan eco village (see Kirby, 2017) and community-led initiatives across the country (including the Heritage Council's Village Design Statement) are evidence of an activated local level that is underserved by the national government. The review also sets the scene for the following case study. A study of a village, that attempted to imagine its own future through collaborative means. The following section will explore the methods used before an analysis of the results.

4. MOYCULLEN

The village of Moycullen is home to 1,704 (2016 census) and sits 12 kilometres to the Northwest of Galway city, in the shadow of the world-renowned Connemara landscape. It is a young village, over two-thirds of the population are less than 44. As a village it is also young in terms of built environment, CSO figures show a 10-fold increase in the housing stock since 1970. It is also a diverse village, and relatively unique for settlements of its size in Ireland with over one in five residents being born outside of the state. Moycullen matches the national trend in that its most recent expansion (between 2000 and 2010) coincided with the construction boom across Ireland. Yet, in terms of its residents, and relative to other villages of a similar size, Moycullen differs from national trends. The demographic profile is matched by a socio-economic one that describes the vil-

lage as home to middle and upper-income earners. Unemployment is below the national average with close to two-thirds of those at work in either 'professional or managerial/ technical' roles. Educational attainment figures match these trends with above average attainment at all levels and the village's proximity to the National University of Ireland, Galway can help explain the unusually large concentration of PhD graduates there.

The Moycullen local area plan is reflected on as part of the work. Completed in 2012, it was adopted by Galway County Council in March 2013, becoming effective for six years. A Local Area Plan is statutorily required to be consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan and consists of a written statement and plans, which may include objectives for the zoning of land in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The legislation also requires the provision of detail on community facilities, amenities and detail on the standards for the design of developments and structures. Prior to 2014, all settlements with a population in excess of 1,500 were eligible for a local area plan. Such being their nature, these documents tend to focus on the zoning of land. They are statistical exercises in that they answer to the county-level plan and owing to the nature of local government finances in Ireland, they do little in the way of dictating future development beyond zoning. Further views on the planning process are expressed below, but they do not enjoy a broad subscription from the general population owing to what is perceived as an exclusionary process allied with exclusionary language.

5. METHODS

Scott (2006) has maintained that spatial planning in Ireland is partly due recognition to the role of community-based initiatives such as the EU LEADER programme, and that the application of urban ideas of success could never fully translate to predominantly rural regions. The Moycullen Village Plan was funded by the Irish Research Council and was led by a team of geographers based at NUI Galway. The Plan was funded by the council on the basis that it acted as an opportunity for "third level expertise to engage with local communities." The project itself was intended to "test the demand for place authorship at the local level in and country where local planning is all but nonexistent." One overriding ethos of the project was deference to the new National Development Plan and its aspirations, and a concern regarding the environmental imperative. Ireland's poor track record in carbon emissions was coming under greater scrutiny. Ecological concerns were becoming a political issue in a way they never had previously. The drive for environmental sustainability helped make a more coherent case for local development practices (see Ferber *et al.*, 2013).

This village plan acts as the broadest and deepest consultation ever conducted in the village of Moycullen. Between June and December of 2019, over 800 people had engaged with the initiative. With close to half the population of the village actively contributing to the plan it can be said with confidence that the project reflects the collective wishes and wants of the village. This project acts as an opportunity for active engagement, one in which the residents of the village can be part of envisioning a future for that village in an open and inclusive way.

Desk-based research in the form of a comprehensive historical and socio-economic analysis of the village of Moycullen provided a solid grounding to commence consultation. Use was made of local associations such as the Moycullen Community Development Association (MCDA) and Galway County Council representatives to identify key stakeholders in the village. Some interview candidates were made obvious based on their role in the village, owners of larger businesses were targeted, as well as local political representatives. Others were less obvious, including small scale entrepreneurs, community members, and artists. The method was open and use was made of the snowballing technique, i.e. the identification of interviewees by other interviewees (Noy, 2008). In identifying interviewees a conscious effort was made at all times to ensure the broadest possible representation of the village.

Interviews were semi-structured and followed the same format with each participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. (In the interest of fairness, interviewees were offered anonymity). Themes and identification of key topics helped guide further consultations, namely the focus groups and surveys.

Focus group work brings together individuals with a shared interest to contribute to discussions on the key issues under investigation. Focus groups are a staple of social science research. They are used to challenge ideas and better filter consensus (Cameron, 2005). Focus groups were arranged by broad themes identified in the first phase of the consultation. Invites were sent directly to representatives of those themes. The groups were themed as follows:

- School groups,
- Local business,
- Sport,
- Community 1,
- Community 2,
- Senior citizens,
- Parents of the young,
- Planning,
- City-based workers.

Best practice international research informed the structured approach applied to the focus groups. Use was made of a variety of exercises, some individual, but the majority was group based. This helped ensure that all voices were heard equally. Mapping exercises, one supported by the village Development App and the other an individual

mapping task were important in how they informed the group and positioned it to contribute to the third exercise, a SWOT analysis of the village. Inspired, in no small part, by the work of Healey (1997) the broad approach here was collaborative. Key in this was the preparation of participants and the establishment of ground rules with regards to the process. These rules defined how individuals and groups could contribute in a fair and open fashion. Scale was important here also. A small village bears many of the traits of a neighbourhood, perhaps with a stronger tie to history and a deeper identity. At this scale, the negotiating power and self interest among and between participants is more achievable than at the larger scale of cities or regions (see Bradley, 2015).

The results of the anonymous survey have served to solidify the concerns and aspirations of the village. Ensuring a scientifically rigorous representation, members of the team conducted over 90 of these face to face with respondents. A first-round analysis was conducted on face-to-face surveys. A comparison of that to the final analysis, which included responses gathered online, has shown no difference of statistical significance. This lends more confidence for the process undertaken. Demography and gender of respondents reflected that of national accounting (CSO), while time resident, correlated with demography, tells the story of recent waves of settlement in Moycullen.

Finally, the collective mapping exercise constitutes a novel approach to community planning in the Irish context (Sieber, 2006). It is guided by the principle of grounding the aspirations of respondents and encouraging the spatial manifestation of the collective wishes of a village. Respondents were encouraged to think beyond the current and to develop the village according to their aspirations without constraints. The issues of land ownership and planning were deliberately avoided to best encapsulate the ideas and ideals of residents. All methods together helped “fire the geographic imaginary of participants” and enable a much more straightforward engagement in place-making (Gregory, 1994).

5.1. Firing the Geographical Imaginary

Beyond the national level of change regarding planning and sustainable development, the project timing was apt because of more local changes. Under the national transport plan, a bypass of the village was, prior to COVID, scheduled to commence in 2020 and a greenway to connect the village to Galway city was also due. Under national education plans, the village is due a new primary school, while the national plan ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ has helped secure planning applications for a further 300 housing units in the village (an increase of 65% in the housing stock). As with many areas in Ireland, and for reasons already alluded to, the change at the local level has been decided on at the national level. The village plan was intended to contest that and give some voice to citizens who could express their desires on the kind of change they wanted at the local level.

Indeed, the results from the interview process have made it clear that residents were eager to affect change. For the residents of Moycullen, the overriding reflection on the place they lived and worked in was positive. Many cited the surrounding natural environment as key, while bemoaning the lack of access to it. But two issues were made clear from the very start of the consultation process: the depth of community spirit and the lack of leadership at the local level.

This has been reflected in focus group work and the results of the SWOT analysis that are represented in Fig. 1. Again, community features strongly and is highly ranked as a distinct strength of village in all focus groups. Interestingly, when participants were asked to project forward and envisage what were the broad threats in future development, they also highlighted community as susceptible in future growth scenarios. The Irish language, as well as the demographic composition of the village, were highlighted as strengths. The young, diverse and well-educated residents of the village were seen as important factors to build on as it grows.



Fig. 1. SWOT Analysis

Source: own work.

The lack of leadership as a key weakness for the village chimes with reflections from individual interviews. While broad in its application, references were made to leadership at all levels from the local community level to national gov-

ernment and governance. This inspired interesting conversations on new forms of governance in the village that ranged from the formation (against national policy) of a village council to a more nimble radical action group that would deal with individual issues. The lack of bus connectivity and provisions for cycling and walking were discussed with the contention that there existed an untapped demand for both that could not be judged on current supply. Environmental concerns were highlighted as respondents pointed to the car dependent nature of living in an underserviced village.

Connectivity and coordination of development conversations fed directly into all groups identifying the lack of coherence in the built village as a major weakness. Participants felt that the lack of a village centre or analogous public realm was one of the major weaknesses that would leave the village exposed in its future development. Many members of various focus groups expressed the fear that the lack of an identifiable centre would lead directly to the suburbanisation of the village should population growth continue as planned. Here, issues of identity and distinction were expressed as being tantamount in the future development of the village.

Primary amongst the perceived threats to the future development of the village was that of bad planning. All groups expressed serious concern as to unchecked development leading to the building of more housing estates before any of the weaknesses evident in the village were addressed. Few participants referenced the formal planning process of Local Area Plans and those that did were either part of the planning sector or worked in local development. There was general agreement that the formal planning process was exclusionary in its complexity and neither visible nor transparent. The development of a community-led masterplan for the village was seen as timely and beneficial for a village undergoing change.

The survey of over 400 residents provided a greater depth of understanding. Generally perceived as a safe place to live (relating to the levels of contentment) residents were less inclined to define it as a 'traditional' or 'cultural' place. References were made to the work of the Moycullen Heritage Society which is warmly reflected on by respondents. Again, tradition and culture require further attention to be better understood. The results are not out of sync with those of international work (Arnett, 2002). Tradition and culture are difficult to maintain as places grow through rapid expansion. Many efforts have been made by the residents of Moycullen to protect against this but without sustained support, it will be a struggle that has been faced by many other small settlements.

This last point is relevant in considering the current provision of amenities in the village. Current amenities do not provide adequately for the demand to celebrate culture or creativity in the region. Many cited the lack of a basketball court for the Moycullen team as negative, but the good work of the GAA could be seen in the positive reflection on sporting amenities. Commercial amenities both in term of services (pubs, restaurants) and retail (shops) were seen as adequate according to the respondents.

Most telling in terms of under-provision of key areas reflected above is the latent or untapped demand for access and connectivity. This was also reflected in more open questions relating to access to the environment. Residents felt disconnected from the valuable resource on their doorstep. Again the greenway featured highly in the minds of residents. Many respondents bemoaned the lack of progress as well as reflected on the multitude of benefits that its construction would reap for the community. Bus and alternative transport options were in high demand for the village, a level of untapped demand that was set to grow.

Figure 2 summarises respondents' views on future development. Rather than specifics in terms of infrastructure, this question urged residents to consider the broader values that they would like to have associated with their village in the future. Here again, community was to the fore. This reflected not only the current depth of community ties but the desire to ensure that depth into the future. Environmental sensitivity referred not only to sustainable building practices but also to climate-resilient buildings. Relating this to broader comments reflects a desire that a future village is better planned. A well-planned village ensures a smaller carbon footprint by lessening the need for carbon generating pursuits such as an over-reliance on private cars. Inclusivity refers also to village design, through an expressed desire for more open and accessible places (public buildings such as libraries, community centres, as well as to the environment). Inclusivity also refers to housing types and the recognised need to address the current housing crisis by a mixed approach to housing development. Issues of identity come to the fore in the expressed wish from respondents that Moycullen does not evolve into a suburb of Galway city. Ensuring against this requires more attention to that which makes the place unique. Here respondents cited cultural, creative, and traditional values as being important for the kind of development they wished to see in the village. The complementary nature of these values speaks to a general coherence in the future visioning of the village.

Figure 3 ranks amenities according to their importance for the future development of the village. The broader point in reflecting on the patterns shown here is a set of respondents that have ranked community as an important value for the future of the village. Connectivity was judged as important for the development of community. An increased bus service, the completion of the greenway and bricks and mortar (community centre) to enable social connections were all seen as the most vital amenities for the future development of the village. Residents also recognised that the current primary school in the village was beyond capacity and in need of investment. Such as the level of current and future enrolment, this too is a priority for the development of the village. Other factors such as youth facilities and co-working spaces speak to the demography of a village that had seen the wave of new residents in the early 2000s, moving beyond the playground to something more appropriate. The interest in co-working spaces was reflective of the change in modern work practices.

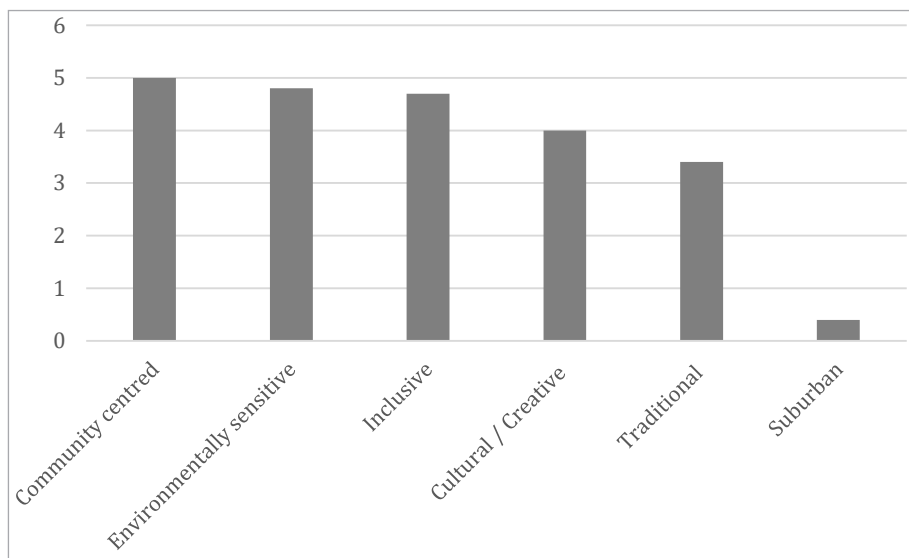


Fig. 2. Ranked future values for the village

Source: own work.

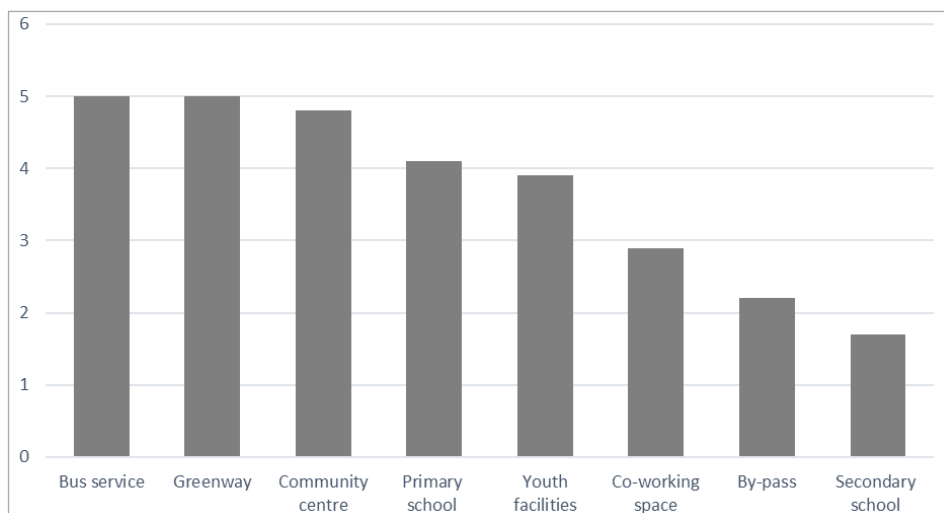


Fig. 3. Ranking in terms of importance for future development

Source: own work.

5.2. Mapping

The collective mapping exercise constitutes a novel approach to community planning. It is guided by the principle of grounding the aspirations of respondents and encouraging the spatial manifestation of the collective wishes of the village. Respondents were encouraged to think beyond the current and to develop the village according to their aspirations without constraints. The issues of land ownership and planning were deliberately avoided in an effort to best encapsulate the ideas and ideals of residents. The collective mapping exercise relied on the contributions of 100 residents. Again, efforts were made to ensure representation. The results of the exercise are presented below.

Housing is distinguished by type. All respondents were guided as to the possible level of future growth for the village and their visions as to what type of housing and where that housing was situated is shown here. High density housing (the most often chosen type of housing) was generally sited in the village centre on vacant lands. The density of housing lowers as we move away from the village centre. Note the inclusion of social/ community/ care housing which is also situated in proximity to the village centre. In general, as with other elements of this exercise, there is some evidence of the wisdom of crowds, the above patterns tantamount to a well planned housing development for the village.



Fig. 4. Collective mapping

Source: own work.

In terms of community infrastructure the results are quite resounding. There is a general collective imagining of the future community needs (in the form of a village centre, library, public park and youth facilities) being delivered on publicly owned lands in the village centre. This piece of land too sees the siting of connectivity offered by bus infrastructure. It also better aligns with a more compact approach to development, the siting of a key piece of village infrastructure closer to its centre. The depiction of this collective imagination is set out in Fig. 4; in its simplest form it is a collation of individual desires and through this process of collective mapping it has set out to avoid some of the issues encountered by the collaborative planning process (Tweder-Jones and Thomas, 1998). The exercise was supervised by researchers who encouraged the participants to simply reflect on what it was that they felt their community needed by marking the functions on a map.

6. DISCUSSION

This village plan project served two purposes. The first was the provision of a plan that was built on the collaborative principles of bottom-up development. The second was to shine a light on place authorship. The village plan project was intended to test what place development at the local level could look like in a country that is widely recognised as one of Europe's most centralised. Centralisation of this type has been particularly unique to Ireland. Contributing factors are weak local/regional governance structures, the implementation of regional structures by Europe, and a political system where localism and clientelism are rife (Collins and Cradden, 1997).

What makes the Irish experience all the more unique is how its approach to spatialisation ran counter to the approaches adopted in most developed countries. The top-down approach currently seen in Ireland has its roots in the systems analysis approach which, in turn, was inspired by the quantitative revolution in geo-spatial science in the 1950s/60s. At that time, Keeble (1952) was describing planning as the science of ordering the use of land in order to secure the maximum economic/ convenience outcome.

The technocratic approach still rests well with the Irish political system. While the procedural approach enjoyed broad subscription internationally through the 1960s and into the 1970s, criticisms saw some countries move towards a more humanist approach. Theorists such as Healey (1997) had been at the forefront of the new planning paradigm. What distinguished it from that which went before was the inclusion of citizens as part of the planning process. Spatial science more generally was not beginning to see the sub-national, regional scale as the most

appropriate for affecting change (see new regionalism, cf. Tomaney and Ward, 2000). Internationally, one can now recognise that stakeholder consultation lies at the heart of contemporary public policy formation. While many planning documents in Ireland make reference to public participation, the planning process itself undermines it.

It is this highly centralised (see Breathnach, 2010) and technocratic approach to planning in Ireland that has discouraged broader involvement. Since the 1960s, policy in Ireland (be it regional or industrial) has been driven by economic and financial concerns rather than social or political ones. In the absence of any real policy for sub-national development, it was assumed that the industrialisation by invitation model would trickle down to the regions. When Ireland was a competitive location for low-end manufacturing, this did hold true, but as the model advanced towards more technological and technical expertise, FDI investments served only to increase the divide between the urban and the rural. The lack of the social as well as the spatial all run through a hierarchical top-down approach to development served to undo any link between citizens and the future planning of their place.

In her work on local governance and planning in Ireland, Grist (2014) has pointed to the fact that the local governance structure established at the end of the 19th century, when Ireland was under British colonial rule, has remained largely unchanged. She highlighted the 2010 Planning Act as further curtailing autonomy at the local level in Ireland, this action seen as an ill-placed response to the corruption in local governance that was highlighted by the Moriarty tribunal. Fox-Rogers *et al.* (2002) in their critique of planning legislation highlighted three key issues. The first related to the pursuit of neoliberal policies (depicted as the pursuit of foreign direct investment, most recently seen as the invitation of international investment funds into the Irish property market). The second, concerned the enforced entrepreneurialism in planning approaches. Local authorities compete against each other for national funding (see Collins, 2019) one example being the Urban Regeneration Funding introduced in the National Planning Framework. The final issue related to the reduction of democracy in the planning process. Grist (2014) has brought this final point further by highlighting the role that the Irish electoral system (proportional representation) plays in this. The combination of clientelism and evidence of informal planning practices (see Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2011) serve to further remove the citizen from the future development discourse. This provides the context for the establishing of a collaborative process to engage citizens in the future of their place. The application of such revealed not only the latent demand for it, but also the untapped wisdom in the people of a place, and their knowledge about a path towards the successful and sustainable development of that place.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to contribute to the literature on spatial planning in Ireland. In line with others (Collins and Cradden, 1997; Breathnach, 2002, 2010, 2012; Healey, 1997, 2004; Laffan, 1996; MacFeeley, 2016; Kitchin *et al.*, 2012; Fox-Rogers *et al.*, 2002; Grist, 2014) it describes a system that is highly centralised, technocratic, bureaucratic, and linear in its approach. It highlighted some attempts to change these approaches, but made clear that without some legislative changes and an augmentation of the infrastructure of the state, no real change can happen. The paper then made clear the apparatuses that were necessary to solicit bottom-up, collaborative and local-led authorship of place development. While not being naive and understanding that the results and recommendations of the village plan will not also fall foul of the current planning framework, the hope is that it can offer an incentive for changing it.

Planning at the (micro) local level appears to bring about “the constitution of collective identities around clearly differentiated positions” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 4) and might, therefore, be considered as offering the potential for a new democratic politics of localism (see Bradley, 2015). That Ireland remains subject to a governance system established to satiate a colonised country on the cusp of a strike for independence translates into a planning system that is no longer fit for purpose. The Moycullen Village Plan not only intended to demonstrate some of the methods necessary for introducing a more democratic process, but its end result highlighted the collective wisdom of a people with respect to their place. As Ireland moves into its second century as an independent state, it must now begin to trust in the people of a place to author the destiny of that place.

In this paper, I have set the linearity of the planning approach in Ireland up against that which involved a broad consultative and collaborative process. The difference between the two is stark. Linearity, inspired by the economic view-point sits almost directly against liveability and people authored places. National Plans have declared the building of roads, the village plan calls for an improved public realm. National policy has set in train the doubling of the housing stock, a village plan makes clear the opportunity offered by mixed-use housing. National climate action policy talks about targets to be achieved 20 years hence, a village plan talks about immediate action to connect with the environment and explore simple ways to change our reliance of emission emitting technologies. There is an opportunity offered by planning from the bottom up. It is a form of democracy that is becoming too rare in today’s populist climate. A simple broad consultative process helps to unlock the knowledge of lived experience in and of a place, the filtering of those voices as achieved through the village plan project demonstrates the old adage that there is ‘wisdom in the crowds.’

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FARMERS' MARKETS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS IN SLOVAKIA: HOW DO TOWN AUTHORITIES APPROACH THESE PHENOMENA?

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to evaluate alternative food networks (farmers' markets and community gardens) in Slovak towns in order to determine the views of town self-governing authorities. Data was collected through a questionnaire sent to representatives of towns. The results have shown that only 39% of towns regularly organise farmers' markets but, overall, 52% of towns support or plan to support their organisation. There are a total of 40 community gardens in 17 towns, mainly in the west of Slovakia. The paper discusses the ways in which Slovak towns support alternative food networks.

Key words: farmers' markets, community gardens, Slovakia, town authorities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Alternative models of consumption have been developed against the conventional model in which there is a longer supply chain between producers and consumers (producer → wholesale → retail → consumer). The aim of alternative consump-

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tion can be conceived as a supply chain in the form of producer → consumer. This type of supply chain is sometimes referred to as an alternative food network. In the paper we consider alternative food networks (AFNs) as a short production and distribution chain integrating the dimensions of spatial, economic, and social proximity (Barbera and Dagnes, 2016) in as few relations as possible. It is based on local, decentralised approaches that respect quality, health, freshness, traditional production techniques, and local identity. “Alternative (local) food systems are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community” (Feenstra, 1997, p. 28). This local food system can be seen as building new producer/consumer alliances and creating experimental spaces to develop novel practices of food provision that are more in tune with their values, norms, and needs. The desire for higher values results from the reproduction and revaluation of local sources, and that result in food of distinct and better appreciated qualities (Roep and Wiskerke, 2012). AFNs represent a bipolar alternative to conventional agriculture that has strongly benefited from certain consumers’ preference for quality and a growing mistrust of standardised food (Kizos and Vakoufari, 2011; Maye and Kirwam, 2010; Sage, 2003).

AFNs include a wide variety of initiatives such as farmers’ markets, box schemes, farm shops, community gardens, food cooperatives, and community-supported agriculture (Dansero and Puttilli, 2014; Spilková *et al.*, 2016; Tregar, 2011). The paper focuses on two elements of AFNs, i.e. farmers’ markets and community gardens, because these two alternatives are the most common and popular forms of ANFs in Slovakia (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020). Geography has recently shown significant interest in researching the problems of towns and consumption. Research into public space is valued when it increases the chances for unused and neglected public spaces to find use as the target of activist, ecological, and town-planning projects (Blazek and Šuška, 2017). The creation of AFNs affects the sustainability of towns. It also provides support for local communities and the solution for the social questions they face (Barbera and Dagnes, 2016; Gould and Lewis, 2016; Wachsmuth and Angelo, 2018). Food justice organisations create spaces (farmers’ markets, community gardens, cafés, and health food stores) inside towns. Its activism has positive environmental effects and contributes to the reduction of the urban heat island effect. However, the development of such green spaces in terms of food justice activism contributes to green gentrification which appeals to elite workers, more attractive housing offers, displacement of the middle and lower indigenous inhabitants, and a disruption of existing neighbourhood social relations (Alcon and Cadji 2020; Anguelovski *et al.*, 2019).

The potential for AFNs in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe depends on the interaction between various aspects (in history, geography, and urban planning) and the influence of the local post-socialist context (Spilková and Perlín, 2013). Although ANFs have existed in many post-socialist countries

for more than two decades, the emergence of AFNs can be considered a modern phenomenon of the last 10 years (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020). AFNs research remains in the background in Slovak geography and is still in its infancy. The intention of the authors is therefore to evaluate the support of town authorities of these two forms, the level of support and development of farmers' markets and community gardens in Slovakia.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate AFNs (farmers' markets and community gardens) in Slovak towns and to determine the views of town authorities on their organisation, establishment, operation, and their future potential. The paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

Q1: Do farmers' markets and community gardens have a representation in Slovakia? The aim is to identify farmers' markets and community gardens in the context of their development.

Q2: Do town authorities support the development of farmers' markets and community gardens? The aim is to measure the level of support from town authorities.

2. ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS AND URBAN AGRICULTURE

The current dynamics in urban development in Slovakia and other post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe is related to the historical factors that delayed development in the economic and material-spatial dimensions (Malý *et al.*, 2020; Spilková and Perlín, 2013; Sikora-Fernandez, 2018). In Slovakia, as in Czechia, the 1990s saw rapid liberalisation of agriculture leading to numerous changes in the structure of production (Spilková and Perlín, 2013). Ideologically and centrally controlled urban planning practices were replaced by an uncoordinated exploitation of land resources and complicated property-law relations (Hirt, 2013). Schmidt *et al.* (2015), Sykora and Bouzanovsky (2012) have discussed issues such as spatial chaos, the shortages of funds, and depopulation. Post-socialist towns have a special structure that differs from that of other types of towns, one which is the result of the legacy of communist spatial planning. Šveda and Šuška (2014) have concluded that urban and suburban development in the post-socialist towns of Central and Eastern Europe can be interpreted as the consequence of a wide-ranging transformation processes in society, the transition to a market-oriented economy, and the region's integration into global processes. AFNs are associated with benefits, from fresh food provision, through ecological, environmental, social and economic benefits (Schram-Bijkerk *et al.*, 2018; Zoll *et al.*, 2017). Residents make a positive contribution to the development of community gardens and farmers' markets as modern locations of consumption, a fact which affects the social life of consumers (Renting *et al.*, 2003).

When one considers urban gardening, self-provision and the need for productive land has had a long tradition in Slovakia. Towns were characterised by access to healthy food through allotment gardens in the past, which were formed at the urban fringes. Allotment gardens (“garden colonies” called in Slovakia) began to appear in the 1960s (Duží *et al.*, 2014). The period of 1980–1990 saw a rapid development of allotment gardens, when traveling abroad and leisure activities were limited by the totalitarian regime. People spent a lot of their free time and holidays in the countryside. Duží *et al.* (2014) provided a review of home gardens – another traditional type of urban gardening in Slovakia. However, gardening in the towns changed rapidly. The political and social changes in the 1990s also affected the development of allotment gardens and their members. While at the beginning of 1957 the number of members of the Slovak Union of Gardeners was 1,800, in 1989 it exceeded 221,000 members, while in 2011 it had 80,648 members (the Slovak Union of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, 2012). The extinction of colonies was caused not only by the degradation of the land, but also by the sale of land for the construction of residential or infrastructural projects. As Spilková *et al.* (2016) have claimed, while allotment gardens have been declining, new forms of AFNs have been emerging – farmers’ markets and community gardens. However, allotment gardens are still the prevailing form of urban agriculture, while community gardens emerge at random in towns. The members of colonies of the Slovak Union of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners can be found in as many as 44 districts of Slovakia (the Slovak Union of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, 2012).

The protection of the urban environment and the need to regenerate destroyed (abandoned) lands are the problems of post-socialist towns in general (Duží and Jakubínský, 2013). The issues of towns that have stagnated affect the current existing gardening and food provision practices in towns. As Matacena (2016, p. 53) stated, AFNs occurred naturally in urban environments [...] “since their aims of inclusion and re-localization are deeply intertwined with city governments attempts to realize a better management of local foodscapes, directed to build a healthier and more just local food system.” The author presented AFNs in the context of urban food policies and the adaptation of urban food strategies in towns. From a different point of view Barbera and Dagnes (2016) have discussed AFNs as a characteristic of self-organisation, with individuals acting locally and with insufficient involvement of institutions.

Production and consumption in the system of AFNs are closely interconnected, both economically and socially (Kitchin and Thrift, 2009). As a result of political and social changes since the 1990s, not only retail in Slovakia has changed, but also consumer behaviour in terms of consumption has transformed gradually (Križan *et al.*, 2019). Šuška (2014) indicated the importance of the changes in consumer shopping habits during the socialist era. Consumer behaviour in Slovakia has ever since been affected by various globalisation trends. Changes

in attitudes to shopping and consumption as global trends made shopping a full-fledged leisure activity (Spilková, 2012). Global homogenisation can be discussed in relation to consumption (Howes, 1996). It is a global convergence of tastes and consumer practices in societies. Many multinational private companies have an impact on consumption and can be termed the intermediaries of global consumption. Processes such as McDonalised or Coca-globalisation have led to homogenisation, so that societies are becoming consumable (Križan and Bilková, 2019). In the first decade of the 21st century, a kind of a counter-current to the globalisation trend emerged, including various alternatives, which could be generalised by the term “sustainable consumption”. Alternative forms of retail and consumption were developed in opposition to globalisation. Consumer preferences increased for various forms of shopping involving the consumption of local healthy foods and the revival of social relations between consumers and producers through shopping at farmers' markets or small, specialised shops (Spilková *et al.*, 2013). Together with community gardens, as a place for people to grow their own food in the town, they have been one of the most significant trends of the last ten years. Many of the new trends relate to economic factors and marketing that are outside the scope of geographical research.

Slovakia is one of the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe where AFNs have gradually emerged over the last 10 years (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020; Škamlová *et al.*, 2020). Interest in AFNs among Slovak consumers is clearly growing based on inspiration from consumption patterns in other countries (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020). The conditions for the establishment and operation of AFNs are also related to town support. Therefore, the aim of this case study is to evaluate the actual situation in Slovak towns and present the experiences.

3. METHODS AND DATA

The questionnaire survey for towns was conducted in August 2019. Data was collected using an online questionnaire created using Google Forms and distributed via e-mail (cf. Jarosz, 2008; McClintock *et al.*, 2016). It was sent to mayors and relevant employees of all the towns in Slovakia except Bratislava, which was excluded because the community gardens and farmers' markets there had been analysed in detail in a previous research (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020). No specific criteria were used for the selection of the towns. The questionnaire was sent to the towns which are defined in Slovak context in accordance with the Act No. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Establishment (The Act No. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Establishment). It was an electronic questionnaire survey completed by the respondents themselves (cf. Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section concerned community gardens and included questions about the number of community gardens in the town, the interest in implementing community garden projects, the town's support and the fact of drafting development documents in respect to community gardens, and the town's views on future measures related to community gardens. The second section concerned farmers' markets, how often they were held, the conditions for such markets, and who organised them. This section also asked about the town's support for organising such markets or for the emergence of such markets, and about the future of farmers' markets in the town. We received responses from 130 town authorities in Slovakia (93%).

The analysis of the quantitative data was based on descriptive statistics and visualisation. We applied a cartographic representation of the analysed phenomenon, especially the method of figural characters. The technique of word cloud (tag cloud) was also used for visualising respondents' answers. The primary attribute of the analysis was the mapping of town support and the measures for the implementation of farmers' markets and community gardens. In the case of farmers' markets, the research also investigated the frequency of such events and the character of the organiser.

The responses obtained in the questionnaire were transcribed in full and analysed in detail. Qualitative data sources gave us an understanding of the attitudes (positive, negative or neutral) expressed by the representatives of town authorities regarding AFNs. Any stated reasons for such attitudes were also recorded. The qualitative approach was used to evaluate the authorities' perceptions, and to understand the problems and the way in which towns handle and manage the forms of AFNs (cf. Bonow and Normark, 2018).

In accordance with the ethics of social science research, the data was anonymised to preserve the anonymity of the respondents – representatives of town authorities (cf. Saunders *et al.*, 2014). The reported opinions and quotations from representatives of town authorities were anonymised using a key in which towns were classified according to various criteria (see below).

4. MARKETS AS THE ALTERNATIVE

Farmers' markets can be characterised as modern places of consumption where food is sold directly from the producer to the consumer (Spilková *et al.*, 2016). They support local craft workers and small producers, growers and farmers who care about the quality of their products. The products sold are of local or regional origin with minimal (or no) sale of foreign products. Consumers thus receive healthy and sustainable alternative products and reduce the environmental impact of transporting food to conventional supermarkets (Duram and Oberholtzer, 2010).

In Slovakia, markets are mainly organised in the traditional form in marketplaces or market halls. Such markets also offer other products besides food (clothing and footwear, consumer goods, etc.) Traders come from further afield and sell products that are not of local or regional origins (e.g. exotic fruit, saltwater fish, etc.) Consumers often confuse the concepts of a local marketplace and a farmers' market. The incorrect interpretation of the terms is associated with the efforts to make marketplaces more attractive and the trend for AFNs – seeking something local and attractive. It can be said that the organisation of farmers' markets in Slovakia is still at an early stage of development. The survey of town authorities in Slovakia indicates that farmers' markets are organised in 51 towns (39% of the participating 130 towns) (Fig. 1). They tend to be organised as special events.

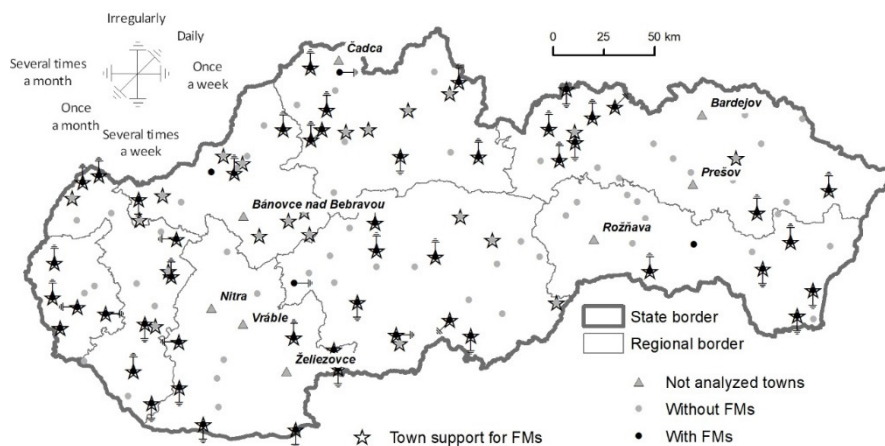


Fig. 1. Farmers' markets and the frequency of their organisation analysed in Slovak towns in 2019

Source: own work.

Farmers' markets in Slovak towns are usually held on an irregular basis (55%) or several times a week (31%). Most farmers' markets are organised by private persons (57%). Self-governing authorities organise 24% of them, and non-profit organisations organise 14%. There are cases of cooperation in organising farmers' markets. A total of 68 town authorities (52%) support the organisation of farmers' markets. They are organised in various forms: "By decisions of the council, provision of suitable conditions", "By a low price for renting a stall for the market", "The town council has approved market rules for farmers' markets", "By providing space on land owned by the town", or "Allocation of public areas, support for the accompanying programme by the town". Towns provide space, financially support for the implementation of farmers' markets, or assist in their promotion and marketing (e.g. media advertising): "We contact businesses and other private

entities to ask them to participate and help in implementing farmers' markets". It should also be noted that the authorities in many towns (41% of the participating 130) show no interest in implementing farmers' markets: "So far, no local farmers have asked us to organise markets", "It's still hypothetical. None of the local population has raised the issue". In some cases, plans for farmers' markets were not successful: "There was a plan to build a farmers' building in the town where farm products could be sold but the potential implementer eventually pulled out."

The town authorities that did not support organising farmers' markets (41%) offered various explanations: "No employee of the town has considered the question yet" (district town in the north of Slovakia); "To hold farmers' markets, it would be necessary to amend the town's by-laws" (district town in the south of Slovakia); "We don't have any tradition of such events and so far nobody has asked for a permission for such an activity. There are only a few independent farmers in the local area and the town is in an industrial part of Slovakia" (district town in the north of Slovakia). Authorities felt no need to organise farmers' markets for various reasons: "The town does not have a large population. It is more rural in character and from experience we know that farmers would not be very interested in such a market because they would not reach many customers. There is already a shop selling farm products in the town. The neighbouring village has two businesses selling animal products from farms and our people are used to going there. People can buy plant products on the town market during the summer or grow them in their own gardens. The town authority does not feel any need for the organisation of farmers' markets" (district town in central Slovakia). Or there are statements of the type: "Our town is too small to organise farmers' markets" (town in the east of Slovakia) or "It is not one of the town's priorities!" (town in the east of Slovakia) or references to past experience: "In the past (2010–2014), the town organised farmers' markets but they did not catch on because of the strict conditions laid down by the veterinary administration" (district town in the east of Slovakia) or "The range of products varies. For example, from widely available meat and dairy products to special products from beekeepers. The sale prices for commonly available products tend to be twice as high as for products of the same quality from retail chains" (town in the south of Slovakia). The most frequent arguments (31%) put forward by town authorities was the lack of interest among the local population or among the farmers in the region or the claim that "This type of market has no tradition in our micro-region" (town in the east of Slovakia) or "First somebody has to want to sell their products and then we can look for a place and method" (town in central Slovakia).

Town authorities tended to take a positive view of organising farmers' markets in the future (Fig. 2): "Of course, people are getting more and more interested in buying fresh, local products, but the local farmers and producers do not sell their products in this way, or only in very small quantities, because of the many legislative obstacles and restrictions and the mass of red tape. If there was a permanent space with better rental conditions, there would probably be interest among the

[illegible]

Source: own work.

The aim of a town in the west of Slovakia is to combine farmers' markets with other social events in their towns: "Yes, but probably as part of the accompanying programme of other cultural and social events." Town authorities see added value in farmers' markets besides the sale of local foods: "People meet each other and talk together, children get creative ideas and the whole town feels like one community" (town in the west of Slovakia) or "Definitely, yes, it supports the region and it's a way to increase people's awareness of environmental issues and a chance to bring the community together" (district town in the north of Slovakia) or "Some of our people (especially older people and the people who live out in the country) see market days as a social event and a chance to meet their friends and neighbours" (district town in the west of Slovakia). There are towns where organisation duties are left for others: "Yes, but it very much depends on the involvement of the younger generation because at the moment things are in the hands of the older people" (town in the east of Slovakia) while others do not care about the future of organising farmers' markets: "Farmers' markets have no future in this town. At least 95% of the goods are generally available in several stores for a lower price" (town in the south of Slovakia).

5. GARDENS AS THE ALTERNATIVE

The emergence of community gardens in Slovakia was preceded by urban gardening in allotment gardens, first established under the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia (cf. Spilková and Vágner, 2016). Community gardens are generally considered one of the alternative ways to improve local access to food and can be found mainly in urban contexts (Guitart *et al.*, 2012). The modern phenomenon of establishing community gardens in Slovakia has become popular in both small towns (e.g. Modra) and larger urban centres (Banská Bystrica). In general, there is no evident correlation between population size and the emergence of community gardens. Bratislava, which currently has 13 working community gardens, can be considered a pioneer in the development of this phenomenon (Hencelová *et al.*, 2021). Based on the consumption patterns in other developed countries, we can expect further growth in Slovakia.

As 10 town authorities did not participate in the survey, it was necessary to conduct a search for community gardens through various websites. This research indicated that community gardens exist in four of the towns that did not participate in the survey (Rožňava, Prešov, Nitra, and Tvrdošín). The other non-participating towns (Vráble, Želiezovce, Galanta, Bardejov, Bánovce nad Bebravou, and Čadca) did not have community gardens at the time of the survey.

There are a total of 40 community gardens in 17 towns in Slovakia. These are mainly towns in the west of Slovakia, but similar developments can also be expected elsewhere. Thirty-one towns expressed interest in supporting the establishment of community gardens. Support takes a variety of forms: “Included in a project to regenerate the spaces between blocks of flats in the town supported by European funds” (district town in central Slovakia); “The town is able to provide land for community gardens, information for potential garden operators and expertise in preparing project” (district town in the west of Slovakia); “We have supported the creation of raised beds by production, volunteer work and financial support” (town in the north of Slovakia); “A grant request has been filed for a project supporting community gardens” (town in the west of Slovakia); “Advice, provision of land owned by the town” (town in the west of Slovakia). Town support can be divided into two categories. The first is direct support through the lease of space or through financial support. The second is indirect support through grant and project applications, the organisation of volunteering, and various forms of consulting. There are, however, some town authorities that do not take the initiative but are supportive towards community gardens: “As nobody has yet expressed an interest in such activities, the town has not provided any support. If anybody presents such a project, we will certainly support it” (district town in the west of Slovakia).

Not all town authorities were aware of community gardens: “This issue never came up in any meetings. I don’t think the councillors or the town management know about community gardens” (town in the west of Slovakia). There were also responses that were apathetic: “Community gardens are not an urgent problem in our town” (town in the west of Slovakia) or even negative: “We do not think that community gardens are appropriate in public space or on housing estates; where there are detached houses, people have fenced-off gardens; it is something that could be done in schools to teach children how to grow food and care for plants” (district town in the north of Slovakia). Yet another town in the north of Slovakia had incorporated the implementation of community gardens into its land-use plan. In total, 44 towns plan to implement measures supporting the establishment of community gardens in the future (Fig. 3) and land-use decisions for community gardens had been requested in 6 towns.

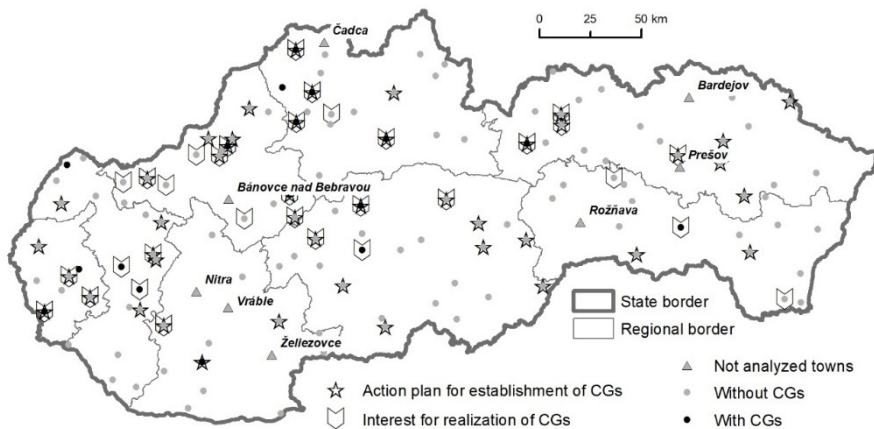


Fig. 3. Community gardens analysed in Slovak towns in 2019

Source: own work.

An important factor for the establishment of community gardens in Slovak towns is the initiative of local residents. Town authorities encounter such initiatives rarely but if there is interest, they are supportive. An initiative is not all it takes to implement a community garden, however, and towns encounter problems maintaining community gardens: “In our town we have received a request to establish a community garden but that it should all be managed and cared for by the town’s subsidised organisations. The citizens want to create a community garden, but they don’t want the responsibility of caring for it. It comes from a few citizens who may not be very well informed” (district town in the west of Slovakia).

It should be noted that the present research focused on towns in Slovakia, which are varied settlements established by political decisions. Many of them are made up of detached houses that have their own gardens. This may explain why some town authorities took a neutral view on community garden projects: “Our is a small town with many family houses with their own gardens. There are also three large allotment gardens that provide adequate space for gardening by people living in blocks of flats. The town authorities therefore see no need to establish community gardens” (town in central Slovakia) or “In small towns like ours, there are many individual gardens and most of the population has adequate space to grow fruit, vegetables on their own land or that of family members. There has so far been no requests or need to allocate space for this purpose. Should interest arise, we have plenty of space (in the town parks, etc.) to implement this type of plan” (town in central Slovakia).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Slovakia, as in other developed countries, an increasing number of consumers prefer alternatives to conventional forms of consumption (Duží *et al.*, 2017; Koopmans *et al.*, 2017; Pearson *et al.*, 2010). As a result, AFNs are developing, especially in the form of farmers’ markets and community gardens. The results of the survey evaluate AFNs in Slovakia – town support for the establishment of community gardens and farmers’ markets, the interest of town authorities in AFNs, and future steps for the development of these alternatives. The results provide data on the current distribution of farmers’ markets and community gardens, and support the creation of a database which has so far been lacking in institutional documentation in Slovakia.

Slovak towns do not strongly support the trend of organising farmers’ markets although the trend of organising farmers’ markets has future potential in many towns. Support for the organisation of farmers’ markets may take various forms (Fig. 4): approval by the town council, provision of favourable conditions, provision of space, financial support or promotion and marketing support from the town authorities. There are towns (30%) where the authorities would like to combine farmers’ markets with other social events in the town, increase the awareness of environmental issues, and bring the community together as a means of increasing the social value of farmers’ markets. In this regard, it is necessary to consider the towns’ duty to provide services to people in the surrounding area. Some town authorities (41%) do not participate in the organisation of farmers’ markets nor do they envisage any such participation in the future. The reason for such a lack of interest may be the prejudice that such markets have no tradition in the town or that they are not

a priority of the town. These town authorities also defend their lack of interest with reference to the need to amend by-laws or comply with strict hygiene standards.

Markets have a long tradition in Slovakia and their spheres of influence can be mapped geographically (Žudel, 1973). Town authorities therefore need to pay attention not just to the population of their own town but also consider the issue of farmers' markets in broader spatial contexts or in the context of the hierarchical relationship between the town and its surrounding areas.

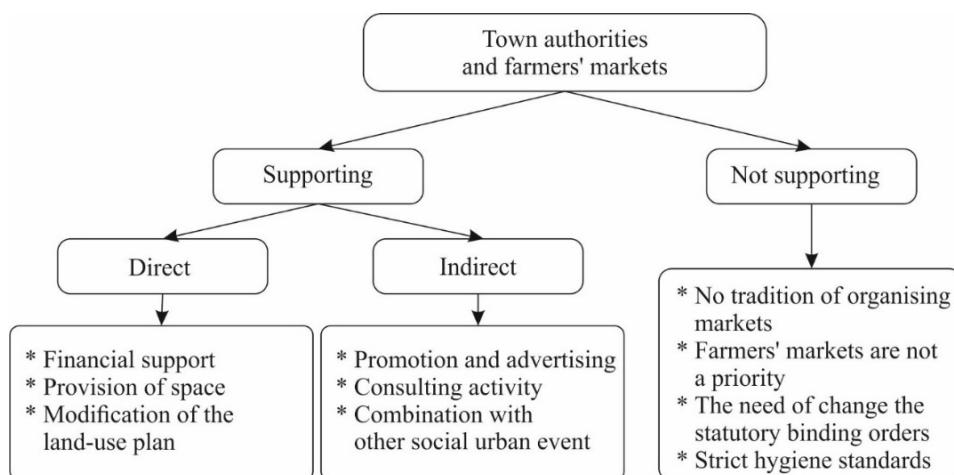


Fig. 4. Town authorities approach to the farmers' markets

Source: own work.

Community gardens are still at an early stage of development in Slovakia (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020). In general, there is no evident relationship between population size and the emergence of community gardens. Thirty-one towns (26%) expressed interest in supporting the establishment of community gardens. Town support can be divided into two categories (Fig. 5). The first is direct support by providing space or funding, the second is indirect support in the form of grant and project applications, the organisation of volunteering, and various forms of consulting. The problems for the future of community gardens include maintaining the condition of gardens and ensuring their proper operation. Despite that, the phenomenon of community gardens continues to grow and 44 town authorities (37%) have plans for the establishment of community gardens in the future. The arguments of town authorities (65%) against establishing community gardens based on the food-growing functions of gardens fail to consider the social function of community gardens. The social function of community gardens and the motivation they provide for community participation is more important than their productive function (Hencelová *et al.*, 2020).

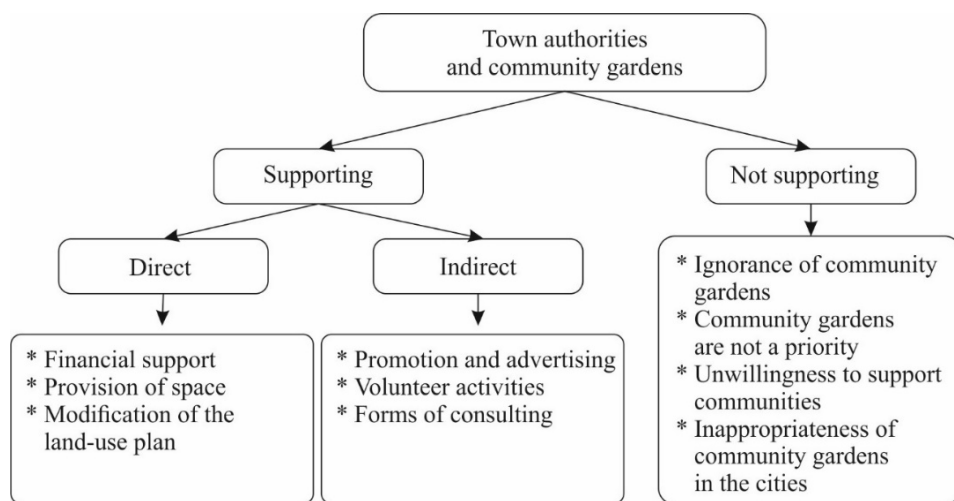


Fig. 5. Town authorities approach to the community gardens

Source: own work.

The case study highlights the state of support and the approach of town authorities to the development of AFNs. Consumers, town authorities and researchers have shown considerable interest in farmers' markets and community gardens over the last decade. Our intent was to evaluate the approach of local authorities to farmers' markets and community gardens, as they could be supported through their assistance. The connection of the analysed two forms concerns the possible development and support of an alternative (local) food system in Slovakia.

Farmers' markets support and develop local economies and increase the income of local farmers and craftsmen in general. The overall social relations between consumers and farmers in Slovak towns would increase. Those towns which do not support organising farmers' markets display a prejudice that such markets have no tradition in the town or that they are not a priority of the town. There are towns in Slovakia with plans to establish a community garden in the future. A town's priority may be to support relations in local communities, food production, or to follow new trends in urban planning. Community gardens contribute to higher diversification and support green sustainability. Thus, the environmental approach should be another reason for their future establishing in Slovakia. Towns that oppose the establishment of community gardens may already have a tradition in urban agriculture, i.e. home gardens and allotment colonies.

The case study presents various solutions for a possible support of AFNs, community gardens, and farmers' markets in Slovakia. Town authorities decide what kind of support they wish to offer. It is expected that AFNs will continue to develop in post-socialist towns. Therefore, the dynamics of the development of AFNs

depends on the policy of town authorities. Our analysed approaches may be an inspiration for policy makers in other countries.

This case study is a pilot study in mapping farmers' markets and community gardens as the markers of AFNs in Slovak geography. It presents new data for understanding town authorities' perceptions and support for AFNs, as well as the possibilities for their future development.

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Marko OREL , Will BENNIS 

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES AS A SELLING POINT? FROM COMMUNITY-DRIVEN TO SERVICE-PURPOSED COWORKING SPACES

Abstract. Coworking spaces emerged in the mid-2000s as collaborative workplaces that actively supported teleworkers and self-employed knowledge workers who shared various (work) environments to interlace themselves in supportive networks, tackle isolation, positively influence well-being, and collaboratively participate in knowledge-sharing activities. However, with the swift popularisation of the coworking model by 2020, newly established flexible office spaces have begun to refer to themselves as community-based workplaces even though they lacked the capacity to support their users' interactions and collaborative work. Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to explore how coworking spaces have transformed from community-based environments to a flexible place of work where establishing a collaborative community is not an organisational priority. The following exploratory research investigates a sample of 13 coworking spaces in Prague, the Czech Republic, and considers their capacity for supporting interactions and collaborative processes between their users. The results uncovered significant differences between coworking spaces, their spatial designs, the presence of mediation mechanisms, and the frequency of interactions between users, and suggest that the handful of sampled coworking environments misuse the notion of community. In that context, the following study indicates that contemporary coworking spaces can revert to community washing to deliberately pursue economic self-interest rather than support decentralised peer-to-peer exchange that would lead to developing a coworking community.

Key words: coworking, shared workspaces, community-washing, mediation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have brought considerable alternations in how knowledge workers tend to work, interact with one another, and cooperate on mutual tasks. These changes have led to the popularisation of on-demand office environments that have swiftly morphed into highly flexible workspaces, becoming increasingly used by remote workers, the self-employed, and others who conduct their work on an individualised basis. The design of these offices has continued to be based on spatial openness enhancing the ability of individuals to interact and form social relationships. Commonly referred to as coworking environments, these human-centred work spaces aim to support the creation of supportive networks that are regularly identified as collaborative communities of work (Merkel, 2015; Rus and Orel, 2015; Gardenitsch *et al.*, 2016; Bianchi *et al.*, 2018; Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018).

The first contemporary coworking spaces emerged in 2005 as a direct response to the socio-economic challenges of the time (Spinuzzi, 2012; Rus and Orel, 2015). Self-employed individuals, solo entrepreneurs, and remote workers, who frequently felt the isolation due to previously working from the seclusion of their homes, organised group work sessions in a shared environment to avoid alienation (Orel and Almeida, 2019), maintain an adequate level of work/life balance (Weijss-Perrée *et al.*, 2017), and interconnect in supportive work-based communities (Rus and Orel, 2015; Bouncken and Aslam, 2019). Due to its positive outcomes for daily users, the coworking model saw a fast popularisation and increase in numbers at the turn of the century, bringing coworking environments to urban and rural areas (Kovács and Zoltán, 2017). Coworking spaces have spread to local cafés (Green, 2014; Lukman *et al.*, 2018), formed within libraries (Lumley, 2014; Schopfel *et al.*, 2015), became adopted by traditional offices (Sargent *et al.*, 2018) and seen other alternations with their pre-pandemic numbers doubling on an annual basis (Orel and Dvouletý, 2020).

Coworking spaces have been widely recognised as places that are co-constructing a sense of community (Garrett *et al.*, 2017) that follows the work activities of their members (Blagoev *et al.*, 2019) and provides a caring environment for both personal growth and optimal delivery of work outputs (Mirel, 2015). However, the increased popularisation of the coworking concept has brought noticeable changes to the incentive model. Coworking spaces, commonly independently-run, have not only grown bigger in size and capacity and subsequently morphed into serviced office centres (Mayerhoffer, 2020), but also changed fundamentally in terms of how they intend to connect individuals by supporting *horizontal encounters* between them (Orel and Dvouletý, 2020). Multilocation and multinational coworking sites such as WeWork and Regus (IWG group) shifted their focus to accommodate a larger number of individuals and corporate teams of

workers (Bouncken *et al.*, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2019; Mayerhoffer, 2020) instead of focussing on a smaller and more interconnected userbase of individual knowledge workers (Gandini, 2016; Waters-Lynch and Potts, 2017).

While some of the recent studies have explored coworking spaces and their capacity to form collectives with the ability to identify common goals (Blagoev *et al.*, 2019), co-create value (Bouncken *et al.*, 2018) and host various types of collaborative communities (Spinuzzi *et al.*, 2019), it is still not entirely clear how coworking spaces utilise the presence of their moderators to build a supportive network within, and how coworking environments have hybridised due to the said swift popularisation of the model in recent years. What is more, there is an uncertainty whether the growth in ranks of coworking spaces causes a shift from community-driven to service-purposed workplaces that can attract a larger number of individual users and corporate teams, while lacking the capacity and tools to interconnect them in active collaborative communities. The latter also calls for the debate whether specific coworking spaces purposely revert to community-washing, intending to deliberately pursue economic self-interest rather than support decentralised peer-to-peer exchange that would lead to developing a coworking community.

With that in mind, the following study seeks to answer these questions and investigates a sample of 13 coworking spaces in the city of Prague, the Czech Republic. First, the paper explores the concept and characteristics of coworking spaces and the development of communities by overviewing relevant past studies with annotated literature review. Second, the paper further builds on the data collected using the mixed-method approach, combining the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviewing and non-obstructive participant observation to determine the collective capacity of the sampled coworking spaces. Finally, a survey conducted among coworking space users is used to measure the level of perceived support for interaction between users that may or may not result in the presence of a coworking community. The findings are subsequently analysed and cross-compared with results which suggest that a proportion of the studied coworking spaces indeed misused the notion of community and disguised service-based workspaces as community-driven coworking environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. The characteristics of coworking spaces

Coworking spaces help break geographic and institutional barriers to open collaboration (Rus and Orel, 2015) by co-constructing a sense of supportive community (Garrett *et al.*, 2017) that is managed by moderators such as community

managers (Gregg and Lodato, 2018; Bouncken *et al.*, 2018; Spinuzzi *et al.*, 2019; Haubrich, 2021) using mediation mechanisms (Brown, 2017) to employ a community-based governance model (Castilho and Quandt, 2017). Mediation mechanisms most commonly take the form of facilitation tools (e.g., matchmaking events, conversation starters, etc.) that support the development of group creativity (Brown, 2017) and both formal and informal collaboration between coworking space users (Orel and Almeida, 2019). By most accounts, a well-planned mediation additionally promotes more significant innovation (Surman, 2013; Schmidt *et al.*, 2014; Marchegiani and Arcese, 2018) and efficiency (Butcher, 2018), enabling the biggest talents for a particular project to come together quickly and affordably with as little interference as possible (Constantinescu and Devisch, 2018). They thus break institutional barriers because they are shared by people who do not work for the same organisation (Spinuzzi, 2012), commonly resulting in an availability of non-binding relationships and collaboration forms (Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018).

Additional benefits linked to using coworking facilities are the availability of non-materialistic, emotional support (Gerdenitsch *et al.*, 2016; Cheah and Ho, 2019; Hall *et al.*, 2019), typically in the form of solidarity as a by-product of professional cooperation between coworking space users (Bianchi *et al.*, 2018), and the reduction of alienation and isolation (De Peuter *et al.*, 2017; Orel and Almeida, 2019) that result in the improvement of users' work/life balance (Gandini, 2016; Orel, 2019). Moreover, the usage of coworking spaces is repeatedly connected with increased work-related productivity that may lead to new product development or the emergence of additional project opportunities (Ross and Ressler, 2015; Cabral and Van Winden, 2016; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Isaac, 2016; Bueno *et al.*, 2018).

Individual knowledge workers tend to use a coworking space over a home-office or neighbourhood café because of the opportunities for knowledge exchange with other workspace users through horizontal interactions (Kubátová, 2014; Parrino, 2015; Akhavan *et al.*, 2019; Bouncken and Aslam, 2019). They tend to seek a new perspective on labour processes, given the requirement for constant innovation (Merkel, 2015). As such, coworking spaces are often identified as go-to places for their support of social and open innovation (Aguiton and Cardon, 2008; Capdevila, 2014; Schmidt *et al.*, 2014; Fuzi *et al.*, 2018).

Considering these defining factors, coworking spaces are widely understood as working environments for individual users and smaller teams of knowledge workers who share knowledge resources, workspace equipment, and ideas to positively affect their labour processes and the quality of daily lives. From its modest start in communal and grass-root movements back in 2005 (Avdikos and Iliopoulou, 2019; Merkel, 2019), the coworking model has recently become widely adopted by corporate environments (Green, 2014; Rosati *et al.*, 2016; Arora, 2017; Sargent *et al.*, 2018; Pyszka, 2019; Mayerhoffer, 2020), seeing increased investment trends (Gauger *et al.*, 2019) and the development of workspace brands with multiple business locations (e.g., WeWork, IWG, Industrious LLC, etc.)

These trends are causing the coworking model to undergo transformative changes shifting the initial focus from community-driven collaborative platforms to purposed productivity-orientated workspaces (Orel and Dvouletý, 2020). However, there are indications that their managers are camouflaging these environments of work as communal offices with a distinctive narrative of human-centred workspaces, with users frequently finding limited opportunities for becoming actively involved in supportive communities.

2.2. Coworking community as a selling point

We argue that there is a rising trend amongst contemporary coworking spaces and their operators to project community and collaboration principles only to attract their clientele. At the same time, their workspaces in practice lack sufficient mediation support to steer encounters into the development of dynamic social networks of cooperation. It is no surprise when one considers the recent trends within *sharing economies*. Hawlitschek *et al.* (2018) has reported that 78 per cent of sharing-acquainted adult individuals agree that the sharing economy can build stronger and more capable communities. The accessibility to assets within sharing and collaborative communities can be an appealing idea for a broad segment of society (Avram *et al.*, 2017) and can be transformed into a selling point (Price and Belk, 2016).

As contemporary coworking spaces are supposedly built on a communal foundation where individual users can find supportive co-users (Garrett *et al.*, 2017; Rus and Orel, 2015; Brown, 2017), they can become an appealing course to attracting clients to establish a swift userbase. However, what putative coworking spaces provide, with respect to community and support, varies widely and sometimes they offer nothing at all (Gandini, 2016; Merkel, 2017). Therefore, in parallel with the *sharewashing* or *crowdwashing* phenomenon, where sharing platforms deliberately pursue economic self-interest rather than sharing resources (Schor, 2016; Penz *et al.*, 2018), *community-washing* can be used to sell non-existing communities in shared workspaces.

From another angle, community-washing can be established to improve and *whitewash* the reputation of selected workspaces and organisations behind them and build a positively perceived brand (Hill, 2019). It seems that instant communities are widely built on the *bro culture* that transitions the values from a culture of informality into a modern office environment, making coworking spaces appealing to individuals because of the prevalent uncertainty and risks of independent work (Merkel, 2019).

However, the same individuals may find upon entering these coworking spaces *empty shell spaces* where the communities are non-existent or built upon weak relationships that do not meet expectations. Interactions on the horizontal level

(i.e., encounters between regular users) may be solely formal with interactions on the vertical level (i.e., encounters between regular users and workspace operators) minimised to the rudimental client-customer degree, leaving individuals unable to knit meaningful relationships that would result in anticipated emotional support (Bianchi *et al.*, 2018) or functional relationships that would result in new business opportunities (Cabral and Van Winden, 2016).

The likelihood of expected collaboration diminished and promoted collaborative workspaces are demoted to office environments with shared infrastructure but without benefits upon which the initial coworking space were formed. These challenges call for a study that would assess the plausibility of coworking environments being mistakenly or deliberately projected as communal centres and to understand various practices used to steer the relationships between users within these workspaces.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the paper is, therefore, to support or possibly reject the hypothetical claim that contemporary coworking environments have transformed into service-purposed (i.e., primarily focusing on providing services related to the workspace usage) shared office spaces that are not necessarily community-based (i.e., mainly focusing on developing interactions and subsequent relations between individual users that result in the development of collaborative communities), and have limited capacity in supporting horizontal interactions between workspace users. With that, the study seeks to answer the following three research questions. First, how coworking environments differ concerning a) their spatial arrangements, and b) the presence of mediation personnel and mediation mechanisms that support the development of interactions between coworking space users. Second, how coworking spaces have transformed from community-driven to service-purposed workplaces. And third, whether contemporary coworking spaces can disguise their service-purposed roles by misusing the notion of collaborative community.

To provide full or partial answers to these questions, the study has formed its basis on a) an annotated review of the relevant literature, b) short semi-structured interviews with coworking space managers, c) qualitative non-obstructive participant observation of different coworking environments with regard to (i) their spatial configurations, (ii) the presence of mediation personnel, and (iii) the frequency of horizontal interactions, and d) quantitative surveys of different coworking space users measuring their perception of the workspace and of mediation mechanisms that influence their cooperations with others.

The following exploratory mixed method design has enabled sufficient data collection with more detail than either qualitative or quantitative approaches would gen-

erate separately. Using the said approach, quantitative data collection has been used to generalise the results of the central qualitative part of the study (Fuentes, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2010). The qualitative component served to uncover various perspectives of sampled coworking environments. In contrast, the quantitative part made it possible to test the subjective view of the selected workspaces and generalise the results.

The core of the research is represented by a study of coworking spaces in Prague, the Czech Republic, using qualitative participant observations, supported by short open-ended interviews with community managers. The sample consisted of 13 coworking spaces in the nine months between March and November 2019.

Prague is one of the European Union's capital cities that is experiencing high economic growth (Sýkora, 2017), establishing itself as an entrepreneurial centre that is on par with major Western European cities and, most importantly, having a vibrant coworking ecosystem (Šindelářová and Kubíková, 2018). At the end of 2019, the Nomadlist, an online directory of international travellers working remotely worldwide, listed 133 work environments that have been identified as coworking offices,¹ making Prague one of the prime pre-Covid-19 European locations to seek a coworking space (Nomadlist, n.d.) A recent study on growth factors of the coworking industry in Prague by Mayerhoffer (2020) has found that global coworking brands expand in Prague's metropolitan area by predominantly targeting corporate teams instead of users. Despite that, the local coworking spaces positively influence Prague's socio-economic situation. However, the fact of catering to the needs of mainly corporate teams puts to question the positive benefits of coworking space usage for independent users.

The selected coworking environments (see Table 1) have been chosen based on their popularity, reflected in the number of first-page hits when using a Google search with the combination of keywords "coworking space" and "Prague". Additionally, peer reviews have been checked to obtain an initial estimation of how these spaces are frequented and ensure a sufficient variety of selected places. All the chosen coworking spaces have been opened to the general public and have not been reserved for a particular target group (e.g., corporate teams, independent users, etc.)

Of the selected coworking spaces, nine were independent, meaning that they were single-location spaces and not a part of a larger enterprise. Four were part of a multinational franchise, having sister workspaces in other countries and cities worldwide. Six selected coworking spaces exceeded 500 sq. m, some occupying entire buildings and others crossing several floors. Five coworking spaces were mid-sized (between 100 and 500 sq. m), with the remaining two being smaller

¹ Other sources indicate more conservative estimates. Roussel (2018) has estimated that there are 15 coworking spaces in and around Prague, while Šindelářová & Kubíková (2018) reported that there were 26 coworking environments within Prague's city limits. Contradictory numbers support the contention that a better classification of what is, or is not, a coworking space is warranted.

than 100 sq. m. The selected workspaces were mostly memberships based, meaning users paid a fee to access the coworking space for a given period of time (i.e., a day, a week or a month). Two sampled coworking environments had hybrid memberships that enabled free usage of a non-restricted area within the inner workspace (e.g., cafeteria). Still, they required a payment for complete access, while one workplace was entirely free of charge within the opening hours.

Table 1. Selected coworking sites

Work-space	Size (sq. m)	Workplace capacity (individual sittings)	Access	Single location / Multi-national
A	50-100	1-50	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>
B	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Multi-national</i>
C	100-500	50-100	<i>Hybrid membership</i>	<i>Single location</i>
D	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Multi-national</i>
E	100-500	1-50	<i>Free to use</i>	<i>Single location</i>
F	100-500	50-100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>
G	100-500	1-50	<i>Hybrid membership</i>	<i>Single location</i>
H	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>
I	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>
J	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Multi-national</i>
K	>500	>100	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Multi-national</i>
L	50-100	1-50	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>
M	100-500	1-50	<i>Membership based</i>	<i>Single location</i>

Source: own work.

The principal investigator (PI) spent approximately 25 hours in each selected coworking space as a casual workspace user, working on his daily work tasks while performing a non-obstructive participant observation. The PI's role and the research purpose have been revealed to the managers of selected coworking spaces. However, the process of non-obstructive participant observations has remained hidden to community managers and coworking space mediators to prevent interfering and possibly influencing the research process (e.g., by more actively working on community-based activities, interacting with other users, etc.) Upon the first visit, the researcher engaged in casual conversations with the daily community manager (9), baristas (3) and first impression manager/receptionist (1) that served as entry semi-structured interviews. While these interviews have mainly been unstructured for the most part to resemble an informal conversation that the said personnel would have with other users, three questions were included in all 13 cases: (1.) "Would

you say that your coworking space has a supportive community (that I could benefit from)?”; (2.) “Does your coworking space support user encounters with spatial configuration and other tools?”; and (3.) “Are individuals reporting positive or negative effects that your coworking space has on them?”

After completing these semi-structured interviews, the selected coworking environments were used as a daily workplace by the PI. They were observed from two perspectives – *spatial design*, where the researcher observed the space and how it influenced the interaction of users within it (i.e., non-mediated and spontaneous activities), and *human facilitation*, where the observer noted interactions between individuals and the community-managers/mediators (i.e., mediated and planned activities). The usage of every work environment was flexible and was not attached to a specific sitting position so that the researcher frequently changed locations within the space (i.e., from shared flexible tables within the quiet parts of workspaces to working from the cafeteria section of the coworking environment). Notes were drafted in a paper-pencil form, pinpointing observations on three predictors and nine related observation points (see Table 2).

Table 2. Predictors and points of observation

Predictors	Points of observation
Spatial configuration	(1a) Workspace layout (1b) Furniture and workspace equipment (1c) Presence of spatial mechanisms for accelerating interaction between users
Mediation mechanisms	(2a) The existence of a mediation mechanism and related tools (2b) The presence and the role of mediators (2c) Execution of mediation mechanisms (2d) Organisational culture
Frequency of interactions	(3a) High/low frequency of interactions among users (3b) High/low frequency of interactions between users and community managers

Source: own work.

This approach provided the data which was analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step analysis procedure. After identifying and analysing the problem, and collecting the sufficient entry data, thematic content analysis (Guest *et al.*, 2011; Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Terry *et al.*, 2017) was used to categorise the selected workspaces based on (1) customised spatial configuration, (2) the presence and variety of mediation tools, and (3) how individuals used the selected coworking environment. The frequency of interactions was not directly measured but indirectly observed and estimated to assess the efficacy of spatial and human-mediated mechanisms subjectively.

The findings which emerged based on the qualitative data collection and a subsequent analysis have been validated with a quantitative approach by completing a mean of 13.5 questionnaires with randomly selected daily workspace users, totaling 176 respondents. We need to note that the number of approached individuals has been adapted to the actual membership size of a selected coworking space. While the largest selected coworking space had more than a hundred users, the smallest workspace had as little as 20 full-time members. These short questionnaires were divided into three parts: the first part surveying the perceived presence of a supportive community within the space and the perceived presence of a community manager or mediator. The second part of the survey asked individuals to rate the formal and informal engagement of workspace staff. Workspace staff can have diverse approaches towards managing a supportive network, resulting in varying levels of community development. Therefore, to understand the types of vertical interactions that evolve between a workspace user and a community manager is pivotal if one wishes to understand a) the variety of mediation mechanisms that are being used, and b) the sort of interactions that develop within a particular class of a coworking space. The third and last part of the survey asked individuals how frequently they engaged in horizontal encounters with other workspace users. Understanding a workplace users' perspective about whether the coworking space has either a community or a manager who is steering relations within that space is crucial to perform a cross-comparison of the data that the qualitative part of the study had collected.

Before discussing the findings, it is essential to note that the authors have both founded and ran their coworking spaces (in two different CEE countries) and previously worked as community mediators. To add credibility to the conducted study, it is crucial to emphasise that the second author of this paper has been a co-founder and past owner of one of the coworking spaces where the research has been conducted (workspace F). However, the second author did not participate in the data collection or analysis of workspace F, mainly to avoid the possible conflict of interests or unintentionally influencing the results.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Uncovering themes

The research revealed several subtypes of contemporary coworking environments. As anticipated, these spaces differ in terms of (1a) spatial configuration (closed/semi-closed/open layout), (1b/1c) workspace equipment and functionality of the available furniture (workspace arrangement, various furniture for individual or collective use), (2a/2b/2c) the presence of active and passive mediation mecha-

nisms (i.e., tools to accelerate the interactions between coworking space users and that promote cooperation via networking and matchmaking processes), and (2d) specified organisational culture (i.e., established norms and expectations that predict and steer the behaviour of workspace users). The final observed differentiation, i.e. (3a/b) the frequency of interaction between workspace users and between workspace users and community managers, relied on a subjective estimate by the investigating researcher but was not directly measured.

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed several differences between the sampled coworking spaces on the reoccurring themes. Table 3 shows the observed differentiating factors of the selected coworking spaces. It has been divided into four sections, with the first section reporting on the observed spatial configuration of a selected coworking space, the second outlining the observed presence of mediation mechanism, the third indicating the interactions that evolved during observations, and the final part summarising the apparent aims of a particular coworking space as reported by the workspace manager.

Four key thematic groups from the data follow. First, the observed workspaces were either *open*, *partially open* or *closed* to use for everyday users. While most of them had several membership packages, a handful of the observed coworking spaces were *free-to-use* during daily work hours. One of the space had a strict *gatekeeping* process that pushed individuals through several selection steps, while another was accessible by *invitation-only*.

Second, while coworking spaces are predominantly based on an *open workspace design*, they have various differentiating factors that influence user interactions. Four of the observed coworking environments had an open space divided into dedicated work, leisure, or social areas with different sitting configurations. Five of the workspaces had group worktables used either on a fixed basis (i.e., dedicated for the use of an individual) or a flexible one (i.e., non-dedicated work spot that anyone can use). *Shared desks* or – as observed in two cases – workstations with collaborative tools for precise mechanical work (e.g., 3D printers or technical devices) played an active role in promoting unprompted communication between workspace users.

For the most part, team-purposed coworking spaces not only reserved a selected number of work spots (via the fix desk system) but also divided open spaces with pane glass walls that enabled teams to have discrete work territories. Dividing the main workspace into subunits seems to produce limited encounters. However, four out of the thirteen coworking spaces had separate rest (e.g., café area) and leisure areas (e.g., game rooms) that helped overcome these restrictions and acted as non-guided mediation mechanisms promoting spontaneous and casual encounters between users. For example, eight workspaces had self-serving kitchen areas that enabled a homely feel to the workspace and increased sharing (e.g., coffee, tea, food, etc.) In contrast, other workspaces had bars with baristas acting as support personnel. Individual-purposed coworking spaces were less structured with fewer dedicated desks, promoting user circulation around the workspace.

Table 3. Common and differentiating features of observed coworking spaces

Work-space	Observed spatial configuration	The observed presence of mediation mechanisms	Observed interactions	Explicit aims
A	Open space with group seating and worktables, a dedicated area for mechanical work.	Limited variety of on and off-site facilitation mechanisms. No dedicated community manager, but an active role of the project manager. The project manager does not directly manage the community within the workspace, but takes care of knowledge transfer processes and ensures that the workspace users work from an optimised workspace. The facilitation mechanisms are present but limited to the particular group that is involved in a specific project (e.g. workshop, etc.)	Low-to-mid frequency of interactions, predominantly formal. Encounters evolve by dint of open workspace design and shared facilities (e.g. tools, workstations, etc.) Workspace personnel does not manage or promote interactions between users.	A respondent reported the presence of a supportive community. A respondent did not report on the positive or negative effects of the workspace on users. A respondent reported that the primary goal of workspace usage is to ensure the circulation of knowledge and enable workspace users to be a part of knowledge transfer processes.
B	Main open space with flexible sitings in the core, team offices with pane glass walls, versatile event venue.	No dedicated community manager. Observed workspace had a receptionist who integrated the future user into space by doing a) guided tour, b) presenting the facilities within the workspaces, and c) arranging billing and other financial obligations. Receptionists/workspace staff do not actively manage current users. Workspace staff makes minimal effort to engage with other users or facilitate engagement between users.	Observed interactions between workspace users were solely formal and momentary. Encounters seemingly evolved due to workspace design (e.g. common open area, flexible work desks, etc.) and shared infrastructure (e.g., coffee machine, dishwasher, etc.) Workspace staff is passive and static (i.e., does not move around the space and puts minimal effort to promote interactions and connect users).	A respondent did not report the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent did not report on the positive or negative effects of the workspace on users. A respondent reported that the primary goal of workspace usage from the user's perspective is to increase productivity.

C	Open space with a café setting.	No dedicated community manager. Observed space had a barista who welcomes users into space and offers the essential services (e.g. signing-up members, serving beverages, etc.), but has no set goals to support encounters. Workspace had a typical open café set-up with shared tables. There were no observed mediation mechanisms apart from the shared spatial layout of the workspace.	Very little to no interaction among workspace users. Limited interactions seemingly develop due to the workspace set-up. Workspace staff is passive and static, but willing to support users with rudimentary tasks (e.g. using the printer, serving beverages, etc.)	A respondent did not report the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent did not report on the positive or negative effects of the workspace on users. A respondent reported that the primary goal of workspace usage is to change the daily workspace environment and get inspired.
D	Open space with a café setting, various styles of flexible workstations, informal group area and a versatile event venue.	No dedicated community manager. Operational workspace staff/receptionists assist users with an infrastructural request but do not facilitate relations between them. The workspace itself is designed to support the development of encounters between users (e.g. shared adjustable tables, group sitting areas, commonly used areas, etc.)	Interactions are limited, and it appears that they mainly develop due to the spatial layout of the workspace. The observed frequency of interactions is low, with the predominant form of interactions being formal. Although the coworking space advertises community presence, it appears that the community within this space is absent.	A respondent reported the presence of a supportive community within the space. A correspondent reported no positive or negative effects of the workspace on users. A respondent stated that their users frequently report increased productivity and improved ability to balance work-life tasks.

E	Open space with a café setting, and a dedicated event venue.	The observed workspace had no membership packages and have allowed the user to come on a flexible basis within the opening hours. No observed role of a dedicated community manager. Observed space had similarly to workspace C a barista who welcomed users into space and offered the essential services (e.g. serving beverages, etc.), but has no set goals to support encounters. Barista also played the role of an event manager who takes care of the infrastructure when various events occur. Workspace had a typical open café set-up with shared tables and a dedicated event venue.	Very little to no interaction among workspace users. Limited interactions seemingly develop due to the workspace spatial set-up. Workspace staff is passive, but willing to support users with basic tasks (e.g. serving beverages, etc.)	A respondent did not report the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent did not report on the positive or negative effects of the workspace on users. A respondent reported that the main goals of workspace usage from the user's perspective are to a) increase the level of productivity, and b) to socialise alongside individuals with whom they already have friendly relationships.
F	Open space with a café setting, various styles of flexible workstations, informal group area and a versatile event venue.	A dedicated community manager has a proactive role in a) facilitating connections among users, b) keeping the positive climate within the workspace, c) potentially resolving conflicts among users, d) ensuring that the workspace operations run smoothly and without interference. Facilitation occurs in the form of either informal (e.g. community lunch, leisure evenings, etc.) or formal (e.g. organised lectures, networking events, etc.) events. Shared infrastructure also positively affects spontaneous encounters (e.g. use of flexible and shared worktables, socialisation in dedicated rooms such as game room, bar area, etc.)	Very high level of interactivity among workspace users. Interactions develop both due to a) active mediation by community managers and b) open workspace design. Observed interactions ranged from formal to informal.	A respondent reported the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly regarding motivation towards completing work tasks and inspiration. A respondent stated that their users frequently report increased productivity and that they manage to balance work-life tasks.

G	Open space with a café setting, and a dedicated event venue.	No dedicated community manager. Observed space had a barista who welcomes users into space and offers the essential services (e.g. signing-up members, serving beverages and food, etc.), but has no set goals to support encounters. Workspace had a typical open café set-up with shared tables. Workspace had a high number of fixed workstations that are seemingly lowering the probability of spontaneous encounters among users.	Very little to no interaction among workspace users. Workspace users mainly interact before and after events (although these are not dedicated networking events). Limited interactions seemingly develop due to the workspace café set-up and stay informal. Workspace staff is passive, but willing to support users with rudimentary tasks (e.g. serving beverages, etc.)	A respondent did not report the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly with respect to productivity. A respondent also reported that their users are mostly seeking to use their workspace in order to ensure sufficient work-life balance.
H	Open space with group seating and worktables, a dedicated area for mechanical work.	Workspace had a dedicated community manager actively curating the community with the use of online (e.g., digital channels such as forums and dedicated chat services) and on-site mechanisms (e.g., direct encounter with workspace users, event organization, etc.) The strong presence of on- and off-site facilitation mechanisms. The community manager narrates the development of relationships and moderates encounters both within the space and their digital channels. Community manager serves as a gate-keeper of the community.	The observed frequency of interactions between workspace users was high. Workspace users were seemingly interacting regularly and co-creating a friendly environment with a favourable climate. Community managers repeatedly rearranged the workspace layout (e.g. moved the tables, etc.) to support user encounters.	A respondent reported a supportive community within the space and its digital counterparts (e.g., online channels). A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly concerning their a) productivity, b) well-being and c) learning capacity. Supportiveness of community reportedly affects user's inspiration towards set goals and tasks.

I	Open space with a café setting, various styles of flexible workstations	No dedicated community manager. Workspace staff limits itself to assist users with basic tasks but does not participate in mediating encounters. The workspace itself is designed to support the development of encounters between users (e.g. shared adjustable tables, group sitting areas, commonly used areas, etc.)	Interactions are limited, and it appears that they mostly develop due to the spatial layout of the workspace. The observed frequency of interactions was low with the predominant form of interactions being formal. Although the coworking space advertises community presence, it appears that the community within this space is absent.	A respondent reported the presence of supportive community within the space. A respondent reported that their workspace has positive effects on users, mainly concerning their a) well-being, and b) work-life balance.
J	Main open space with flexible seating in the core, team offices with pane glass walls, versatile event venue.	Workspace had a dedicated community manager. The role of community manager had seemingly minimal effectiveness, mainly because the workspace was closed to individuals and opened (by invite-only) to teams. These teams had their office managers (or similarly positioned individuals within the team responsible for developing personal relationships).	Mid-to-high frequency of interactions, both informal and formal. Community managers actively facilitate encounters. Apart from active management by community managers, encounters are also supported by an open space design with flexible workstations and many leisure areas.	A respondent reported the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly with respect to a) productivity, b) well-being and c) learning capacity. Increased inspiration and the affected level of motivation was not reported.
K	Main open space with flexible seating in the core, team offices with pane glass walls, versatile event venue.	The workspace had a community manager position. Although the community managers effectively facilitated mechanisms and increased the possibility of encounters between workspace users, their effectiveness was questionable (seemingly due to the closed organisational culture of several teams using the space, and the unwillingness of individuals to socialize). Mediation mechanisms took the form of planned events (e.g. networking) and informal gatherings (e.g. weekly socialising via a casual community event such as group dinner).	Mid-to-high frequency of interactions, both informal and formal. Interactions develop both due to a) active mediation by community managers and b) open workspace design.	A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly with respect to motivation towards completing work tasks. A respondent also reported that individual users often express satisfaction regarding their increased level of productivity. A respondent reported that informal interactions between workspace users affect their a) level of workspace satisfaction and b) productivity.

L	Open space with a café setting, various styles of flexible workstations.	The workspace was occupied by a single company (with several teams). The company's office managers, therefore, took over the position that has similar functions to the position of a community manager in other observed coworking spaces. Mediation mechanisms were taken from the inner company's culture and mainly focused on informal interactions (with formal interactions already developed due to team relations).	Low-to-mid frequency of interactions, predominantly formal interactions. The openness of workspace design supports encounters among users.	A respondent reported that company employees form their own community based on the selected company's values and norms. A respondent reported that usage of the coworking space highly contributed to a) increased well-being of team players, b) raised productivity, and c) simplified knowledge exchange processes.
M	Open space with a café setting, various styles of flexible workstations, informal group area and a versatile event venue.	The strong presence of a community manager. A dedicated community manager similar to the community manager in workspace F with a proactive role in a) facilitating connections among users, b) keeping the positive climate within the workspace, c) potentially resolving conflicts among users, d) ensuring that the workspace operations run smoothly and without interference. Facilitation takes place in the form of either informal (e.g. game night, community dinner, etc.) or formal (e.g. business pitch events, networking sessions, lectures, etc.) events. Shared infrastructure positively affects spontaneous encounters (e.g., using flexible and shared worktables, socialisation in dedicated rooms such as game room, bar area, etc.)	High level of interactivity among workspace users. Interactions develop both due to a) active mediation by community managers and b) open workspace design. Observed interactions ranged from formal to informal.	A respondent reported the presence of a supportive community within the space. A respondent reported positive effects of the workspace on users, mainly in a) raising their network capacities through building meaningful relationships, b) increased motivation towards completing work tasks, and c) acquiring new skills and knowledge. A respondent stated that their users frequently report increased productivity and that they manage to balance work-life tasks.

Source: own work.

Third, the selected coworking environments gave workspace staff distinct roles. Some workspaces had dedicated community managers who were active in supporting the development of formal and informal interactions. In contrast, other spaces only had operational staff managing fundamental activities such as infrastructure maintenance, serving beverages or welcoming users to the workspace (e.g., project managers, receptionists or baristas). The level of active mediation, therefore, varied from workspace to workspace.

Fourth, the observed interactions varied widely across the observed spaces. The number of observed encounters was related to a) the presence and activeness of mediators (i.e., community managers), b) the keenness of their engagement towards formal (i.e., work-related) or informal (i.e., not work-related) interactions, and c) the design, purpose and openness of a coworking space. While formal interactions were more frequent in team-purposed coworking environments, informal interactions were more common in individual-purposed environments.

4.2. Understanding differences

It is vital to note that participant observation-only provided a limited and subjective assessment of the frequency of interactions, which enabled a rough estimate of differences. Furthermore, the stated aims from coworking space employees often contradicted the observations. In several cases, interviewed managers claimed a supportive community within their coworking space, while observations showed little to no interaction among workspace users. Since the interviews were framed in the context of the participant-observer visiting a space and deciding whether to work there, the discrepancy may reflect the unreliability of the respondent-employees, given that part of their role was presumably to *sell* the workspace to potential users. Table 4 summarises the reported communal aspects of selected coworking spaces.

The surveys of workspace users frequently contradicted the accounts by workspace managers. First, consider the perceived presence of a supportive community. All thirteen coworking spaces claimed, in conversations with their managers, to have a supportive community. Sampled users unanimously supported that position only in three of the sampled workspaces (where more than 90% of respondents said it was a supportive community) and marginally supported that claim in an additional three locations. In three locations, user responses were utterly mixed (with respondents supporting that claim between 50% and 60%). In the last four locations, user responses were decidedly negative, with fewer than one in four respondents endorsing the claim. These differences suggest not all “community-based” spaces are created equal, and—more importantly—not all coworking environments manage to create a sense of community at all.

Table 4. Reported communal aspects of selected coworking spaces

Workspace	n	Perceived presence of a supportive community	Perceived presence of a community manager	Perceived keenness of workspace staff towards formal engagement	Perceived keenness of workspace staff towards informal engagement	Reported level of horizontal interactions
A	12	Yes 58% No 42%	Yes 42% No 58%	Mean response: 2.25 1: 25%; 2: 33%; 3: 33%; 4: 8%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.91 1: 41%; 2: 33%; 3: 16%; 4: 8%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2.25 1: 16%; 2: 33%; 3: 33%; 4: 8%; 5: 8%
B	12	Yes 17% No 83%	Yes 8% No 92%	Mean response: 1.42 1: 66%; 2: 25%; 3: 8%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.5 1: 58%; 2: 33%; 3: 8%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.42 1: 58%; 2: 16%; 3: 25%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%
C	18	Yes 23% No 77%	Yes 17% No 83%	Mean response: 1.61 1: 61%; 2: 22%; 3: 11%; 4: 5%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2.61 1: 16%; 2: 27%; 3: 33%; 4: 22%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.72 1: 44%; 2: 38%; 3: 16%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%
D	11	Yes 52% No 48%	Yes 18% No 82%	Mean response: 1.9 1: 36%; 2: 45%; 3: 9%; 4: 9%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2.18 1: 27%; 2: 36%; 3: 27%; 4: 9%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2.18 1: 18%; 2: 45%; 3: 36%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%
E	14	Yes 14% No 86%	Yes 21% No 79%	Mean response: 1.57 1: 50%; 2: 28%; 3: 14%; 4: 7%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.71 1: 35%; 2: 28%; 3: 21%; 4: 14%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.57 1: 50%; 2: 42%; 3: 7%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%
F	12	Yes 100% No 0%	Yes 100% No 0%	Mean response: 4.08 1: 0%; 2: 8%; 3: 8%; 4: 50%; 5: 33%	Mean response: 4.17 1: 0%; 2: 0%; 3: 25%; 4: 33%; 5: 41%	Mean response: 4 1: 0%; 2: 8%; 3: 16%; 4: 41%; 5: 33%
G	16	Yes 19% No 81%	Yes 6% No 94%	Mean response: 1.37 1: 75%; 2: 12%; 3: 12%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.62 1: 62%; 2: 12%; 3: 25%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 1.31 1: 75%; 2: 18%; 3: 6%; 4: 0%; 5: 0%
H	13	Yes 92% No 8%	Yes 92% No 8%	Mean response: 3.92 1: 0%; 2: 7%; 3: 23%; 4: 38%; 5: 30%	Mean response: 4.7 1: 0%; 2: 0%; 3: 15%; 4: 30%; 5: 53%	Mean response: 4.15 1: 0%; 2: 0%; 3: 23%; 4: 38%; 5: 38%

Workspace	n	Perceived presence of a supportive community	Perceived presence of a community manager	Perceived keenness of workspace staff towards formal engagement	Perceived keenness of workspace staff towards informal engagement	Reported level of horizontal interactions
I	15	Yes 53% No 47%	Yes 13% No 87%	Mean response: 2.2 1: 33%; 2: 26%; 3: 26%; 4: 13%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2.27 1: 26%; 2: 26%; 3: 40%; 4: 6%; 5: 0%	Mean response: 2 1: 33%; 2: 40%; 3: 20%; 4: 8%; 5: 0%
J	12	Yes 67% No 33%	Yes 67% No 33%	Mean response: 3.75 1: 0%; 2: 8%; 3: 33%; 4: 33%; 5: 25%	Mean response: 3.92 1: 0%; 2: 8%; 3: 25%; 4: 33%; 5: 33%	Mean response: 3.25 1: 8%; 2: 8%; 3: 41%; 4: 33%; 5: 8%
K	14	Yes 64% No 36%	Yes 57% No 43%	Mean response: 3.5 1: 7%; 2: 14%; 3: 21%; 4: 35%; 5: 21%	Mean response: 4 1: 0%; 2: 14%; 3: 28%; 4: 28%; 5: 28%	Mean response: 3.14 1: 7%; 2: 14%; 3: 42%; 4: 28%; 5: 7%
L	12	Yes 67% No 33%	Yes 42% No 58%	Mean response: 2.83 1: 8%; 2: 33%; 3: 33%; 4: 16%; 8: 0%	Mean response: 3.83 1: 0%; 2: 8%; 3: 25%; 4: 41%; 5: 25%	Mean response: 2.67 1: 16%; 2: 25%; 3: 41%; 4: 8%; 5: 8%
M	15	Yes 93% No 7%	Yes 87% No 13%	Mean response: 3.47 1: 6%; 2: 6%; 3: 40%; 4: 26%; 5: 20%	Mean response: 3.8 1: 0%; 2: 13%; 3: 40%; 4: 20%; 5 = 26%	Mean response: 3.73 1: 6%; 2: 6%; 3: 40%; 4: 26%; 5: 20%

Source: own work.

Similar findings emerged when measuring the perceived presence of a community manager. While six coworking spaces had dedicated community managers (*F, H, I, J, K, and M*), the proactivity and effectiveness of those managers from the user perspective varied considerably. For example, while 100% of the respondents from coworking space *F* perceived the active presence of a community manager, only 13% of the respondents from space *I* perceived the existence of the same role. The discrepancy could also be seen in user responses regarding the keenness of workspace staff towards formal and informal engagement.

Coworking spaces with high rates of the perceived presence of a supportive community and the presence of community managers had high agreements in perceived keenness towards both types of encounters (e.g., workspace *F*). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the sampled users from two coworking spaces who did not report an active community manager and did not perceive the presence of a community still acknowledged the supportive role of workspace personnel towards informal encounters (workspaces *C* and *I*).

Finally, the reported level of horizontal interactions mostly confirmed the field observations. Coworking spaces with users who reported the presence of a supportive community and of a community manager keen to engage in both formal and informal encounters also featured high levels of horizontal interactions (i.e., between users and space managers; workspaces *F, H, and J*). These interactions were not uncommon in coworking spaces without an active community manager but with the shared and open spatial design (workspaces *A, I, and L*). Even in these cases, however, the development of these interactions was related to active facilitation.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Concluding discussion

Based on a data comparison, we have been able to answer the first research question. Coworking spaces differ in terms of their spatial arrangements. Those arrangements influence horizontal interactions, whereby the openness of a workspace, and intentional workspace segmentation promote more interactions. Mediating mechanisms also play a crucial role in supporting formal and informal encounters on a horizontal and vertical levels. Therefore, the presence and activeness of mediation personnel are essential for developing a supportive community independent of spatial arrangements.

Nevertheless, quantitative data has shown that community mediators' presence and their manifested role do not necessarily correlate with workspace personnel's

reported effectiveness. Some coworking spaces seemingly construct their community-building activities gradually over time and based on the proactive personalities of workspace mediators, while others mechanise and dehumanise the very same processes to produce instant communities.

While the research findings clearly show that contemporary coworking environments have morphed into multipurpose offices that are not necessarily community-based and may have a limited capacity to support horizontal interactions between workspace users, we cannot provide an intelligible answer to the second research question. It is understood that coworking has developed into a multidimensional workspace model that cannot stand by a singular definition. Significant differences in defining the factors of spatial design, the presence of mediation mechanisms, and the varying frequencies of both horizontal and vertical interactions that result in the development of a coworking community point towards the importance of taxonomising contemporary coworking spaces.

However, the sampling of a relatively small number of coworking spaces in one geographic region is insufficient to create a valid classification. As observed through the entry literature review, the coworking model has transformed from initially planned individual-based workspaces into predominantly team-based corporate offices with altering models in-between. Hence, we can only partially respond to the second research question and conclude that while most coworking spaces are based on developing communities that knit supportive relationships between workspace users, the actual execution may be questionable.

These findings indeed support the claim that coworking spaces often portray an image of community and collaboration principles while their workspaces in practice lack sufficient mediation support to steer encounters into the development of dynamic social networks of cooperation. Therefore, community washing appears common in the coworking industry, reinforcing a solid need to classify different coworking environments. Spatial configurations, the presence and effectiveness of mediations mechanisms, and the frequency of horizontal and vertical encounters could help classify the features of a future taxonomy of contemporary coworking spaces.

5.2. Research limitations

The research had its limitations mainly in the form of the non-responsiveness of coworking space users. The managers of coworking environments were approached directly upon the first use of a workspace. While all workspace managers approved the use of their premises to conduct the proposed research, not all gave consent to reveal the names of their workspaces. For that reason, the work environments were only generally described to enable the researchers to elaborate on their finding, but the identity of the workspaces have been maintained anonymous.

Ethical concerns can be linked to the qualitative part of the research. Participants have been observed to reflect their habits of using a particular workspace, their affection by potential mediation mechanisms and workspace staff, and their interactions with each other. The role of the researcher was revealed to the managers of the observed workspaces, but the observation itself was unobstructed in order not to influence user daily routines. This risk was minimised by carefully protecting the anonymity of both workspace users and the coworking spaces themselves. Only aggregate data was shared so that individual workers could not be identified. These spaces were already accessible to other non-scholarly observers with similar relationships to the people being observed other than the motivation behind the observations, minimising the ethical implications. Furthermore, when presenting the questionnaires to workspace users, the research purpose was presented transparently and clearly.

One possible limitation of the conducted research is that the sample was taken entirely from one city. To the extent that coworking and other collaborative workspaces differ systematically across cities or countries (given their distinct languages, histories, and cultures), one concern is that these methods will uncover a community washing of Prague coworking spaces rather than a community washing of coworking spaces in general. As with any research, resources are limited, and we had to choose geographic constraints to make the scope of the research reasonable.

That said, there are many reasons to believe Prague is the ideal location for an initial study and that it will present a broad and mostly representative distribution of coworking spaces. As mentioned earlier, Prague has been recognised as a leading city in terms of the number and diversity of coworking spaces. One of the researchers has been actively involved in researching and developing coworking spaces in other countries around Europe and globally. From previous ethnographic work, he feels confident that Prague has a sufficiently wide distribution of spaces to understand coworking environments' defining features adequately. Finally, the sample of coworking spaces used for the study has intentionally been chosen to represent a diverse sample of collaborative open workspaces.

A second limitation of the research was that the questionnaires were entirely in English. One might object that the surveys should (also) be in the Czech language, and the fact of limiting them to English would limit and taint the sample. We were conscious of these objections when we were deciding to limit the surveys to English, which was made for a few reasons, both practical and theory-focussed. First, Prague-based coworking spaces are notable for their cross-cultural diversity. All the spaces we examined have a significant minority of non-Czech members, and some of them have a majority. Many non-Czechs in these spaces do not speak Czech, while most native Czech speakers (in these coworking spaces) are fluent in English. This was the reason for choosing English as the preferred language over Czech. But why not use multiple language versions of the survey? While it would be ideal to have a survey in the native language of every participant translated

in such a way as to maintain meaning across distinct languages correctly, this ideal would, of course, not be possible in practice. Every translation necessarily changes the meaning of the questions, and so a Czech version of the English survey could do more to taint the responses than giving the same English version to Czech speakers fluent in English. As we intended to provide the same survey not just to native Czech and native English speakers, but primarily to non-native English speakers from many, many countries, the quality of the responses would be as good as that of the questions asked. This reminded us to be careful in creating the questions and response categories that were direct and difficult to misinterpret. We believe it has resulted in higher quality and more directly comparable responses.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Philip McCANN, Tim VORLEY (eds.), *Productivity and the Pandemic. Challenges and Insights from Covid-19*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham/Northampton, 2021, 305 pages

The persistent weakness of the development of the United Kingdom's productivity after the 2008/09 crisis has posed a major challenge for economic policy, and this problem has a clear spatial dimension. The *Productivity Insights Network*, a multi-disciplinary network of social science researchers investigating the UK's productivity puzzle, published a timely book on the challenges in a post-Covid economy. Addressing a wide range of topics related to the possible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on labour productivity, the book consists of 21 chapters prepared by 46 contributors. Given the broad perspective of the volume and the limits of this review, we have chosen to focus on the parts of the book most closely linked to the topic of entrepreneurship, innovation, and business growth. Therefore, below we will discuss chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, and 20.

Chapter 1 takes a detailed stock of the impacts of the virus-induced crisis observed and anticipated in the first year of the pandemic in an international and a UK context. The authors first set the scene for the whole book and describe the nature of the pandemic crisis, and the reaction of the different sectors to the supply and demand-side shocks. A subsection of this chapter is devoted to the quakes in the financial and capital markets that hit the SME sector through credit contractions, the real estate industry through radical uncertainty, as well as economic development projects. The patterns of recovery may differ between countries and regions, but the most likely outcome will be the widening of the gaps between the economic core and the periphery. This phenomenon has also occurred in the UK,

since the economically weaker regions have been the most adversely affected by the crisis, e.g. due to the reduction of workforce, business dissolutions, increased investor risks, whilst service sectors in London are among the least affected sectors. As a result, widening inter-urban and inter-regional inequalities challenge the 'levelling up' agenda.

With the help of a series of stylised facts, Chapter 2 discusses 'the long tail of less productive firms' in the UK in comparison to their main international competitors. At the upper side of the distribution, frontier firms are vulnerable to the shocks caused by global value chains, as productivity and demand shocks 'travel up and down the value chain.' The author discusses the role of creative destruction in clearing the market, thereby increasing overall efficiency. However, this effect has been weak after the 2008 financial crisis, partly due to labour market conditions. The last subsection of this chapter concerns several pandemic-relevant questions, including the impacts of trade restrictions, reshoring tendencies, increasing concentration of businesses, the constraints to the diffusion of technologies to laggard firms, as well as the impacts of government subsidies on creative destruction. Positive impacts can be expected if the crisis induces some firm-level solutions that may increase efficiency, productivity, and resilience to future shocks (Chapter 3). Reshoring of supply chains may create new opportunities, assuming that domestic suppliers are competitive enough. Accordingly, coordinated central and local government policies are required to develop the business environment, and local governments need to engage in supporting innovation, skill development and infrastructure development. Chapter 4 refers to this as fostering the productive culture of entrepreneurship through digitisation, the adoption of management practices, (public) schemes for business growth financing, and a local high street redesign.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the Covid-19 crisis on the functioning of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs), and their various stakeholders (banks, business incubators, accelerators, universities, venture funds, government-funded entrepreneurship support organisations, and business angels). EE as a 'new' market-oriented industrial policy with its stress on entrepreneurial agency and localised determinants of firm success was widely embraced by national governments across the globe in the post-2008 era. Overrepresented in successful and large EEs, the disproportionate role of high-growth enterprises (HGEs) or scaling-up firms in job creation, productivity and exports is particularly evident in the UK economy. The pandemic has placed HGEs centre-stage in productivity recovery, prompting the government to direct a coronavirus support package to protect these firms. The efficiency and integrity of EEs may be undermined by several developments induced by the Covid-19-crisis, such as the decline of seed and venture capital finance targeting this narrow cohort of firms, a transition to remote work, online networking, and the reduction of relational interactivity, alongside delays in angel and VC investments. The authors argue for stronger governmental in-

terventionism to enhance the ecosystems' robustness and resilience to external shocks and joint action with ecosystem leaders to boost the relational capacity of EEs and business angel and venture capital financing.

Chapter 6 links the prospect of sustainable post-pandemic recovery to the availability of risk capital for ambitious start-ups and scale-ups, which would be put into peril by an eventual contraction of the business angel market. In addition to fostering more risk averse behaviours among investors, the pandemic has triggered a sectoral shift in angel investments toward Fintech, Remote Education and Health/Med Tech. Despite a continuation of business angel investing, the chapter forecasts a drop of aggregate angel investment activity in the years 2020-21 based on the perceived decline in seed and start-up investments. To reverse this trend, the government is urged to increase tax incentives for business angels and introduce co-investment schemes such as the *Future Fund*. Complementing tax incentives, non-dilutive finance programmes comprising grants for innovation and commercialisation essentially support pre-revenue seed entrepreneurs. The review of policy measures indicates that the government, by adopting a top-down approach to crisis management, has sidelined the issue of exacerbating regional economic inequalities whose deleterious impacts on national productivity were amply exposed in pre-pandemic analyses.

When this book was being written, one timely question was that of the pattern of the expected economic recovery, and Chapter 12 supposes that an asymmetric 'L-shape' is the most likely scenario in the UK. The Covid-19 crisis has been different from previous recessions, for example, when it comes to the sectors involved or the scale of the falls. However, the recovery may take on some typical forms as experienced after previous crises, such as households accumulating financial assets, firms deferring investments, and a possible interplay of employment and output dynamics with strong cyclical effects on productivity. Even though some local areas are initially hit hard by the recession, what really matters in the long run is their capacity to revive, which may be determined by local sectoral composition and the regional specialisation. The Covid-19 crisis is expected to have a harder impact on the more peripheral areas of the UK. During the recovery, the automation initiatives may have adverse effects on job markets in these regions, and insolvencies may damage their capacities. Government policy responses (furlough schemes, business loans) may postpone a part of the output shock, and public investments will focus on job creation and the demand side. By dint of this policy intervention productivity resurgence and creative destruction may not take place in the short run.

Chapter 20 highlights the shifting priorities of top-level innovation policy under post-pandemic recovery. Generally speaking, the UK as a world-leading innovation hub is strong in frontier technology development, but not in the diffusion and dissemination of innovation. The Industrial Strategy of the UK addresses the problem of low productivity and underinvestment in R&D, confirming the UK's

commitment to raising the level of overall R&D spending driven by frontier tech firms and the diffusion and scaling of the use of innovations. Innovation policy (through the provision of equity aid) is urged to play a pivotal role in ensuring the growth of earlier stage and frontier firms that have been hit hard by the decline in R&D expenditure and private equity investments. The intensification of digital technology diffusion and adoption by businesses is likely to alter business models and working practices in the long run, placing remote interaction and home-working at the centre. The chapter presents the pandemic as an opportunity for policymakers for rebalancing the economic and social objectives of innovation policy. The centrality of innovation system thinking is emphasised in the efficient delivery of the economic and societal objectives of innovation policy (fostering goals in the field of environment, health, well-being, security, resilience, etc.) beyond those of growth and productivity. The pandemic has also impacted the nature of policy outcomes, their evaluation and measurement, with new areas, such as behavioural change, the societal diffusion of new approaches and practices, as well as health and environmental outcomes prioritised over the more traditional outputs of innovation policy.

In summary, this book provides good guide to understanding the diverse implications of the pandemic crisis in exceptionally uncertain times. We highly appreciate that the contributing experts undertook the effort to consider the emerging pandemic-related trends and prospects at a relatively early stage after its onset. The limited temporal focus does not allow for drawing premature conclusions on the nature of post-pandemic productivity and business recovery in the UK, but it is safe to say that the impacts will be profoundly uneven across different sectors and geographies, with large industrial clusters and spatial agglomerations recovering faster than non-metropolitan or lagging areas. That said, the main messages for productivity upgrading are valid not only for the UK, but for other regions experiencing spatial inequalities and low productivity performance such as Central and Eastern European countries.

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**Annett STEINFÜHRER, Anna-Barbara HEINDL,
Ulrike GRABSKI-KIERON, Anja REICHERT-SCHICK (eds.),
New rural geographies in Europe – Actors, Processes, Policies,
(Rural Areas Series: Issues of local and regional development, 6.),
Zürich: LIT, 2020, 295 pages**

This is the 6th volume of a book series, containing the edited and selected contributions of the 2017 RuralGeo Conference, “New rural geographies in Europe – actors, processes and policies” organised by the Rural Studies-section of the Thünen Institute (Braunschweig, Germany) in cooperation with the Working Group Rural Areas (Arbeitskreis Ländliche Räume) of the German Geographical Society. The editors of this book recruited contributors from these two organisations.

The last Working Group has built systematically a national and international interdisciplinary network of researchers and university teachers – mainly from Western and Southern Europe – a fact which is also mirrored in the composition of the volume’s authors. As a geographer from the eastern part of Europe, I observed that our region is highly underrepresented in this book. The study fields cover dominantly northern, western and southern European regions with a Romanian case study as an exception. However, this does not mean that the editors do not have knowledge about the state of rural studies, the problems or research results in the eastern part of Europe.

The introductory chapter provides a highly detailed picture of rural trends with a focus on Europe as a whole, including a content analysis of leading rural scientific journals and the territorial foci of papers (Heindl and Steinführer, 2020). The absence of Eastern Europe in this review is not that problematic because the main trends of east European rural transformation in the last three decades have already been summarised in another collected volume, edited by Jerzy Banski (Banski, 2019), containing more than 30 chapters (reviewed by Nagy (2020)). In fact, a parallel analysis of the two volumes offers an interesting comparison of topics, trends, processes, and challenges in different macro-regions of the European continent, although the research questions and the used methods were (partly) different.

In the introductory chapter, the editors explain that this Working Group and the wider research team organised around the RuralGeo community applied an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the transformation of rural areas over the last decades (Heindl and Steinführer, 2020). They see ‘rural’ as a highly heterogeneous spatial category, differentiated by several spatial processes. ‘Rural’ is an umbrella term including areas developing under the influence of certain metropolitan centres, active parts of an intensive urban-rural relationship or even

threatened by peripherisation (Lang, 2015; Raagmaa *et al.*, 2019; Görmär *et al.*, 2019), and/or depopulation. The mosaic-like structure of rural areas induces different development paths, different problems and challenges, different scales of values, welfare and well-being preferences, and indexes.

The book contains 14 chapters – including the introduction – which are organised around three main perspectives following the sub-title of the 2017 Conference (*Actors, Processes, Policies*). The grouping of chapters is not always clear. For example, two chapters focusing on rural gentrification have been separated from one another, while a chapter on sustainable tourism could have been placed also under the major topic ‘Policies’.

As noted before, the introductory chapter gives the reader a detailed summary about rural studies inside Europe and its development through the changing research focus of the topic. Here, some points are highly interesting: i) the increasing importance of an interdisciplinary approach including, e.g. sociology, geography, regional studies, agrarian research, and environmental issues amalgamated with the changes in the relevant legal and political framework; ii) the moderating influence of individual case studies and the emerging importance of comparative research; iii) the growing importance of institutional background, human capacities, local and regional decision-making processes, and participatory planning and development; and iv) the shift from a pure description of processes towards a better understanding of the hidden driving forces, the beneficiaries, and decisions of excluded social groups.

The editors of the book, however, have not defined a clear unified theoretical framework for the authors to interpret the transformation of rural areas in recent decades. As a consequence, the theoretical background to the major questions in the book is eclectic. We can identify institutionalist, constructivist, relationalist, and network-based theories as the frameworks in individual chapters. This eclectic approach can also be seen when it comes to the methods, geographical scale, and even the number of regional/local case studies chosen. In some case studies a critical approach is weak, while critical rural theories are almost missing in the book.

TOPICS AND APPROACHES

The first part of the book focuses on local ‘actors’ of certain rural areas, however, in some chapters the important role of ‘outer’ interest groups can be identified (see Métenier, 2020 – gentrification; Mose and Mehnen, 2020 – sustainable tourism). To some extent, the discussed topics are very innovative, such as gamification (Robinson, 2020) or renewable energy sources (Authier, 2020), but there is also sample room for such ‘evergreen’ problems like rural gentrification or ageing (Busch, 2020).

In the second part of the book the research focus turns from ‘actors’ to ‘processes’. I understand the logic of the editors in this case, but the segmentation (more precisely the division) into actors and processes seems to be a bit artificial. In fact, long-term and short-term processes can be hardly separated from the actors’ interests, strategies, preferences, reactions, and the like, while, at the same time, the actors actively define the direction, speed, and depth of processes in a certain spatial unit.

As a geographer working on rural areas I could see there are three chapters that give me new angles for my fieldwork. First, there is the topic of ‘food deserts,’ a phenomenon with which we are familiar in our case studies from Hungarian peripheries (see Nagy *et al.*, 2016). The majority of our own research on food deserts have been reinforced by the North German case study (Jürgens). The findings of the Romanian case study (Stoica, Zamfir and Saftoiu, 2020) about small towns with rural specificities (a certain re-ruralisation process in the countryside) shows similarities with results found in other East-European countries (e.g. about ‘ceremonial’ towns in Hungary after 1990). Last but not least, I have identified several similarities between the Spanish and Italian case studies (Navarro *et al.*, 2020) about the effect of neo-endogenous development policies to reproduce spatial inequalities in rural areas. From an East-European viewpoint, there is also an emerging criticism against the wider neo-liberal development agenda of EU and national policies, including rural development policies.

The third part of the book (‘Policies’) includes three chapters focussing on the local consequences of top-down decisions (national or EU levels). The most important issues discussed in the chapters are the LEADER programme of the EU, resilience, and migration trends. These topics are quite interesting, the long-term perspective, the historical timelines and temporal comparison of certain processes are the most promising parts of the chapters. The chapter on migration waves and their political narratives (Weidinger) has given me the most interesting viewpoint because of the method that the author applied. (Migration is a highly sensitive research topic in Hungary, even the post-Second World War wave, the post-1956 wave or the recent wave of 2015).

SPATIAL FOCUS AND COMPARABILITY

The western half of the European continent is highly over-represented in the book, following the nationality and research interest of the authors. The study areas cover some regions of Germany, Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, and Sweden. As noted before, Romania is the only case from Eastern Europe. Most of the chapters try to give a comparison between two or more study areas or at least limit some micro-regional units with specific characteristics inside the chosen area.

The inner structure of individual chapters is highly homogenous (which points to the difficult work of the editorial team), following a common writing guide (such as: Introduction – Research objectives, scientific design and/or state of research – Methods and conceptual design – Study areas – Case study analysis – Discussion – Conclusion). This makes the chapters well-structured, although in some papers the inner logic is partly different following the specific needs of the topic or research approach. But at the same time, this improves the quality of the volume.

The last section of the book contains the most important information about the authors, and the former volumes of the RuralGeo Working Group (mostly in German), which offer some additional readings for researchers of rural studies. While reading the book I became deeply interested in all the other volumes of the series and I would highly recommend them to all researchers in rural disciplines. The chapters and the book as a whole would be also useful in higher education, especially in rural geography, rural sociology, institutional studies, as well as for illustration purposes in lectures on the EU.

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**Friedrich von BORRIES, Benjamin KASTEN,
Stadt der Zukunft. Wege in die Globalopolis, Fischer Verlag,
Frankfurt am Mein 2019, 208 pages**

After releasing a series of 18 books devoted to contemporary natural environment, the Fischer Publishing House proposed another series of publications, this time focussed on the future of the environments of large cities. The intention was to present the potential opportunities for developing a sustainable modern society. The publishing house invited scientists and researchers to share their visions of the future based on their extensive knowledge and present their ideas of how society could function, residential areas could work, energy could be utilised, and space could be organised.

Up to this point one could conclude that this is yet another book promoting the views of individuals, minor or major authority figures in the science world. Yet the book by Friedrich von Borries¹ and Benjamin Kasten² entitled *Stadt der Zukunft. Wege in die Globalopolis* has been constructed in a way which actually provokes deliberation, and triggers reflection and internal discussion. Even the introduction into the topic raised seems original as the authors begin by presenting their rather controversial vision of 2070 Berlin in the form of a graphic short story with political undertones. That is a form of provocation and the intention was presumably to intrigue and trigger a reaction in prospective readers. It seems that the book's target audience consists of young people who are most interested in the environment in which they will have to live in the future, i.e., in 30–50 years. Therefore, the application of the form of a graphic short story in the publication and its elaborate graphic contents will probably encourage more young people to read it.

Using the form of graphic short story, the authors have described their perfect city of the future, using the example of Berlin, where 8 million people would live in a city open to all, one which is climate neutral and utilises new eco-friendly public transport without passenger cars, filled with greenery which had replaced former thoroughfares, with farms producing protein from insects, houses with plant-covered façades, which purify the air and absorb energy, and with a forest with trial forms of human residence. I must admit that both the form and the contents of the introduction offer much food for thought and can trigger many debates in various circles about the desirable future, which should be considered a purposeful and effective way of attracting young readers' attention.

¹ Friedrich von Borries, born in 1974, architect and professor of design theory at HFBK Hamburg, owner of a design studio, where he focusses on architecture, design, art, and urban planning.

² Benjamin Kasten, born in 1980, has studied urban and regional planning, currently works at the design studio of Friedrich von Borries.

In the following chapter, the authors have concentrated on the role of global cities discussed from the perspective of the domains of science they represent architecture and urban planning. I believe that the fact of emphasising at this point the role of spatial organisation and its impact on our quality of life, on how we perceive the world and how people interact has an educational value. As do the propositions being advanced and the questions being formulated, which force readers to pause and think. The propositions are supported by diagrams which present statistical data, mainly gathered from American studies. They have a flaw, though, as there is no information underneath the figures stating the sources of the data – the sources of statistical data are summarised at the end of the book. Furthermore, the authors' views are, well, only their views, stated without appropriate grounding in literature.

However, the most expansive and the most valuable part of the book contains descriptions of research fields associated with the functioning of global cities in the future. It includes such topics as: historical past, population density, infrastructure, population mobility, ecosystem, resources, and modes of recovering them from waste, communication, work, housing, and issues related to ownership, security, social participation, and the aesthetics of the space in which we are going to live in 30–50 years. A major advantage of this part is the fact that the authors indicate various kinds of projects underway throughout the world, which were intended to highlight the directions in which the organisation of the future global city might develop. They have supplemented their book with a compilation of snippets regarding those projects, which once read again trigger reflection and review of one's own opinions. It offers interesting material for discussion in the proposed research fields.

The publication is complemented with statements by three people from different regions of the world and different cultures regarding their visions of human places of residence. Once again, this compilation of diverse opinions from different cultures shows how different social needs associated with future city organisation can be.

The reviewed book is of a popular science nature, yet its contents have been structured well. It is intended mainly for young readers, a fact clearly indicated by the utilisation of the form of graphic short story to present visions of the future. It is thought-provoking while providing specific statistical data and examples of projects which suggest future directions of development. It does not offer any ready-made solutions as apparently people do not have one vision of a desirable future space for living. That is why it worth discovering views grounded in statistics and the executions of innovative projects and posing a major question: how diverse our visions of future living space are, and for what we should strive.

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