

The Europeanization of Territorial Governance: results from an analysis across the board

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**Track 6: Governance**

## **The Europeanization of Territorial Governance: results from an analysis across the board**

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### **Abstract**

Since the 1990s developments in the territorial dimension of EU policies has progressively fostered member states' territorial governance and spatial planning systems to become one of the key components of EU integrated development strategies and policy delivery mechanisms. The extent to which this created a catalytic environment resulting in a so called 'Europeanization' of territorial governance and spatial planning is however subject of debate. Aiming at shedding light on this matter, the paper builds on the provisional results of the ESPON COMPASS project to investigate the role that the EU plays in shaping national territorial governance and spatial planning and vice versa. It does so by understanding territorial governance and spatial planning systems as 'institutional technologies' subject to continuous change and classifying the possible influences that link the EU and the Member States within the overall European territorial governance framework. In particular, it identifies three types of top-down influence from the EU to the country level (structural, instrumental, discursive top-down), two types of bottom-up influence through which the European countries potentially influence EU policy-making (discursive bottom-up, practical), and the horizontal influence through which countries potentially influence one another. The impact of these six types of influence is explored systematically for the 32 States of the ESPON area (28 EU Member States plus 4 neighbour countries), in order to reflect on the main commonalities and differences that characterise the Europeanization of territorial governance and (ii) on what this can suggest for the improvement of European territorial governance.

### **1. Introduction**

The ESPON COMPASS research project – launched in 2016 for a "Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe", and currently in the final stages<sup>1</sup> – provides for a structured overview of investigations, on the one hand, to compare the state of territorial governance and spatial planning systems in 32 European countries<sup>2</sup> and, on the other, to understand how the policies of the European Union (EU) contribute to the change of these systems, with particular attention to the last 15-20 years. This last objective of the research was set by attempting to reconcile the scientific evidence in terms of 'Europeanization' with the explicit request of the client of a 'dynamic' approach to the analysis, that is to say such as to allow future updates of the observed phenomena.

Based on a survey that has involved 32 national experts of respective territorial governance and spatial planning systems through detailed questionnaires, providing for quantitative degrees of perception supported by qualitative evidence and observations, this analysis led to the following findings:

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this contribution take part in the research unit of the Politecnico di Torino, responsible for the "2.3 – EU Policies" work package of the project, which is coordinated by Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. The authors are particularly grateful to Bianca Seardo for the processing of maps included in this paper. The other members of the research unit to thank are Erblin Berisha, Elena Pede and Alys Solly.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the 28 EU Member States, the research is extended to the 4 States that co-finance the activities of the ESPON (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion) platform, namely Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

1. The systems of territorial governance and spatial planning in Europe operate within a broader context of European territorial governance. Despite the absence of formal EU competence, Europeanisation in this policy field takes place through various and simultaneous processes of influence: (a) the download of rules, approaches and ideas from the EU to national systems; (b) the upload of ideas and approaches from the national systems into the EU governance process; and (c) the mutual exchange of approaches between these systems through EU cooperation platforms.
2. In the 2000-2016 period, the EU exerted significant influence on national systems of territorial governance and spatial planning. In particular:
  - i. The impact of EU legislation is rather uniform across the systems, albeit with some differences in its application. The most relevant impacts are in the fields of Environment and Energy;
  - ii. The impact of spatially relevant EU policies is more variegated. Cohesion Policy is the most influential, while other policies have more moderate impacts. Unsurprisingly, the higher the financial support associated to each policy or allocated to a country, the greater its impact on national systems;
  - iii. The impact of EU discourse channelled through guideline documents, concepts and ideas is even more differentiated. In general, EU mainstream development strategies (such as Europe 2020) have been more influential than specific spatial strategies (such as the EU Territorial Agendas).
3. In the same period, the national systems of territorial governance and spatial planning influenced the EU governance process, albeit to a lesser extent. In particular:
  - i. The impact of national discourses within the EU arenas of debate has been mostly fluctuant and depending on how engagement and authoritative the individual domestic actors have been. In general, old member states exert a higher influence, but some eastern European countries are increasingly influential;
  - ii. The impact of domestic practices as source of inspiration is sporadic. This influence appears limited by the intrinsic difficulty of spontaneous learning within a highly heterogeneous framework.
4. Finally, the exchange of ideas between territorial governance and spatial planning systems as part of European territorial cooperation offers interesting insights but remains difficult to detect.
5. Overall, the institutional complexities and difficulties of European territorial governance depend on the high differentiation that characterise the national systems of territorial governance and spatial planning. Amongst other considerations, this may suggest to establish an institutional recognition (which is currently missing) of the role of territorial governance and spatial planning systems in the achievement of the EU objectives.

The above results are discussed in the rest of the document, retracing the salient phases of the research carried out. In particular, section 2 illustrates the adopted approach for the analysis. Section 3 explores the influence of EU legislation, policy and discourse on national systems. Section 4 investigates the influence of domestic concepts and practices on the shaping of European territorial governance as a whole. Section 5 summarises the findings on the horizontal influence across the national systems. Finally, section 6 proposes an overall typology of territorial governance and spatial planning systems with respect to European territorial governance and the concluding considerations.

## **2. The conceptual model**

Based on the outcomes of an already vast interpretative literature on the phenomenon of Europeanization (among others, Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999; Börzel & Risse, 2000; Olsen, 2002; Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003; Wislade, Yuill & Mendez, 2003; Radaelli, 2004; Lenschow, 2006), the research has approached the European territorial governance (Janin Rivolin, 2010; Zonneveld et al., 2012) as a continuous process of exchanges of rules, policies and ideas in the field of territorial governance between the EU and the Member States, without neglecting the exchange horizontal between the States favoured by the cooperation platforms set up by the EU.

The conceptual model adopted (Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015) led to the systematic identification of possible influences that link the EU and the Member States within the overall framework of European territorial governance (Figure 1). This allowed for categorizing the possible EU influences on the systems of territorial governance and spatial planning within the overall European territorial governance

framework. One can identify three types of top-down influence from the EU to the country level, two types of bottom-up influence through which European countries potentially influence EU policy-making, and one horizontal influence through which European countries potentially influence one another (Table 1, Figure 2).

Figure 1. Relations between the EU and Member States in the framework of European territorial governance (source: adapted on Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015).

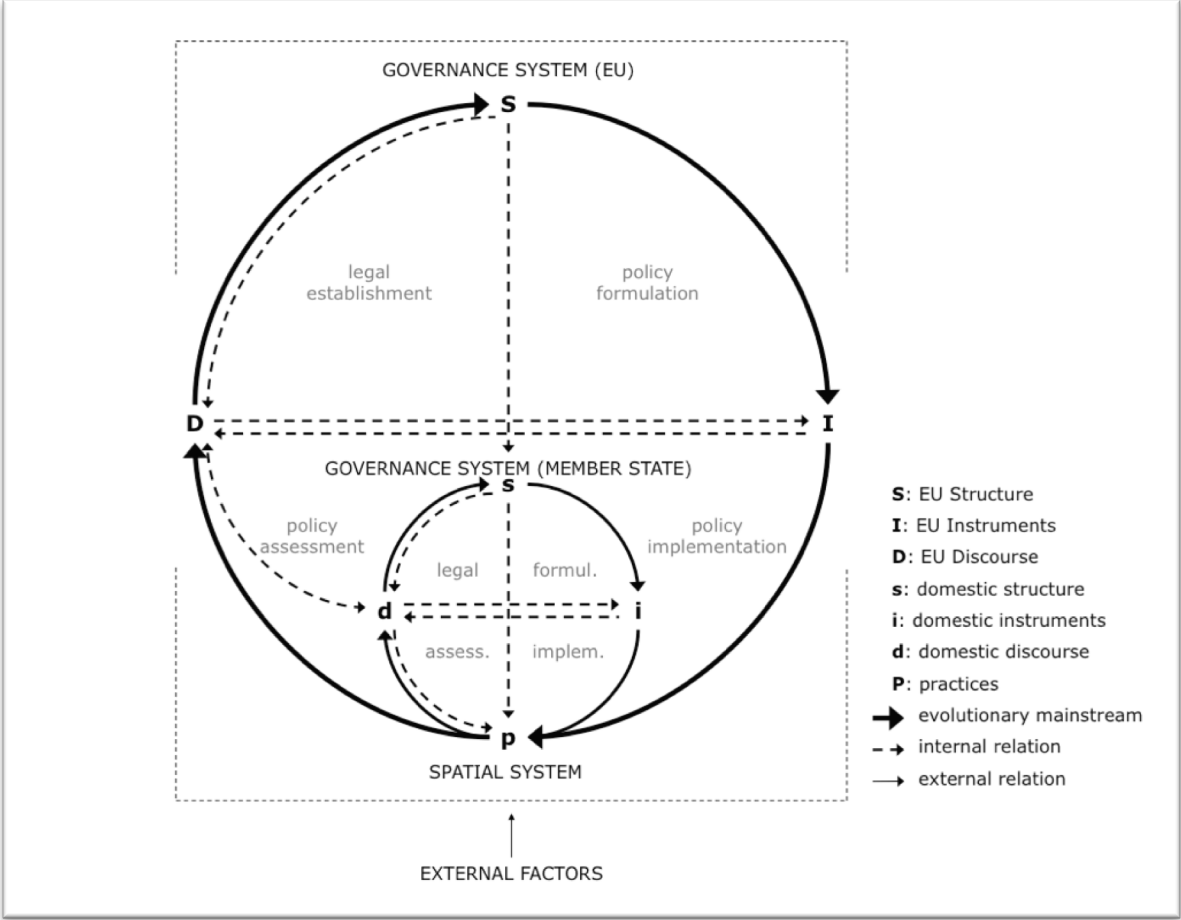
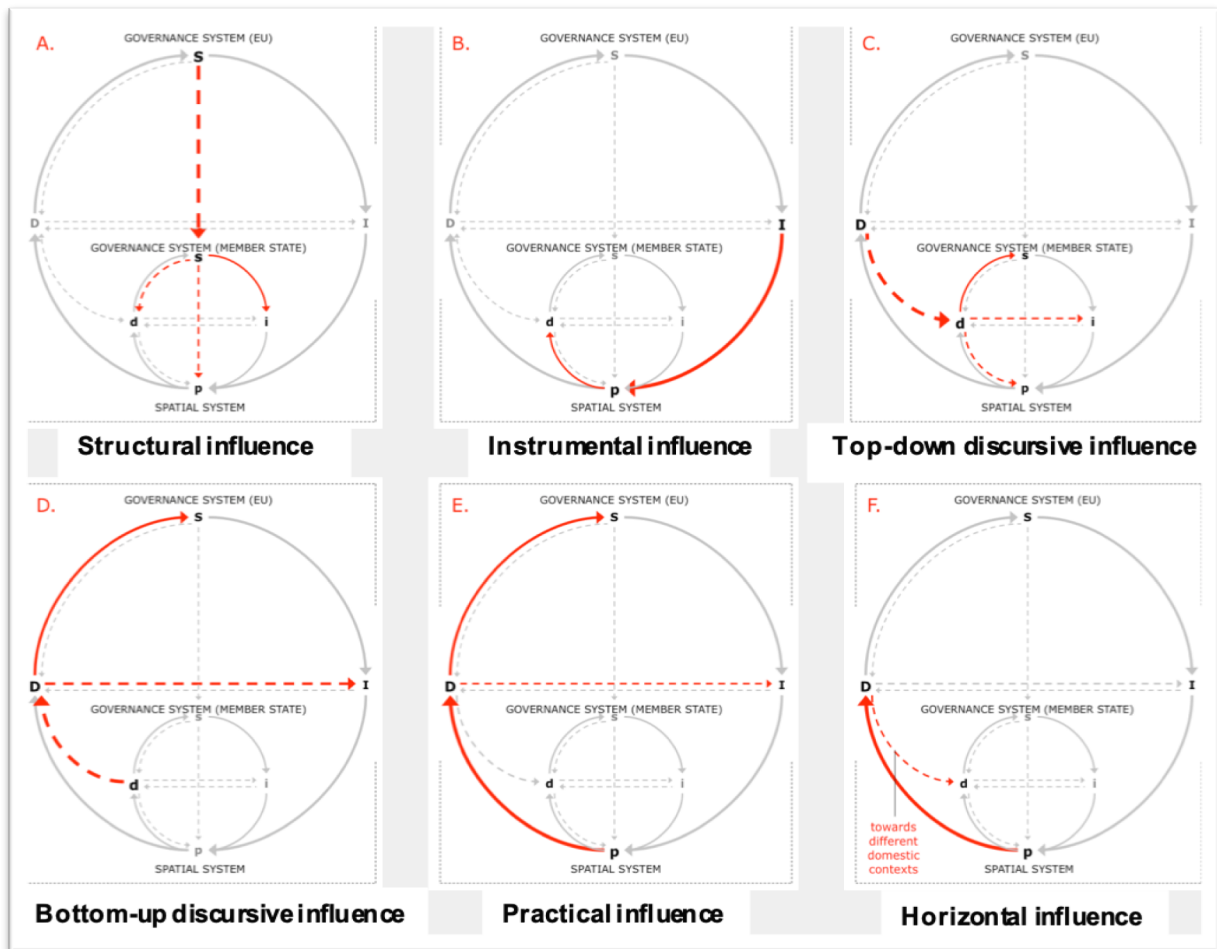


Table 1. Typology of influences in European territorial governance (source: adapted on Cotella and Janin Rivolin (2015).

Type of influence	Direction	Driver of change	Mechanism of change
A. Structural	Top-down (EU → Member States)	Rules	Legal conditionality
B. Instrumental		Funds	Economic conditionality
C. Top-down discursive	Bottom-up (Member States → EU)	Expert knowledge	Cognitive persuasion
D. Bottom-up discursive		Expert knowledge	Cognitive persuasion
E. Practical	Horizontal (Member State → Member State(s))	Interactive knowledge	Social learning
F. Horizontal		Interactive knowledge	Social learning

The six types of influence indicated were systematically explored in the 32 States involved in the analysis, through detailed questionnaires submitted to respective national experts, in order to understand the mechanisms and impacts of Europeanization in the field of territorial governance and to understand more about the European territorial governance.

Figure 2. Representation of top-down (A, B and C), bottom-up (D and E) and horizontal (F) Europeanization influences (source: adapted on Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015)



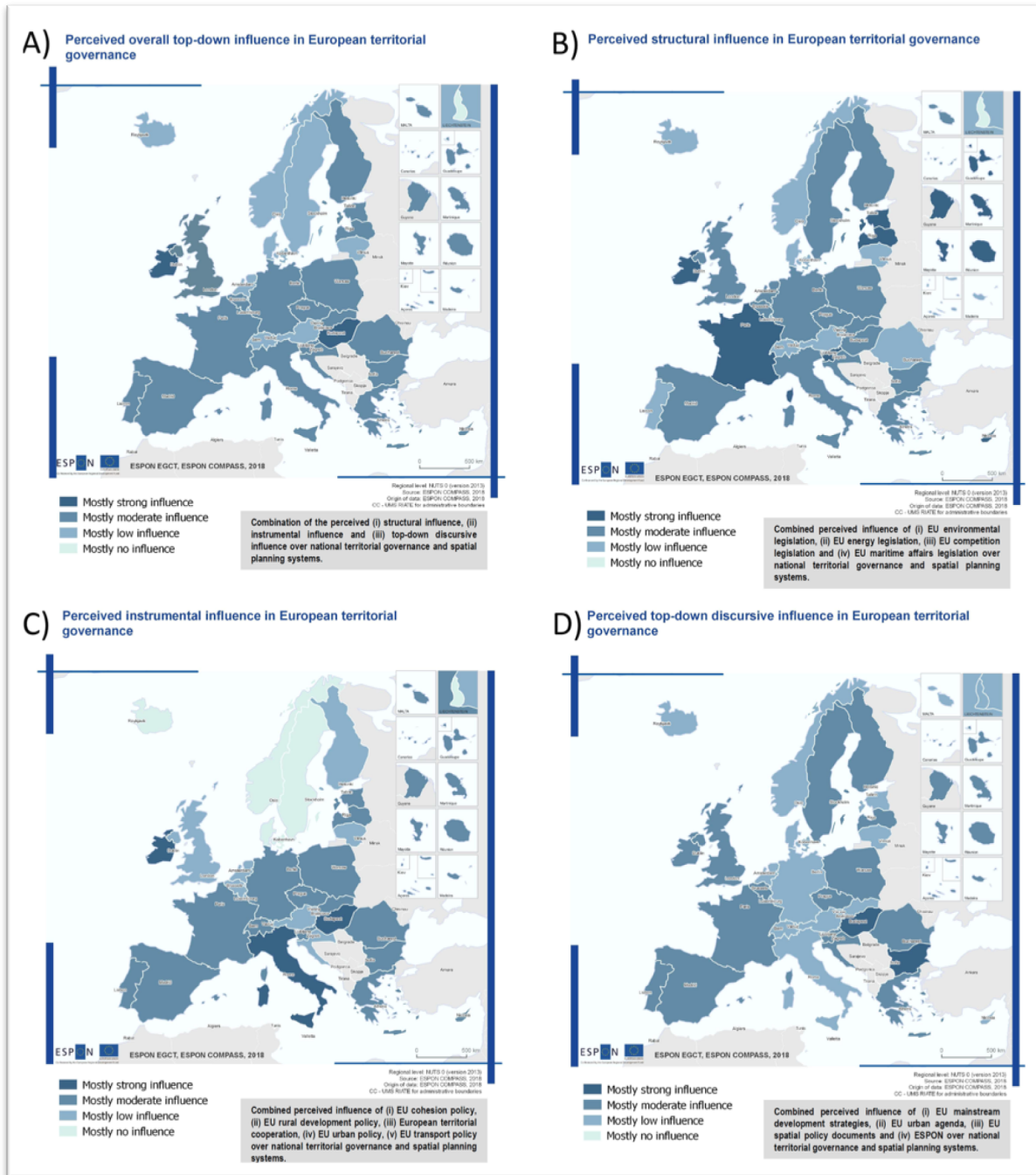
### 3. The influence of the EU on territorial governance and spatial planning systems

This section summarizes the COMPASS project results with respect to the influence of the EU on national territorial governance and spatial planning systems (Figure 3), through the impact of EU legislation (3.1), of EU policies (3.2) and of the EU discourse (3.3).

#### 3.1 The impact of EU legislation (structural influence)

Despite the absence of EU spatial planning competences, the analysis shows that EU legislation in other fields indirectly affects national territorial governance and spatial planning systems. Environmental legislation has been by far the most influential. Its impact is evaluated as strong or moderate by 28 of the 32 country experts, and its significance increased over time in 22 cases. Eastern European countries show deeper and faster changes in terms of the adjustment to or creation of new spatial planning tools and procedures, and the modification of the governance structure and mechanisms. This is mostly resulting from transposing and adopting the *acquis communautaire* during preparation for EU accession.

Figure 3. Perceived top-down influence in European territorial governance (authors' elaboration).



The actual changes in territorial governance and spatial planning systems are rather similar among the countries, as they have to follow the requirements of the EU legislation. The introduction of environmental impact assessment<sup>3</sup> and strategic environmental assessment<sup>4</sup> procedures are the most important drivers of change. The introduction of specific impact assessment procedures in relation to Natura 2000<sup>5</sup> sites is also often reported. EU legislation stimulated the introduction of a large number of different types of sectoral plans within or strongly related to the spatial planning system at all levels. Among the impacts mentioned by the experts there is the change of the territorial governance setting, for example, with the creation of new territorially-based public authorities (EL, FR, IT, NO, PT) and/or the introduction of new administrative areas and boundaries, such as river basin districts and newly designated natural protection areas (FR, IE, IT, NO, NL, PT). Experts also report indirect influence in

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/index_en.htm).

<sup>4</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/sea-legalcontext.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm).

the process of redistribution of competences among planning levels and between and within ministries (ES). Moreover, they reported the rise of community participation (EL, ES, SK), multi-stakeholder involvement in planning (BE, ES), and growing importance of monitoring processes (EL, FR). The most significant reported challenge concerns the introduction of restrictions due to the designation of new protected areas, which can hamper development potentials (EE, FR, HU). Similarly, difficulties emerge when it comes to coordinating the implementation of different environmental policies e.g. 'wind turbines that endanger natural habitats' (FR). The implementation of EU environmental legislation may create disputes that require administrative solutions in which spatial planning plays an important role (EE, EL, FR).

Energy legislation is strongly or moderately influential in 19 countries, and growing significance reported for the majority of contexts (23). Most experts from eastern and Mediterranean countries (except HR, MT, LT and PT) describe the influence of EU energy legislation as moderately relevant at least and increasing. However, experts from North-Western countries hardly acknowledge any impact of energy legislation (except DE, FR, IE, SE). Where an impact is reported, it concerns the introduction or review of existing national energy plans and strategies and reshaping of national policy targets, as well as a devolution of energy related competences towards the sub-national and municipal/inter-municipal level.

Competition legislation influence is assessed as strong or moderate only in 10 countries. Such influence is often reported as growing (12) or steady (16) and mostly concerns spatial planning at the local level, which has to do with the integration of the directive concerning public procurement<sup>6</sup> into national law. In the Eastern and Mediterranean countries, these requirements have an indirect influence on planning at all levels. This concerns in particular practices that involve public sector purchases of private services and products in relation to planning and building. French and British experts report the creation of *ad hoc* agencies with important statutory, planning-related responsibilities and to which governments outsource operations. Finally, a small group of experts from Northern Europe pointed out the significance of maritime issues and, in particular, of the Directive Establishing a Framework for Maritime Spatial Planning<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, the collected evidence shows that EU legislation, especially in the fields of environment and energy, has produced relevant impacts on national territorial governance and spatial planning and such influence has been increasing over time in almost all countries.

### **3.2 The impact of EU policy (instrumental influence)**

The EU influence the national systems through spatially relevant policies and funding instruments. Among them, Cohesion Policy stands out as the most significant driver of change, as its influence is strong or moderate in 21 countries. Unsurprisingly, such influence is related to the amount of funding delivered: experts report low (5) or no influence (6) for North and North-Western Europe, while experts from Eastern European (except LT) and Mediterranean countries, to which most Cohesion Policy funding flows, report a strong (7) or moderate (14) influence. The same holds for Ireland (major beneficiary prior to eastward EU enlargement) and Germany (where EU funds are important for the eastern landers). In most countries this influence is increasing (15) or constant (16); a diminishing influence is reported only in the UK.

The substantial leeway to determine the institutional arrangements for Cohesion Policy implementation left room for experimentation. Some countries delegated the responsibility for Regional Operational Programmes' to the elected subnational authorities (ES, FR, IT, PL, BE, DE, UK). Others created 'statistical' or 'programming' regions and delegated implementation to special-purpose bodies, comprising representatives of multiple territorial units or to private or semi-public agencies (IE, NL, PT, SE, SK). Finally, a third group of countries manages cohesion funds only through National Operational Programmes, either due to their limited size (CY, EE, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, SI) or political preference (AT, DK, FI, HU, RO)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement_en).

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime\\_spatial\\_planning\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime_spatial_planning_en).

<sup>8</sup> This outcome overlaps and further substantiates the results of the ESPON ReSSI overview of regional governance regimes in Europe (<https://www.espon.eu/ressi>).



Cohesion Policy has stimulated significant change where the 'goodness of fit' between its framework and national institutional settings was lower (Eastern and Mediterranean countries). A key example is the creation of regional level bodies for implementing structural funds (e.g. BG, HR, HU, IE, PL, PT), the introduction of coordination and partnership platforms at national and regional levels, or of strategic, multi-annual regional development planning documents at all levels. In most Eastern and Mediterranean countries Cohesion Policy has stimulated re-engagement with the practice of planning, although often limited to the purpose of managing EU funds (CZ, ES, IT, PL, SK). In some countries, this triggered the introduction of national and regional strategic planning instruments to steer and coordinate implementation of Cohesion Policy (e.g. PT). However, in most cases these instruments are not explicitly spatial, rather focusing on planning investment and technical assistance (IT) or specific planning tasks (e.g. urban regions in Austria).

Among the challenges, various experts reported that for economically lagging regions administering large allocations of EU funding within limited time requires significant institutional capacity. Where the latter is low, spatial planning concerns are marginalised in favour of more pragmatic approaches. Only in a few countries experts detected alignment between spatial planning and programming for Cohesion Policy (FR, PL, PT).

Concerning rural development policy, experts argued that it has been strongly (6) or moderately (12) significant in influencing territorial governance and spatial planning, especially in Mediterranean and Eastern countries (except EE, HR, LT and RO). North-Western and Nordic states' experts reported little or no influence (except BE, IE and DE). The influence is reported as increasing (10) or constant (19). The relevance of the agricultural sector in the various countries does not affect the identified trend, as the influence over spatial planning occurs mostly through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)<sup>9</sup> and, to a lesser extent, through the European Agriculture Guarantee Fund (EAGF)<sup>10</sup>. Whereas a weak coordination between spatial planning and rural development policy was indicated, various experts reported the creation of new government bodies and new spatial planning tools. Rural development policy is reported to have had important spatial effects, for example, decreasing the share of unused land (LT), protecting agricultural areas (LV), introducing rural space issues in spatial planning (IT), supporting or restoring territorial diversity through specific financial tools, such as agro-environmental schemes (IE, PL). Finally, some experts stressed the impact of the LEADER community initiative<sup>11</sup> in enabling cross-boundary working on rural development projects, and the potential for Community Led Local Developments<sup>12</sup> to exert a similar influence.

As for European Territorial Cooperation<sup>13</sup>, most experts reported only moderate influence (13) on territorial governance and spatial planning (strong only in FR, IT and LV and, surprisingly, rather low or not relevant in LU, NL and Nordic countries). The impact has been increasing (16) or constant (14) since 2000 and contributed to 'reduce the distance' among bordering communities along the EU internal and external borders, and to shape transnational and inter-institutional partnerships. Moreover, some experts reported the introduction of cross-border planning tools: inter-institutional partnerships at national level (IT), functional areas (PL), general regional policy impacts (CH, HU) or sector specific policies on cross-border transport infrastructure (SI) and environmental cooperation (BG).

EU urban policy has had a moderate influence over national territorial governance and spatial planning in 13 countries and strong in only 3 (HU, IT, RO). Influence is increasing (16) or constant (12) almost everywhere, with most experts from 'old' member states highlighting the importance of the URBAN Community Initiative<sup>14</sup> and the loss of momentum registered after its cancellation and the introduction of JESSICA<sup>15</sup> in 2007. Innovations related to spatial planning include the introduction of urban regeneration plans and programmes that either take advantage of EU resources or mirror EU programmes through national funds (EL, IT, PT). EU urban policy contributes to the widespread introduction in local development strategies of a number of issue: energy efficiency, sustainable mobility

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<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020_en).

<sup>10</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-funding\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-funding_en). This is mostly a consequence of the fact that EAGF is directly subsidizing farmers on the basis of the size of their farm and other criteria that do not have any 'spatial' dimension.

<sup>11</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/publi/fact/leader/2006\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/publi/fact/leader/2006_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/).

<sup>14</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/urban2/urban/initiative/src/frame1.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/urban2/urban/initiative/src/frame1.htm).

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/special-support-instruments/jessica/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/special-support-instruments/jessica/).



and sustainable urban development in general (CZ, EE, IE, IT, LV, RO), city compactness and reduction of soil consumption (CZ), heritage preservation (LV and other eastern countries). Overall, EU urban policy promoted a renewed interest in urban policies and projects in most countries. It also contributed to introducing a programming approach to urban issues, increasing the number and range of actors involved, promoting co-financing and the integration of resources for urban interventions.

EU transport policy<sup>16</sup> has only had a moderate influence over national spatial planning systems (15 countries), with only Malta indicating a strong impact. Such influence is, however, either growing (15) or constant (14) in all countries, mostly as a consequence of the implementation of the TEN-T Networks<sup>17</sup>. There are reports of a stronger involvement of strategic planning in transport issues, but overall spatial planning instruments have been affected only marginally. Examples include adjustment of the national infrastructure plan (IT), revision of the transport legislation (FI), and the adoption of the transport corridors by various levels of spatial planning strategies (HR). Challenges to infrastructure development related to EU transport policy have led to introduction of new planning instruments (e.g. EE). Urban mobility planning has in some cases been added to local land-use planning (e.g. RO).

Finally, experts from most of the countries that joined the EU since 2004 reported the important role played by the pre-accession process in influencing their territorial governance and spatial planning systems. Whereas such impact is hard to distinguish from the one exerted by the transposition of EU sectoral legislation, the accession surely increased the pace of such transposition. Pre-accession negotiations catalysed regionalisation processes in the majority of countries, as the establishment of regional authorities was seen as a precondition for the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and, especially, the future implementation of Cohesion Policy. The most relevant impact concerning spatial planning instruments was the introduction of new plans and development documents at the national and sub-national levels. Such proliferation of regional development documents resulted in the consolidation of a development-orientated attitude in line with the EU programming paradigm in the national and regional administration and in an increasing strategic planning activity at all territorial levels.

Overall, the impact of EU policies over territorial governance and spatial planning systems is more heterogeneous than that of EU legislation. EU Cohesion Policy is reported to have the highest influence. On that basis, a recommendation can be made to emphasise the role of this policy as a planning tool (see Chapter 7), which could, in turn, make the influence of that policy even stronger. By contrast, other EU policy fields tend to have a moderate impact. The impact is generally geographically differentiated and appears (at least partly) correlated to the magnitude of financial resources delivered to each country.

### 3.3 The impact of the EU discourse (top-down discursive influence)

Apart from the more direct impact of legislation and policies, the EU may influence national territorial governance and spatial planning systems by conveying concepts, ideas and guidelines related to territorial development within more or less structured arenas of debate. The study shows that the most relevant of these arenas is the high level political negotiation among the member states. Over time, this negotiation led to the development of a set of EU development strategies. These documents are considered by experts as highly (7) or moderately (12) significant drivers of change for domestic spatial planning discourse, and their impact has been usually reported as constant (20) or increasing (10) since 2000. The most frequently cited strategies are the Lisbon Strategy<sup>18</sup> and the *Europe 2020 Strategy*<sup>19</sup>. Generally, national policies seem to demonstrate a twofold relationship with the issues associated with these strategies, either through explicit reference (BG, MT) or by means of generic compliance in terms of aims and goals (NL). Direct influence is reported mostly on national policies (EL, MT, PT, SI). Whereas the impact mainly concerns the scope of strategic documents (FI, DE), in some countries it also led to changes in legislation (ES), in the overall territorial governance framework (LU), and in the definition of national planning strategies aiming at funding allocation (HU, AT). The latter could happen at the expense of regional or local specific needs (SK).

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<sup>16</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/transport\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/transport_en).

<sup>17</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure_en).

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm).

<sup>19</sup> The Europe 2020 Strategy ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en)) is generally seen to be more applicable for regional development approaches.

The progressive consolidation of the EU Urban Agenda<sup>20</sup> was described as highly (3) or moderately (14) relevant, with usually increasing (16) trend since 2000 (constant in 11 cases). Compared to the other discursive arenas, the EU Urban Agenda has more tangible local impacts (BE, BG, IT, SE, SI), through the inspiration of integrated urban regeneration plans, inter-municipal partnerships, or sustainable urban strategies.<sup>21</sup> EU Urban Agenda can impact upon national, regional and local spatial plans such as sustainable urban mobility, urban regeneration and social inclusion (PT). Most experts agree that the most influential document in this concern has been the *Leipzig Charter on sustainable cities*,<sup>22</sup> followed by the *Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment*<sup>23</sup>.

The EU documents with the most explicit spatial focus – namely ESDP<sup>24</sup>, the Territorial Agendas of the European Union<sup>25</sup> and the *Green paper on Territorial Cohesion*<sup>26</sup> – are considered highly influential in only 4 cases (BG, HU, PL, RO). Moreover, their influence is decreasing (8) or constant (15) at best. Whereas the ESDP aims and options still inspire planning activities in various countries (e.g. IT, SK, RO, EL, FI, PT), the Green paper on Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agendas are generally less known. Despite being often referred to in strategic documents at all spatial scales, they had hardly produced any impacts (AT, DE, ES, MT, SE).

The ESPON programme is reported to have had a growing (8) or constant (16) impact on national territorial governance and spatial planning, but this impact remains rather low (21 countries). ESPON is seen by many as a source of inspiration that, indirectly, led to specific domestic episodes of innovation (e.g. the introduction of Functional Urban Areas in CZ and HU). ESPON projects addressing the international, strategic position of countries are particularly appreciated for providing wider contextual information useful for governments in reshaping linkages with other countries (NL, CZ, PL).

When it comes to the influence of specific EU spatial concepts and ideas, a number of trends emerge. Issues revolving around the strengthening of ecological structures and cultural resources as added values for development are reported to be the most influential over time, having often being translated into concrete policy guidelines and regulations and in spatial plans (PT). Another issue that gained momentum is the development of new forms of urban-rural partnership and governance (e.g. FI). Numerous experts stressed that some themes were already present in national debates and policies before they were consolidated in the EU spatial planning discourse, as for instance polycentric development that had been implicitly or explicitly at the basis of various national and regional strategies (e.g. DE, EL, IT, NL, PL, SE). On the contrary, other concepts emerged and gained importance in the period 2000-2016, as for instance territorial Integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions (e.g. BG, FI, HU, ES) and trans-European risk management, that inspired new national policy documents on climate and adaption in most EU countries as well as in non-Member states (NO).

Finally, most country experts reported that, whereas the influence of the EU discourse over national academic spatial planning debates had been rather high (3) or moderate (16) and generally growing since 2000 (10), this had not been mirrored by relevant change in planning education or practice (with respectively 16 and 15 experts indicating low or no influence). Lower impact is visible in the Nordic and North-Western states, while in Mediterranean countries EU spatial planning had become an autonomous field of research.

Overall, the collected evidence shows that the national impact of EU concepts and ideas is highly differentiated. It mostly depends on the voluntary nature of the mechanisms behind this type of influence. EU mainstream development strategies are the most influential, having a direct impact on the development of EU policies and on funds distribution.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda>.

<sup>21</sup> However, it is hard to say if the influence depends more on the persuasion capacity of the discourse itself or on the funding instruments for urban intervention put in place by the EU.

<sup>22</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/themes/urban/leipzig\\_charter.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/themes/urban/leipzig_charter.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l28171>.

<sup>24</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum_en.pdf).

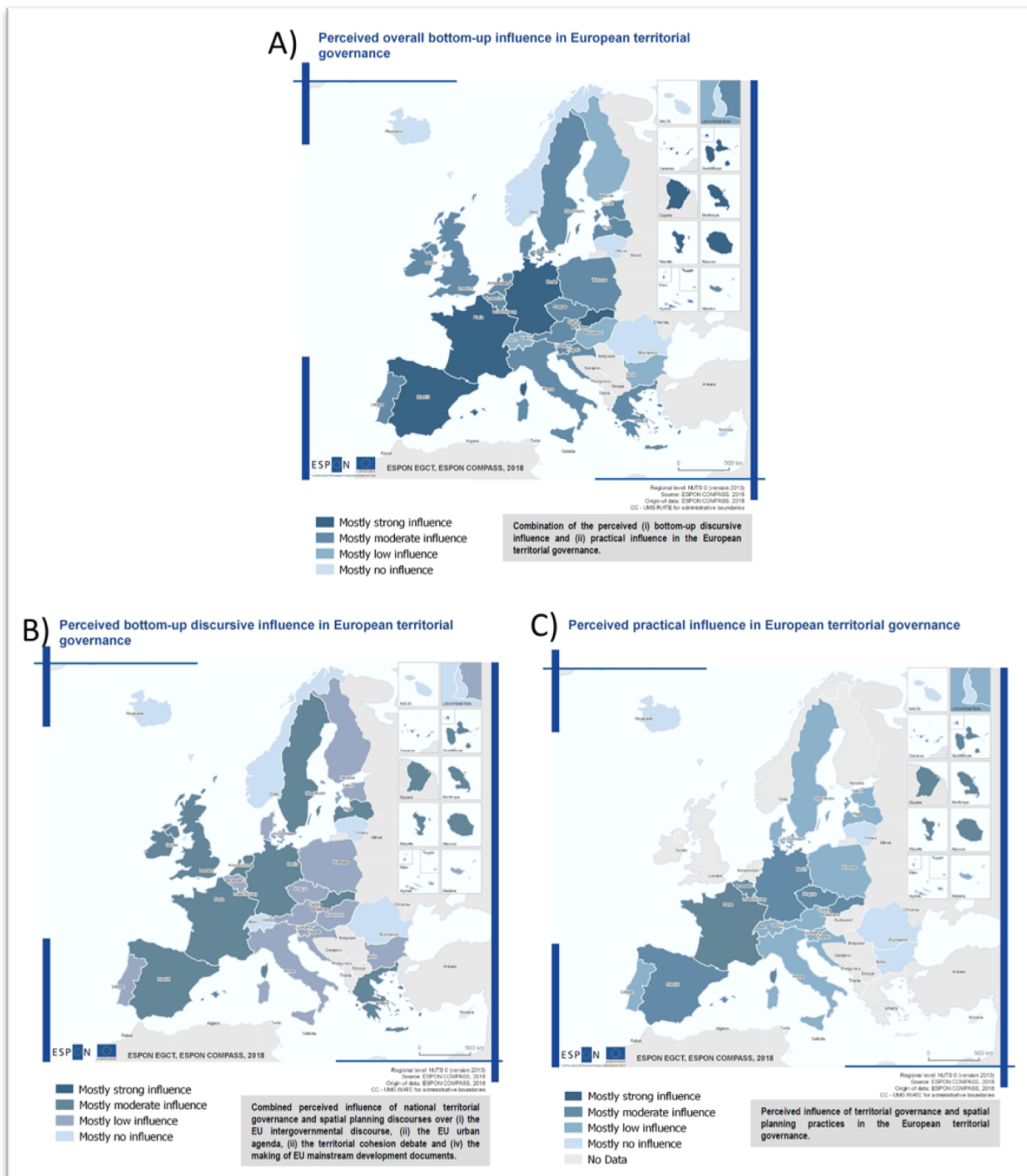
<sup>25</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/territorial\\_agenda\\_leipzig2007.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/territorial_agenda_leipzig2007.pdf), [http://www.nweurope.eu/media/1216/territorial\\_agenda\\_2020.pdf](http://www.nweurope.eu/media/1216/territorial_agenda_2020.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/consultation/terco/paper\\_terco\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/paper_terco_en.pdf).

## 4. The influence of territorial governance and spatial planning systems at the EU level

This section summarizes the COMPASS project results with respect to the influence of the national territorial governance and spatial planning systems on the EU (Figure 4), through the impact of the national discourses (4.1) and of domestic practices (4.2).

Figure 4. Perceived bottom-up influence in European territorial governance (authors' elaboration).



### 4.1 The impact of national discourses (bottom-up discursive influence)

The ways in which national actors engage with the arenas where the EU planning discourse is developed matters for understanding how member countries influence the development of European territorial governance. The level of influence depends on various factors. One of them is a leading role

of a country on specific issues or the themes prioritised by countries during their turn in the rotating Presidency of the EU. In some cases, the territorial focus during the presidency has been limited (DK, IT, LT, CZ, SK, EE), with the attention being on other priorities (for instance, DK and IT primarily focused on growth and jobs, CZ and LT on geopolitical and economics issues). When countries were more active on territorial issues, the main focus was on urban competitiveness (FI), the promotion of endogenous growth in peripheral (especially coastal) areas (CY, GR), circular economy (MT), urban-rural relations (ES), cross-border cooperation (FI, PT, LU), integrated territorial approaches (PT, NL), polycentrism (NL, DE), small and medium cities (LT) and the territorialisation of Cohesion Policy (PL).

The majority of experts indicated a strong (3) or moderate (12) influence of countries' actors over the EU intergovernmental discourse, this influence being either constant (14), decreasing (4) or swinging (11). Some countries were the most influential when hosting the EU presidency during the process elaboration of the Territorial Agenda (BE, DE, LUX). On the contrary, other countries that had a great deal of influence during the ESDP process, were more passive in this process (AT, FR, NL). Mediterranean countries exerted a strong or moderate influence in the consolidation of insularity (GR) and climate change (PT) issues in the Territorial Agenda 2020, as well as a rather important role in the construction of the ESDP vision on the valorization of cultural heritage (IT, ES, PT). Northern countries reportedly had a lower influence (except SE). Various Eastern countries actively participated in the Territorial Agenda 2020 preparation (CZ, SI, SK and especially HU and PL during their respective EU presidency) and tried to strengthen the territorial dimension of the EU main stream discourse (see: Böhme et al., 2011).

A number of experts reported a strong (2) or a moderate (12) influence of their countries' actors on the development of the EU Urban Agenda, and such influence has been generally increasing (5) or constant (18) over time. Three experts stressed that the debate on EU urban policy has concerned mostly the academic institutions rather than the government levels (ES, HU, RO). At the same time, in some national contexts not only the academia but also the government and the professional associations showed interest in engaging in the development of the document. Specific issues 'uploaded' by the countries into the Urban Agenda concern sustainable urban development (SE) and risk management (IT); poverty and urban exclusion (GR, BE, IE, IT), especially in southern Europe due to the economic and social crisis that has had its worst impacts in urban areas; multi-level governance (BE); financial instruments (LU); small and medium cities (LT); urban mobility, housing, or air quality (CZ).

When it comes to the debate on territorial cohesion, a total of 12 countries are reported to have had strong (ES, PL) or moderate influence (BG, FR, HU, IT, LU, LV, NL, SL, SK). The engagement with the territorial cohesion debate is generally constant, decreasing in some cases (NL, SE). Some countries (DE, BE, AU, ES) had been calling for a further detailing of the concept, to make it more operational and flexible in integrating domestic territorial objectives. Various north-western countries contributed to the discussion by emphasizing the importance of economic competitiveness (FI, S, NL), while southern and eastern countries stressed the importance of linking territorial cohesion to place-based policy (IT, HU, RO).

Only minor influence was exerted in the high-level EU political debate that lead to the making of EU mainstream documents, being politically driven and taking place in arenas where planning topics are rather marginal. Overall, the domestic actors in most countries are only marginally engaged with the development of the EU spatial planning debate, with some notable exceptions. Generally speaking, 'old' member states seem to play a stronger role, while at the same time some of the 'new' are catching up quickly (e.g. CZ, PL, SL).

#### **4.2 The impact of domestic practices (practical influence)**

Whereas influence over EU policy-making may also come directly from the practice, only 18 country experts assessed such influence as at least partly relevant. Admittedly, major problems may be related to the challenges of 'learning by doing' in a weakly institutionalised context and in the episodic character of changes occurring only when a particular domestic practice gains attention in the EU discourse and eventually influences policy-making.

Only a few of the experts report relevant examples of such influence. For instance, the Swedish expert highlighted the role played by the country's approach to functional regions in progressively contributing

to the consolidation of the functional regions approach into the EU documents with a spatial focus and, then, as a basis for the delivery of EU policies. Similarly, the place-based approach that lies at the basis of the present EU Cohesion Policy programming period is reported as having taken inspiration from Belgian (and especially Flemish) practices. Similarly, the activity of Fabrizio Barca as special advisor for the then EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübner, had contributed to enrich such approach with the attention for local development conditions that had permeated the Italian development approach since the 1980s. Whereas territorial cohesion clearly has its roots in the French *aménagement du territoire*, the French expert highlights that such approach had influenced the development of the integrated project management approach that lies at the basis of the EU urban policy, from the Urban Community Initiative until the recent Integrated Territorial Investments<sup>27</sup>. The latter is mentioned also by the Polish expert, as partly inspired by domestic practices brought forward by the former Ministry of Regional Development.

Luxembourg approach to cross-border planning within the Greater Region<sup>28</sup> is reported to have influenced the development of European Territorial Cooperation policies since the foundation of the FR-DE-LU spatial planning commission in 1971. Recent influence on European Territorial Cooperation is also reported in Slovakia, where cross-border collaboration units are subjects of public law and served as an inspiration for the development of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation<sup>29</sup>. Also France had lobbied in favour of this tool, and in particular of the formal inclusion of national governments into the latter. That said, the Dutch set the basis for the development of Territorial Impact Assessment procedures at the EU level, as well as the shaping of the Habitat Directive through their domestic ecosystem approach centred on the relation between habitats and buffer zones surrounding habitats. The Czech experts reported influence of the country's territorial system of ecological sustainability, developed since the end of the 1980s, on the development of the Natura 2000 network.

Overall, the practical influence appears by far the hardest to individuate. This may be due to the difficulty to understand what specific elements were taken on board at what stage of the EU policy-making activity, and for what reason.

## 5. The horizontal influence between territorial governance and spatial planning systems

A last type of influence focuses on the impact that practices developed in one country may exert over territorial governance and spatial planning in another country. Here the EU plays a neutral role, mainly establishing cooperation platforms that allows for knowledge exchange among domestic actors, for instance through territorial cooperation initiatives. Evidence of this type of influence are only partially reported by the COMPASS experts and remains hard to identify. For example, a generally increasing influence of territorial Integration in cross-border and transnational regions is reported to favour an increasing transfer of know-how and practices among local policy-makers during the 200-2016 period.

Since the COMPASS data brought little insight on the role of territorial cooperation for horizontal influence between national systems, it is worth to bring up here insights from previous research indicating the importance of territorial cooperation for facilitating knowledge transfer and exchange of 'good practice' in territorial governance and spatial planning. This potential of territorial cooperation to trigger learning points to the need to strengthen the role of spatial planning in this EU policy. In particular, the ESPON TERCO project<sup>30</sup> showed that the horizontal influence was the strongest when territorial cooperation was based on simpler forms of collaboration contributing to trust-building (e.g. exchanging experience and sharing tools to tackle common problems). By contrast, more complex forms of cooperation, such as joint implementation of investment projects to solve local problems or joint implementation of a spatial strategy, seem to require more experience and time to produce the desired effects. Cooperation is more successful when the domains of cooperation are cultural events, tourism, economy or protection of natural environment. Moreover, the stakeholder initiating the cooperation is an influential factor, with higher probability if they are NGOs and local and regional government, rather than

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<sup>27</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/iti\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/iti_en.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.luxembourg.public.lu/en/le-grand-duche-se-presente/luxembourg-monde/grande-region/index.html>.

<sup>29</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/egtc/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/egtc/).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/terco-european-territorial-cooperation-factor-growth>.

Euroregions and other cross-border or national institutions. Popular domains of cooperation are culture, education, tourism, environmental protection and infrastructure development, whereas cooperation in spatial planning is less frequent.

## 6. Overall typology and concluding remarks

In order to respond to the ESPON request of understanding what changes in territorial governance and spatial planning systems can be attributed to the influence of macro-level EU directives and policies, the COMPASS research project systematically explored how national territorial governance and spatial planning systems are related to European territorial governance. To do so, it conceptualised the latter as a set of three simultaneous processes of (i) downloading of rules, policies and ideas from the EU institutions to national systems, of (ii) uploading of ideas and approaches from the national systems to the EU level; as well as of (iii) cross-influence between the national systems through cooperation platforms set by the EU.

The responses provided by the country experts (Figure 5) indicated that the EU exerted a significant influence on all territorial governance and spatial planning systems in the period 2000-2016. Such influence has been exerted through: (i) EU sectoral legislation correlated to territorial governance and spatial planning; (ii) EU policies producing spatial effects; (iii) and EU concepts and ideas regarding territorial governance and spatial planning. This overall EU influence is neither homogeneous nor constant. It is highly variable by country, by sector and over time. The impact of EU legislation – in the fields of environment, energy and competition in particular – is more uniform. This is because of the compulsory transposition of legislation. That said, some variation was observed due to differences in the application of that legislation. The impact of EU policies was more varied. It tended to be closely related to the magnitude of the financial support delivered to each country and policy area. Finally, the impact of the EU discourse on national systems was even more variegated: in general, countries joining the EU after 2004 and Mediterranean countries appear more receptive to EU concepts and ideas, especially those conveyed through mainstream strategies, such as Europa 2020.

When it comes to the bottom-up influence through which national systems shape European territorial governance, no country experts noted a high impact, neither within the EU discursive arenas nor through exemplary practices. Generally speaking, such influence mostly occurs as a result of competitive processes in which certain national actors are more engaged than others or are able to find agreement on concepts or ideas within the main EU discursive arenas, such as the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points etc. An example of such a process was the gradual emergence of the territorial cohesion concept. Despite the progress of evidence-based surveys, such as those promoted by ESPON, inspiration from specific practices remains sporadic. The reasons for this may be threefold. First, scarce attention can be directed at the European level to the practical experience developed at the local level. Second, there is an intrinsic difficulty in learning from practices developed across very different national systems (as confirmed in the main part of the COMPASS analysis). The specific influence of particular practices (or their aspects) is by far the hardest to identify.

The horizontal influence between different territorial governance and spatial planning systems as part of European territorial cooperation programmes follows the same mechanisms of learning and suffers from similar difficulties. As the ESPON TERCO project confirmed, such influence is more likely in simpler collaborative forms that contribute to building trust, such as exchanging experiences and sharing knowledge on tools to tackle shared problems.

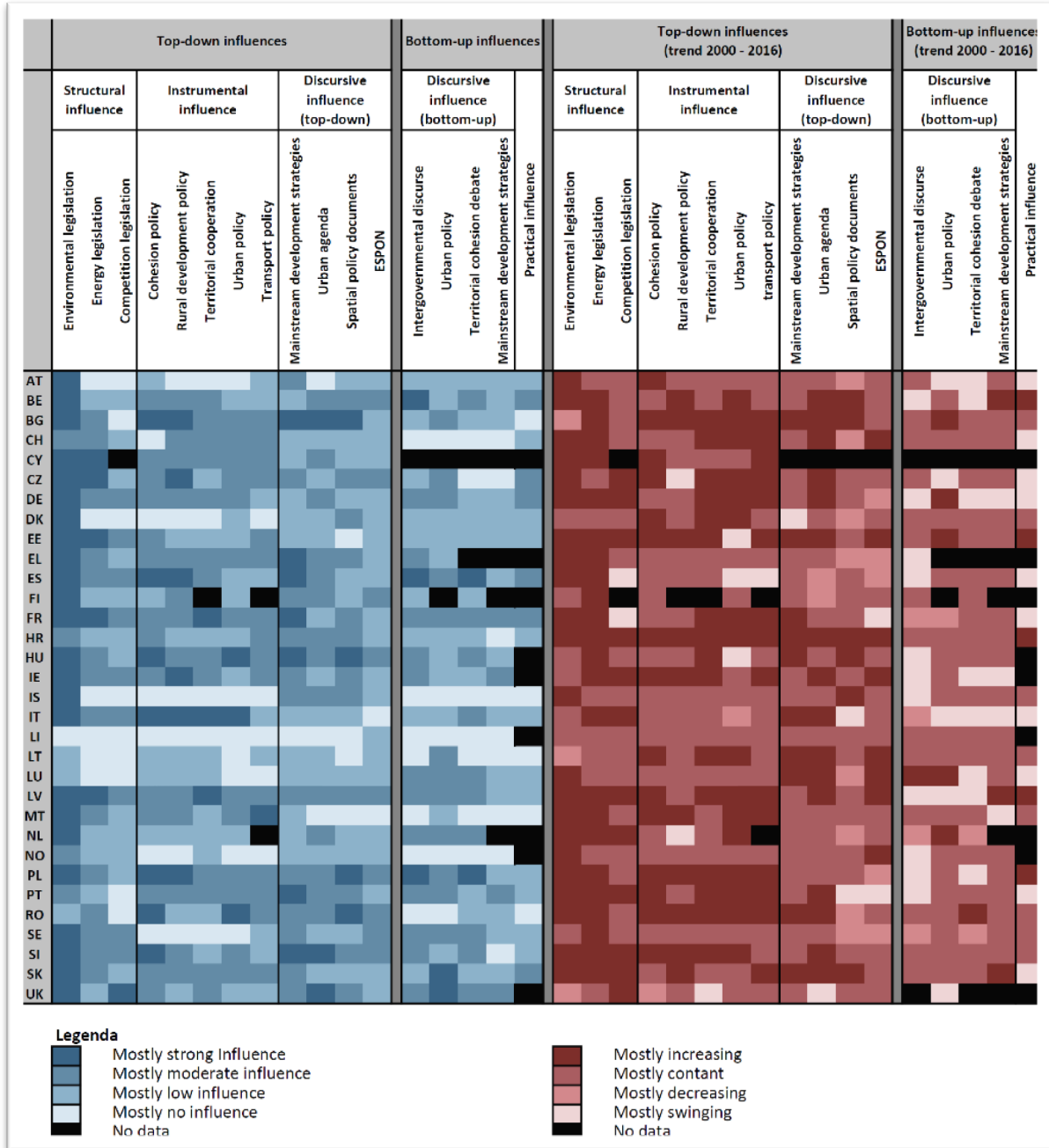
In a nutshell, COMPASS evidence suggests that the institutional complexity of European territorial governance derives from the large variety of national systems, as shown in the previous chapters. Such complexity is also reflected in the typology of the (perceived) engagement of systems within European territorial governance (Figure 6). The typology indicates:

- a prevalence of systems mostly 'engaged' within European territorial governance, i.e. inclined to influence it as to be influenced by it, mostly in Western and Eastern Europe as well as in the Mediterranean countries (although with less increasing tendencies);
- a small group of 'leading' systems, mostly from Central (AT, LU, NL) or Nordic Europe (DK, SE) that are perceived as exerting influence on European territorial governance, rather than be influenced by it;



- a group of ‘following’ systems, found mostly among the new member states (BG, CY, MT, HU, RO, but also FI) which tend to be receptive to the influence of European territorial governance, but are hardly influential on the EU level;
- a group of ‘unengaged’ systems, generally being non-member countries (CH, IS, LI and NO, with the exception of LT), which are not receptive to EU influence and do not have an influence on the European territorial governance.

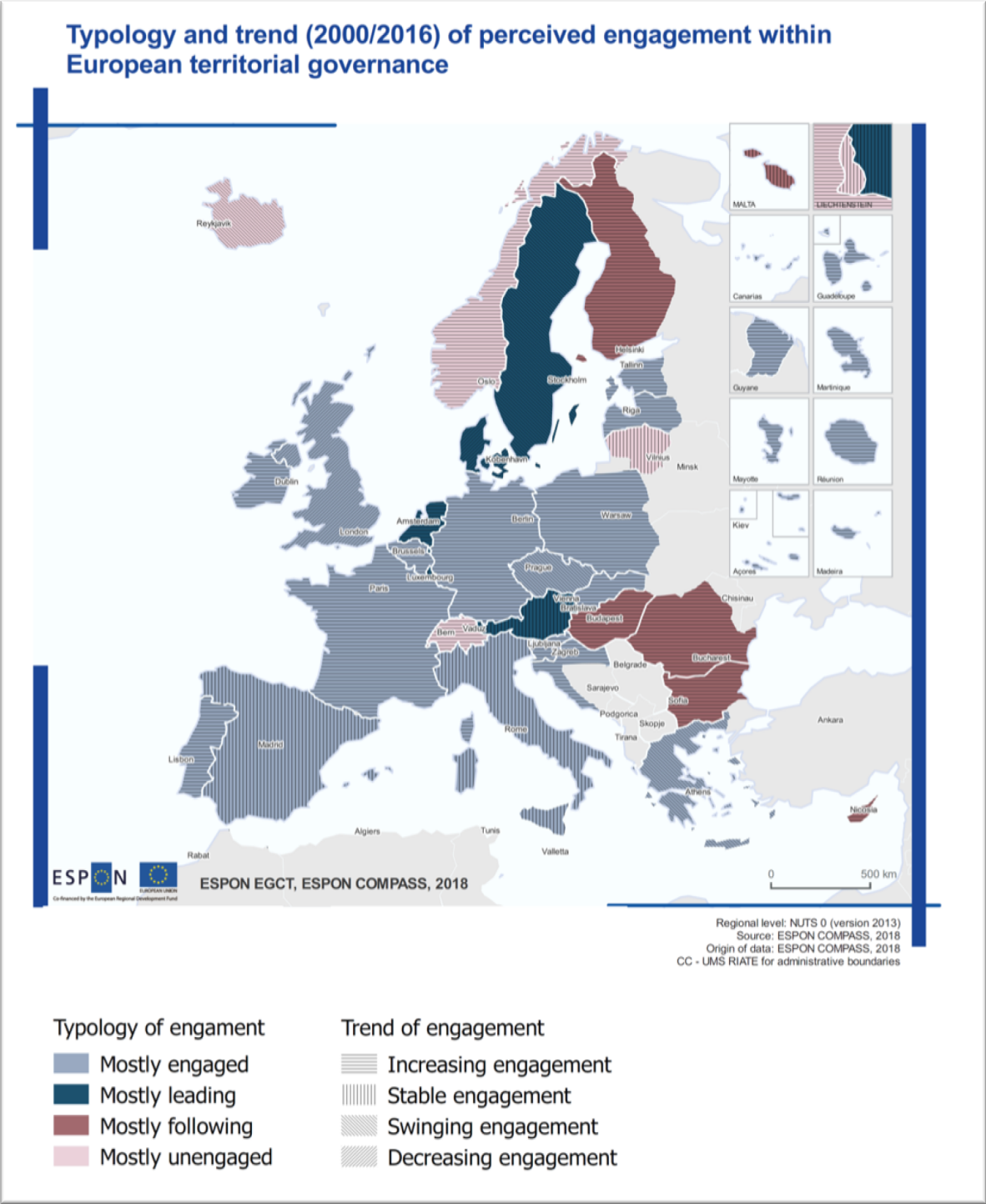
Figure 5. Top-down and bottom-up influences in European territorial governance between 2000 and 2016, by significance and trend (authors’ elaboration).



All the above helps to understand European territorial governance as a complex and non-codified institutional process of vertical and horizontal interactions, aiming at strengthening the coherence between EU policies and national territorial governance and spatial planning. The outcomes of this process are, however, uneven across policy fields as well as between the different countries. This is because of the ‘filtering’ of the Europeanisation processes through the numerous substantive and procedural differences among the national systems.



Figure 6. Typology and trend of perceived engagement of territorial governance and spatial planning systems within the European territorial governance (authors' elaboration).



This ultimately points to the need for formal clarification, in institutional terms, of the role of the national territorial governance and spatial planning systems with respect to European territorial governance and EU Cohesion Policy. After all, the shared competence between the EU and the Member States of “economic, social and territorial cohesion”, which is established in the current Treaties, would make it possible. The heterogeneity of systems and Europeanisation process also require that any reform aimed at empowering spatial planning in relation to EU policies would need to accommodate the differences in national settings.

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