

European Journal of Spatial Development – Reloaded

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## European Journal of Spatial Development - Reloaded

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### Abstract

After almost two decades of life, the EJSD has come to an important shift in its organisation. This piece is the expression of the editorial team's wish to guide the readers through the changes that have occurred, both in the journal's editorial structure and in its technical arrangement. At the same time, it is an occasion to highlight the ideas upon which the new direction are founded.

### Keywords

European, Space,  
Spatial  
Development,  
Spatial planning

### Introduction

After almost two decades of life, the European Journal of Spatial Development (EJSD) has come to an important shift in its organisation. This piece is the expression of the editorial team's wish to guide EJSD readers through the changes that have occurred, both in the journal's editorial structure and in its technical arrangement. At the same time, it is an occasion to highlight the ideas upon which the new direction are founded.

So far, the EJSD has provided valuable room for debate on the articulated nature of the links between spatial planning and spatial development. The journal was established at the beginning of the 21st century, a time when the supra- and intra-national perspectives in Europe were becoming more important and when the European Union (EU) was beginning to provide a political frame for multilevel policy design with a strong and explicit spatial perspective.

As can be seen in its editorial history, the journal followed the evolution of the debate(s) on spatial planning and development, and looked both at the growing interaction between national perspectives and schools of thought, and at the role of the EU. The EU was both a geographical reference framework for investigation and an institution that could generate spatial policy initiatives. In this light, the EJSD has been strongly linked to the activities of the

Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and served as a debating platform for international comparative perspectives.

The new editorial team consists of senior and early career scholars whose work spans diverse geographies of Europe. We have the intention to build on the journal's history while addressing contemporary challenges with a renewed editorial line that, as outlined in the following sections, welcomes a diversity of perspectives as well as of geographical contexts. Seeing space beyond a territory (Duarte, 2017; Faludi, 2019; Massey, 2005; Painter, 2010), it is our intention to open a discussion on the interconnection between policy, politics, and polity in the contemporary era, with a focus on contributing to the European scholarly debate on spatial development.

### **A new setting**

Since its inception, EJSD had the intention of being open source and free of charge. Publication of high-quality articles has been possible thanks to a double-blind peer-review system. The journal has thus been an important outlet for presenting ideas and works by both senior and early scholars. This has not come without costs: maintaining quality while respecting the principle of open access has been possible due to important institutional and personal commitments of the previous editors, among them Wil Zonneveld of TU Delft, and Lukas Smas and John Moodie from Nordregio, the institute that has hosted the journal on its website since its foundation.

As of 2021, the task of hosting and producing the journal was transferred from Nordregio to the Politecnico di Torino, still maintaining the choice to enable open-access and free-of-charge publications as a core value. The journal now uses the Open Journal System platform, which is one of the most advanced standards for open science in the world, and it remains indexed in the most prestigious scientific journal directories.

The composition of the editorial team and editorial board reflects the intention of maintaining a variety of scientific and geographical perspectives. Loris Servillo (Politecnico di Torino) and Tuna Tasan-Kok (University of Amsterdam) are the new chief editors and are supported by an editorial team consisting of Giancarlo Cotella and Marco Santangelo (Politecnico di Torino), Sara Özogul (University of Groningen) and Eva Purkarthofer (Aalto University).

Overall, with the relaunch of EJSD in a new institutional setting and under a new editorial leadership, we intend to secure the existence of a valuable, independent, and high-quality journal. We hope that both established scholars and young academics will consider EJSD a relevant outlet to publish their research and thus ensure a lively academic debate in the pages of the journal. We will rely on the expertise and support of the scientific community to provide constructive and critical peer reviews for articles submitted to the journal.

## **The scope of EJSD – then and now**

In order to introduce the new direction of EJSD in more detail, we would like to explore the implications that the current socio-spatial dynamics poses to a journal whose title includes the terms “European” and “spatial development”. There is no simplistic and univocal interpretation of these terms, especially when considering the multiple socio-economic and environmental challenges and crises that have characterised the last two decades.

## **Why a “European” journal in this day and age?**

As mentioned before, there are two main areas of analysis behind the origin of the journal. Firstly, at the end of the 20th century, a growing awareness of an international and cross-border perspective generated increasing interest in European space as a geographical region (Jensen & Richardson, 2004). Secondly, the European Union became established as an institutional entity and political framework for a wide range of policies that affect all levels of government and administration (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). However, both issues still need to be reconsidered when relaunching EJSD.

We consider this journal “European”, as it is technically hosted by an Italian university and its editors and editorial board members are based at universities in Europe. We envision the journal’s core interest as that of contributing to the debate on European space and the EU as a political institution. However, the editorial team is keen to be challenged by contributions that address a variety of geographical contexts both within and outside of Europe. Therefore, we do not draw a geographical boundary related to the journal's interests *a priori*. Rather, we consider discussions of space, borders, and territoriality, as well as the investigation of socio-cultural, institutional, and political imaginaries as open questions and intellectual challenges to be addressed rather than as fixed starting points.

Nevertheless, the journal intends to primarily offer a space for debate about the complex territoriality of Europe, and its multi-scalar nexus between physical space, social dynamics, and institutional articulations (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999; Jessop, 2016). The articulated relationship between geographical space and territoriality (Moisio & Paasi, 2013) is rooted in regional and national traditions, made up of models of practices and actions (Commission of the European Communities, 1997; Nadin et al., 2018; Janin Rivolin, 2017; Berisha et al., 2021b). These are nested, overlapped and often contested institutional constructions that shape the life and the behaviours of many citizens that are, want to be, or refuse to be called European. Being European can also refer to a combination of schools of thought about spatial planning and development (ESPON, 2013), a combination of interrelated national and regional perspectives, as well as a sometimes contested benchmark for international studies.

The EU has been the subject of investigation for a broad field of studies, such as political science and international relational studies, which since the second half of the 20th century have devoted, a large share of their agenda to the investigation of the political construction of

a supra-national entity which combines formal and informal institutional dimensions in a globally unique way. The editorial team recognizes that, since its foundation, EJSD has addressed the European Union both as a political construct and for its political role in several fields of knowledge related to space (Bengs, 2004; Faludi, 2010; Faludi & Peyrony, 2011; Hedelin, 2005). The EU can be considered a supra-national Westphalian state, a condominium or a consociation (Shmitter, 1996), a neo-medieval revival of the mediaeval political patchwork (Wæver, 1997), or post-modern mediaeval political system (Zielonka, 2006; Faludi, 2018), or a networked polity and State (Ansell, 2000; Castells, 2000); in any case, the investigation of its dynamics has brought important and innovative insights into the formulation of policies and their effects. The most prominent studies include those dedicated to the complexity of multi-level governance and the swing from Europeanisation dynamics to De-Europeanisation dynamics (Radaelli, 2003; Lenschow, 2006; Lecher et al., 2020; Delanty, 2021).

The questions raised around the EU have also inspired a large body of research dedicated to space, spatial dynamics, and spatially relevant policies. Several disciplines, such as human geography, regional economics, spatial planning, and sociology, have reinterpreted the research questions into more specific perspectives. These disciplines investigate both the implications of the supra-national political project in their domains, and the cross-country dynamics that began under its umbrella (Banjac, 2012; Gualini, 2003; Sousa, 2013).

The journal, therefore, in line with its tradition, intends to remain the reference for those studies that consider the EU as an agent of spatial policy-making and an arena to share, discuss, transfer, and contest national and local practices. The discussion should critically address the peculiarities of the EU as a political project in relation to its stage of accomplishment. While it has reached an institutional maturity, it also seems to have encountered limits and disengagement, as the recent Brexit saga has shown. At the same time, EU borders continue to be open to expansion, as the ongoing enlargement process towards the Western Balkan region demonstrates (Berisha & Cotella, 2020). The ways in which these institutional dynamics influence the debate on spatial development and how practices, discourses, and policy arenas are affected is a key theme of the journal.

### **What does “spatial development” mean as a subject for an editorial agenda?**

The term “spatial development” defines the core subject of the journal. It intermingles both spatial development and the two areas of spatial governance and planning as interrelated fields of knowledge. Spatial development refers to a wide scope of activities that shape the natural and built environment, while spatial planning and governance refers to the measures steering socio-spatial transformations and the multilevel governance of the decision-making processes that inform social, institutional, economic, or political actions. The journal

welcomes theoretical and applied investigations on the attempts to develop and achieve a fair and just society. It allows for exploration of the nexus between normative approaches, policy (and political) discourses, institutional arrangements and policy instruments that deal with multi-scalar dimensions or localised practices.

Taken together, spatial planning and development refer to the action of governing spatial dynamics which consist of rules and regulations, goals and policy agendas as well as instruments and devices of multiple kinds. The exploration of these practices offers the opportunity to unveil the implicit balance and potential conflicts between societal and market interests. Space, in this perspective, becomes the epistemological lens through which the relation between the state, the market and society can be approached. Hence, we are keen on works that address the implications of spatial planning and development practices which are institutionally embedded within the state's public sector policies, regulations, and laws, as well as the market.

Along with this broad understanding, the EJSD is also interested in exploring the political aim of economic and social prosperity and the reduction of inequality across space and territories (David, 2004; Dikeç, 2001). Space reveals a complex set of values (Dikeç, 2001) which shape the interpretation of dominating discourses such as the aims of territorial cohesion, spatial justice and sustainable development. By comparing path-dependent disparities which affect specific groups and specific areas for a long time (Hadjimichalis, 2011), we show how socio-economic dynamics are conceived and addressed in multi-scalar policy agendas and structurally embedded in spatial dynamics. Furthermore, the policy narratives adopted by the national and supranational institutions can be seen as a discursive apparatus (Servillo, 2010) that drives the agenda formulation and strategically steer the actors' choices (Jessop, 2016).

The journal, therefore, questions the nexus between spatial planning, multilevel governance, and spatial development through the interconnection between policy, politics, and polity (Hajer, 2003; Savini, 2018). It looks at a large set of actions in terms of contents and spatial outcomes, and the characteristics of instruments and technological arrangements. It is willing to host investigations into the political dimensions that inform spatial policy actions, and that explore who is behind the policy decision making, and what role actors' ideologies play (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2008; Buitelaar, 2020; Davoudi, Galland & Stead, 2019; Haughton et al., 2013). It is open to exploring the configuration of hegemonic/counter-hegemonic groups (Servillo & Van Den Broeck, 2012) and discourses that inform the relationship between state and market (Raco and Savini, 2019; Özogul and Tasan-Kok, 2020).

Finally, EJSD welcomes the exploration of the polity of decision making, intended as the construction of institutional arenas and how they are spatialised through their territoriality (Allmendinger et al., 2015). The territorial features that are the subject of spatial planning and development pose fundamental challenges, often because of the mismatch embedded in the

relationship between functional, cultural, physical, and administrative dimensions (Servillo, 2019; Zimmerbauer and Paasi, 2020). Therefore, the journal offers a space to discuss the multi-scalar phenomena and the adequate scale for policy actions which have been a long-standing dimension of investigation (Faludi, 2012; Gualini, 2003; Jessop, 2016). The journal is interested in research that deals with the articulation of the institutional competences and the principle of subsidiarity, the notion of region (Paasi & Metzger, 2017), the multi-level governance of local and regional development (Barca et al., 2012), and the capacity to tailor strategies for functional places (Hooghe & Marks, 2016).

### **One journal, different perspectives, a plurality of challenges**

Drawing on the issues highlighted above in relation to “EJSD reloaded”, the following sections explore them more in detail from several standpoints and perspectives, introduced by the new editorial team. Our aim was to present specific lines of investigation to enrich the journal editorial line. The result is a set of challenges without any intention of being all-encompassing. We hope that these perspectives will be explored through the articles that interested scholars will submit to the journal.

### **Exploring a quiet revolution: the changing context of spatial planning through new state-market-citizen relations**

**T. Tasan-Kok**, Universiteit van Amsterdam

In contrast to the elitist, self-centred view of the modernist planner, contemporary planning practitioners recognize the importance of collaboration, co-production and negotiation with public- and private-sector actors and community groups in a market-driven and entrepreneurial form of urban development. Market dynamics create constantly changing conditions for urban planning today. They trigger technocratic forms of governance, which require the ‘legal instrumentalisation’ of planning, ensuring legal certainty through a piecemeal approach (Raco and Savini, 2019), while they also necessitate flexibility to enable easy, fast, and efficient forms of implementation due to the increasing involvement of private sector actors in urban development. Within this framework, the planning profession has been going through a slow and quiet revolution driven by new positions of actors in changing state-market-citizen relations.

Some scholars urge us to better understand state-market-citizen relations (Campbell et al., 2014) to recognise this quiet revolution, while sustaining critical but constructive perspectives to explore the implications for city governance (Adams et al., 2012; Adams and Tiesdell, 2010; Raco et al. 2019). New approaches are needed in scholarly planning literature to bring hope and relevance to the practice of planning within this increasingly complex and market-dependent decision-making environment. Moreover, planning education needs to

reflect on the ongoing transformation of the practice not only to prepare better equipped professionals but also to enable them to reflect on the reality in creative and personalised ways. To do that, we need new critical constructive approaches in urban planning to provide a platform for learning new skills, developing ways of thinking or tool sets for boundary pushing, reflective, and critical-thinking planning professionals.

Planners are practicing their profession in environments that are increasingly ‘for profit, not for people’ due to the repositioning of cities within increasingly volatile and financialized circuits of capital accumulation. At the same time, the planner has the mandate, the power and the ability to play a leading role in multi-actor governance structures to safeguard the ‘public interest’. The scholarly literature is still divided between whether public planning is becoming a tool for the market, or it can still achieve the desired public sector goals or solve novel problems. At the same time the contemporary spatial practices show that planning is a tool for the market as it is regulating the playground for the private sector through land and property, zoning and planning regulations. Some scholars even define planners as the ‘market actors’ (Adams and Tiesdell, 2010), some others provide us new ways to understand the market actors (Özogul and Tasan-Kok, 2020). While the scholarly literature stays critical and sees it as a defeat to use market-led planning outcomes for the advantage of the society, the reality of the practice shows that ‘boundary-pushing practitioners’ explore new planning practice methods, following their own coping mechanisms, activism and creativity to get around barriers and problems created by the market dependency. In the scholarly literature we need new generation studies that reflect on these efforts and recognize the changing context of spatial development. As an editor of the European Journal of Spatial Development, I would like to welcome, among others, critical constructive articles that enable us to think and consider new approaches, practices, and understandings of how the planning profession is changing through new state-market-citizen relations.

## **A broad perspective on disparities**

**L. Servillo**, Politecnico di Torino

The EJSJ looks at a broad range of specific – but interconnected - areas of investigation, drawn on the contemporary challenges to disciplines that are interested in space, its transformation, and the possible paths of the development of its communities. Among others, a key aspect remains the challenge posed by the growing divide among places, and the continuous changing geography of social and spatial inequality. The recent debate on the geography of the discontent (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018; Dijkstra, Poelman & Rodríguez-Pose, 2019) is the last resurgence of a long history of multi-scalar disparities in spaces (Hadjimichalis, 2011), caused by concentration of political attentions and flows of investments toward areas and social groups that become the dominant subject of the policy agenda.

Conversely, the neglected areas and people become marginal not because of an unavoidable destiny, but because of the outcome of convergent lines of political measures, which have social and economic consequences. The investigation of these processes as much as the strategies to cope with it, remains one of the biggest spatial challenges across multiple scales and institutions (Estèbe, 2015; Hudson, 2016; León-Moreta, 2018). Country perspectives and the EU agendas are both key subjects of study.

This interest points to some specific domains of investigation. First, the necessity to substantiate processes of changes, and to identify socio-spatial challenges. Despite years of investigations, national bias is still present in knowledge production and the understanding of multi-scalar and cross-border processes, and to develop an intra- and inter-national comparison agenda remains at stake (Ahram, 2011; Sousa, 2013).

Second, the role of instruments and policy agenda, and the effectiveness of them is a key area of exploration. There is a continuous process of technological design that calls for deep investigation through a large set of interpretative frameworks (Anderson et al., 2010; Fincher et al., 2016), both for the process of policy design and for the generated spatial dynamics (Albrechts, 2010; Boudreau, 2007). Instruments inspired by the place-based development approach have been conceived over the years (Barca et al., 2012), and they offer a large set of experiences to be investigated.

Third, the spatial dimension and the construction of specific areas of cooperation, both as a polity and as a process of territoriality (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Hajer, 2003; Savini, 2018), has been a growing area of investigation, which increased with the debate about soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries (Purkarthofer & Granqvist, 2021). Spatial development and planning practices have contributed to the design of tailored regions and spaces of a shared policy agenda (Servillo, 2019). The EU has been the main designer of these arenas: from the Functional Urban Areas to sub-regions, such as those enabled by the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) instrument, from the cross-border to the macro regions.

Forth, the role of policy narratives, and the implication that some goals and discourses have in practices and in research agendas (Jones et al., 2019; Larsson, 2019; Servillo, 2010). From the Sustainable Development Goals to the Smart agenda, they produce discourses that influence the organisation of the policy agendas and the attendant governance dynamics, in this complex intertwining of scales and relationships.

Finally, a core interest is about the role of democracy in the frame of multi-level governance and subsidiarity (Faludi, 2013; Gutmann & Thompson, 2009; Metzger, 2011). There is a renewed quest for contemporary practices of democracy, and new paths of integration between formal institutions and informal practice of cooperation and collective participation, which includes as well as the relationship between representative democracy, participatory and deliberative democracy, and new forms of civic engagement. How they are

theorised and how they are experimented and operationalised in practice remains a contemporary challenge to be further explored.

## **Challenging the status quo: Reinvigorating theoretical discussions on spatial development**

S. Özogul, University of Groningen

Like other social sciences disciplines, research in the spatial sciences - such as planning, urban studies and geography - is characterized by research trends, fashionable frameworks, and conceptual buzzwords. The more popular a concept becomes, the more likely it is criticised at some point for its loose application and conceptual vagueness. Prominent examples of this are neoliberalism (Baeten, 2012; Buitelaar, 2020), financialisation (McGill 2018), place-making (Fincher et al., 2016) and territorial governance (Faludi, 2012). Meanwhile, however, dominant approaches and concepts are often replicated without sufficient scrutiny, and the theoretical foundations of research on spatial development are often left untouched.

Planning scholars have pointed out that planning thought is not stable but continually evolving (Haselsberger, 2017): It represents a diverse collection of paradigms, ideas and methodologies with transdisciplinary linkages to other social sciences (Fainstein and DeFilippis, 2016). Furthermore, it feeds from practice; planning's multiple forms and context-dependent practices prevent the definition of singular and verifiable theories (ibid.). Therefore, it is fundamental to clearly articulate and challenge both methodological and theoretical foundations in planning-related research. Yet, hesitation of scholars to engage with these deeper, foundational debates is widespread. Haselsberger (2017: 317) has pointed out that particularly early-career scholars "*face a continual dilemma of trying to step into the shoes of established planners while also finding exciting new ideas to help spatial planning evolve in different time and context.*"

As spatial development practices change swiftly, there is an urgent need to challenge the status quo in research on spatial development and reinvigorate fundamental theoretical discussions. Triggered by global issues ranging from economic crises, the Covid19 pandemic to climate change, as well as new state-market-citizen relations, spatial development practices develop at unprecedented speed. Scholars who, amidst these complexities, apply popular frameworks to yet another empirical case without reflecting on their theoretical foundation and potential evolution, contribute to stagnation in the spatial sciences. As Flyvbjerg 1996: 384) famously stated, (planning) scholars often have very clear objectives but do not know "*how to get there.*" Consequently, the theory-practice gap widens.

The changes which scholars desire in spatial development practices require concurrent evolution in planning thought (Özogul 2019). As an editor of the European Journal of Spatial Development, I would like to welcome theoretically strong articles that challenge some of the

most prominent theoretical frameworks in the spatial sciences. Inter- and transdisciplinary articles may be particularly well-equipped to uncover taken for granted theoretical assumptions on spatial development and provide new avenues for future research. While not compromising on quality and empirical richness, the European Journal of Spatial Development can provide a space for novel, unconventional, out-of-the-box theoretical discussions.

## **Mobilities and ecologies**

**M. Santangelo**, Politecnico di Torino

Spatial development and spatial planning may have different rationales, the first sort of measuring the “what happens, or should happen, somewhere” and the second aiming at organising the “how development happens, or should happen, somewhere”. It is, however, very interesting to see how both development processes and spatial plans are increasingly characterised, and described through, their recognizable inspiration or model. A vast literature on policy transfer and policy diffusion has focused on transfer mechanisms and arrangements (starting with the seminal contributions by Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996 and 2000) which may trigger a certain effect in terms of policy and plan design. At the same time, with a different perspective that focuses more on the constitutive role of socio-spatial contexts, policy mobility literature has allowed for a deeper analysis and understanding of the logics behind the policy/plan itself (Peck, 2011; Prince, 2017). It is, thus, important to track the wandering of policy instruments, ideas, models, arrangements, and practices that migrate from one part of the globe to another, following the need to find useful solutions to certain problems and/or to support the need of transnational institutions and organisations to provide ready to use solutions across and for the world (see, for instance: Parnell, 2016). The potential to discover new ways/models for planning and of addressing development issues is, however, also very much related to the questions of where from, and whom from, these policies/programmes/practices are coming and where, and to whom, they are directed: analysing the route as well as the origin and ending points. It would be very useful to unpack and examine further how such mobilities reinforce or challenge existing power relations, including those that have discussed the broader issue of global urbanism, and comparative gestures in the postcolonial debate (Leitner and Sheppard, 2015; Robinson and Roy, 2015; Robinson, 2016).

There is another, closely related, issue which would be important to have contributions about in the European Journal of Spatial Development: that of the challenges posed to spatial development and spatial planning by climate change and, in general, by the ecological/environmental issue. Attention to ecology, in particular, would help in unpacking and clarifying the continuously vague reference to sustainability (Long and Rice, 2019). The

main aim here would not be to come up with (another) shared and still vague definition of sustainability, rather the opposite: to focus on the challenges that contemporary processes of urbanisation face in a political ecology perspective (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2014; Tzaninis et al. 2021). To peer into spatial development processes and/or spatial planning practices, that is to put oneself in the position of dealing with experiences of tangible and empirically observable effects of transformation strategies that are widely recognized as aiming at the betterment of a certain space, may help to overcome the risk of perpetuating buzzwords and blurred concepts. This analytical, empirical, and methodological stance asks us to have a greater understanding of a space, including its scalar and global connections, its position not only from the physical point of view but also culturally, economically, ecologically.

## **The future perspectives of European integration and its implication for spatial governance and planning**

**G. Cotella**, Politecnico di Torino

The European Union (EU) integration process has always subsumed a spatial dimension, that became more explicit as time went by and finally found institutional justification with the introduction of the objective of economic and social cohesion in the Single European Act in 1987 and, more recently, with the additional of a territorial dimension to the latter (Lisbon Treaty, 2009) (Duhr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2010).

Since the late 1980s, planning scholars have started to explore the possible implications that this institutional process and the spatial concepts and actions that were emerging in its wake were having on spatial planning and territorial governance in the various European countries. To do so, they often borrowed concepts and theories from other disciplinary fields, such as public policy analysis and European studies (Knill and Lehmkuhl, 1999; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003). Since the late 1990s, a new branch of studies started to consolidate, exploring the boundaries of and the mechanisms behind a so-called ‘Europeanization of spatial planning’, as well as the changes that this process triggered in both Member States and European institutions (Janin Rivolin and Faludi, 2005; Giannakourou, 2012; Stead and Cotella, 2011; Adams et al., 2011; Cotella, 2020). Many of these contributions found their natural home on the pages of EJS, which, since its launch in 2003, had placed European spatial matters at the very centre of its scope (Gualini, 2008; Fritsch 2009; Janin Rivolin, 2010; Purkarthofer, 2016; Tulumello, 2016).

Whereas the process of European Integration has proceeded at a rather high pace throughout the 1990s and 2000s, leading to a deepening of competences and to an increase of the number of Member States from 12 to 28, in recent years its momentum braked abruptly. The consequences of the 2008 economic crisis, the troubled Brexit process and now the Covid-19 pandemic all contributed to put into question the EU integration model and, with it, the

European territorial governance model that the latter had consolidated through time. The place-based approach that was intended to guide the future EU cohesion policy (Barca, 2009) has progressively been side-lined in favour of a partial renationalization of the programming activities, as is even more palpable in the ongoing discussions concerning the governance model that will characterise the programming and implementation of the Next Generation EU recovery instrument display. The Enlargement schedule seems to have been placed on stand-by, overshadowed by more pressing issues, as the delays characterising the accession process of the Western Balkan candidate countries confirms (Berisha et al., 2021a). At the same time, the increasing influence exerted by China's going-out strategy and, more particularly, the implications that the launch of its Belt and Road Initiative and 16-1 Cooperation Platforms may have on EU conditionality (Sielker and Kaufmann, 2020), contribute to project further clouds on the future of European Integration.

In line with the path, it has followed since its foundations, the European Journal of Spatial Development warmly welcomes contributions that provide theoretical and practical insights on how these recent developments may influence the future of EU spatial development and planning policies, as well as on the implications that they entail for spatial governance and planning institutions and practices in the EU member countries and beyond.

## **Critical and comparative perspectives on (European) planning issues**

**E. Purkarthofer**, Aalto University

The European project is unique, ambitious and complex, and thus an unbelievably rich and fascinating subject for research. Planning scholars have also illuminated from various perspectives what the European Union means for spatial planning, territorial governance, and urban and regional development. Examples for such research themes include the spatial dimension and implications of EU Cohesion Policy (Rauhut, Sielker & Humer, 2021); the "Europeanisation" of planning in the member states through EU integration and exchange among planners (Faludi, 2014; Cotella & Dabrowski, 2021); the role of the EU for the creation of soft spaces in Europe (Faludi, 2010; Purkarthofer & Granqvist, 2021); and the meaning of Territorial Cohesion and the discourses inherent in European Spatial Planning (Waterhout, 2008; Faludi, 2013, 2016; Purkarthofer, 2018).

Although the importance of the EU for planning should not be overstated, as many planning tasks remain within the uncontested authority of the member states, its significance for spatial development across Europe cannot be denied. Only a few decades ago, hard borders between nation states were a severe obstacle to trade and travel, while nowadays many (though not all) borders are barely noticeable when moving from one EU member state to another. These changes are clearly reflected in spatial development patterns.

As an editor of the European Journal of Spatial Development, I would like the journal to continue to provide space for discussions on the European Union from the viewpoint of planning. However, such discussions should also take a nuanced and critical stance on the European ideas and the way they are operationalised. As an enthusiastic proponent of the European project myself, I sometimes feel subconsciously inclined to focus on the positives of many European initiatives. More critical research is needed that addresses how European initiatives are implemented by domestic actors and how agreements are reached at the European level. Questions regarding legitimacy and specifically on the role of citizens in the formulation of European strategies and the implementation of EU-funded projects should be explored in order to ensure inclusiveness and sustainability of European policies.

Another subject that aligns with the scope of EJSD is the comparison of planning systems, which has a long tradition in Europe (e.g. Davies et al., 1989; Newman & Thornley, 1996; CEC, 1997; Nadin & Stead, 2008; Muñoz Gielen & Tasan-Kok, 2010; Janin Rivolin, 2008, 2017; ESPON, 2018; Tulumello et al., 2020; Berisha et al., 2021b). In recent years, the conceptualisation and comparison of planning cultures has supplemented and questioned system-centred approaches (e.g. Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009; 2015; Reimer & Blotevogel, 2012; Purkarthofer, Humer & Mattila, 2021). Three perspectives on planning systems and planning cultures are especially promising avenues for further research: First, the self-conception of planners in specific countries, and the immediate role of planning education in shaping this image. Second, the variation of planning approaches (both formal and intangible) at sub-national planning scales, i.e. in regions and cities. Third, the drivers and obstacles to change, referring both to formal reforms and innovative practices within stable systems. Although European comparisons continue to be of relevance, EJSD could also foster an international debate on planning systems and cultures, in order to enable reflection and learning from other parts of the world.

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