

József Benedek³

The Spatial Planning System and Practice in Post-Socialist Romania: Between the Heritage of “Systematization” and Europeanization

This paper offers an overview of the major processes and characteristics of the spatial planning system and practice in Romania. It is largely based on document analysis, proposing an evaluation of the major legislative documents regulating the field of spatial planning (the basic Law nr. 350 from 2001 for Spatial Planning and Urbanism, and additionally, the seven laws composing the National Spatial Planning Act). We focus on the description of the planning practices identified in the official spatial planning documents from various spatial scales, from regional to local, by considering the interactions established between institutional, economic, political and cultural factors from the socialist period and during the post-socialist transition period. The article argues for the major effects related to a low-speed but obvious Europeanization process of the spatial planning institutions and practices expressed through the uncritical and unreflected introduction of neo-liberal ideas in the spatial planning legislation and practices. The resulting spatial planning system has taken a hybrid shape, represented by a mix of three major European planning styles: comprehensive integrated, land-use oriented and urbanistic planning styles.

Keywords: Spatial planning, Planning practice, Systematization policy, Europeanization, Romania, European Union
JEL-code: O21, P21

<https://doi.org/10.32976/stratfuz.2023.33>

Introduction

Largely based on my previous analysis published exactly ten years ago in Benedek (2013), but consistently completed with the latest developments and reconsidered in its essential parts, this paper considers spatial planning as a fundamental part of the state administrative system. We do so in the conceptual and methodological framework represented by the international comparative research on spatial planning systems (Reimer et al., 2014; Nadin and Fernández-Maldonado, 2023). As a consequence, it is shaped primarily by three basic factors: 1. a range of national regulations like laws and government acts; 2. the competences and territorial structure of the public administration; and 3. political culture (Reimer and Blotvogel, 2012). Therefore, the Romanian planning system is considered in this paper as a national planning system with a strong internal coherence and homogeneity in comparison with the other national planning systems, but influenced also by its perpetual and constant internal reforms and external adaptation contexts and pressures. It represents also a comprehensive and complex spatial system that comprises spatial planning institutions and practices at various scales from local, to regional and national levels.

We consider in the same time the Romanian spatial planning systems as a particular case in European context, which has been radically transformed from the territorial systematization of the totalitarian Ceausescu-regime towards a democratized and inclusive form. A crucial role in this transformation has played the European integration process resulting in a convergence of the

³ Professor, External Member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, Faculty of Geography, Department of Geography in Hungarian, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Clinicilor Street 5-7, 400 295 Cluj-Napoca, jozsef.benedek@ubbcluj.ro

Professor, External Member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, Vice-President of the Doctoral School, Faculty of Economics, Institute of World- and Regional Economics, University of Miskolc, 3515 Miskolc-Egyetemváros, jozsef.benedek@uni-miskolc.hu

Romanian planning system towards the European discourse on spatial planning. With other words we assume that the Romanian spatial planning system has undergone an important Europeanization process.

The main perspective of this paper is represented by a structuralist and legalistic approach, common for comparative planning studies and for spatial planning system analysis, looking in the same time behind the systematic description of administrative and legal characteristics for explanations related to the practice of spatial planning. The rest of paper presents the following structure: in the next section we will present the general framework of spatial planning in Romania: the territorial governance of the Romanian state and the competences and structure of public administration; the third section will focus on the evaluation of the the institutional and legal bases of spatial planning. We will conclude with the discussion of Europeanization process of the spatial planning system and the establishment of the main characteristics of planning style in Romania.

Territorial governance in Romania

The transition period following the collapse of state socialism and planned economy from 1989 has led to the strong privatization of economy, and to the establishment of democratic political institutions. However, it does not represented a crucial shift in the top down approach of developmental policies and strategies. Romania has a centralized, hierarchical organization of the public administration. With other words, although there is a certain degree of decentralization of some state functions (education, health care, taxation etc.) from the national level towards the local authorities (41 counties – NUTS 3 units, and 2859 rural communes and 319 cities), there is a dominance of the central government related to the conceivment and implementation of sectoral and regional development policies (Benedek, 2004). Hence, Romania promotes rather an interventionist than cooperative state model, including the spatial planning system as well, organized in fact in two vertical systems, with a small degree of horizontal cooperation.

Accordingly, the first vertical system includes the formal spatial planning, articulated in relation to the administrative-territorial structure of the country, which comprises two levels: communes (groups of villages) and towns on the lower level and counties on the upper level. The Law no. 215 from 2001, with an impressive number of later adjustments and modifications applies the principles of good governance by regulating the organization and functioning of the local public administration. The law foresees as basic principle of the functioning of the local public administration the decentralization and local autonomy. The local autonomy is understood as ‘the right and effective capacity of the local public administration authorities to solve and manage public duties, on behalf of and in the best interest of the local communities they represent’ (Article 3/1). This right is exerted by the local councils and mayors, respectively by the county councils and their presidents. In addition, the law defines the administrative and financial local autonomy as being related to ‘the organization, functioning, competencies and prerogatives, as well as the management of resources which, by law, belong to the commune, town, city or county’ (Article 4/2). Both local and county councils have a category of competencies related to the social and economic development, and to urban development and spatial planning as well. Each county council and city and the local counties of the biggest communes have a spatial planning department, coordinated by a chief-architect, while the spatial planning activities of the smaller communes are taken over by the spatial planning department of the county council.

The second vertical system, represented by the eight development regions created in 1998, has a statistical character, in accordance to the functioning of the European NUTS system. This level is not integrated in the territorial-administrative structure of Romania, has resulted from the grouping of the existing 41 counties into larger, NUTS 2 level units for gathering statistical data, and generating a kind of soft coordination at regional level. Things have changed starting with

the actual programming period (2021–2027), when the eight development regions have started to implement their own Regional Operational Programmes, being elevated to the status of managing and implementation authorities. In order to give more power and a public administration status to the regions, the Constitution should be changed, a long and difficult process (Benedek et co., 2018).

All this territorial governance arrangements have resulted in the establishment of an important local level autonomy of the public administration in terms of attributions but not in economic terms, with missing of substantial financial resources in order to fulfill their attributions granted by law. As a consequence, the vast majority of the rural communes and the small sized cities are still relying in economic terms on the redistribution policies of the state (Török and Benedek, 2018).

The heritage of socialist systematization policies

In Romania, the same as in other countries of Eastern Europe, the 1945–1989 period was marked by the communist ideology and a planning system characterized by top-down approach under the total control of the state. The economy came almost entirely under the direction of state control and planning (for which the term of “systematization” has been used) based on state ownership on the means of production. The private initiative was much restrained, and the modernization policies targeted the heavy industry and urban centres as key interventions areas. The beginnings of the socialist spatial planning are linked to the creation of the State Office of Studies and Research within the Ministry of Construction in 1948 which then was followed in 1952 by the establishment of the State Committee for Construction and Architecture subordinated to the Council of Ministers and further, the establishment of architecture and systematization departments subordinated to the regional and municipal People's Councils. Basically, the Decision of the Council of Ministers 1248/1962 represented the formal birth certificate of the socialist spatial planning (Benedek, 2004). This set up the preparation and approval of systematic plans and of technical and economic studies, later supplemented by the Act 58 of 1974, which defines the purposes and tasks of systematization at the levels of urban and rural development as well.

It is interesting to note that, if we compare the overall objectives of the socialist and Western-European spatial planning systems development programs (Benedek, 2001), the differences are less pronounced. Even the United Nations Report on spatial planning (UNECE, 2008) considers that, despite of political and economic differences, certain principles (democracy, subsidiarity, participation, policy integration, proportionality, and the precautionary approach) are applicable for all planning systems. It may be noted that in general, the major planning objectives of countries with a market economy and the ones with command economy, were similar. Both societies with market economy and with command economy were concerned about localizing their activities and resources and the rationalization of services. The major differences were related to the position of the state, the applied planning tools, the resources allocated to spatial planning and the different political nature of the two ideological systems.

In addition to these, there were certain elements of communist propaganda, which proposed utopian solutions in order to solve social or territorial problems, such as the gradual disappearance of differences between urban and rural areas or the ambitions of producing a perfectly equal and homogeneous society where the working class will be the engine of development (Benedek, 2001).

In fact, social and territorial inequalities, differences between urban and rural settlements are constant elements of any society; the state can only intervene with the aim of improving these in cases when it is considered that inequalities have exceeded an acceptable threshold of values and norms of the dominant system. The socialist heritage of spatial planning is exerting its influence with specific spatial structures generated by the planned economic interventions and the “systematization” policy:

- a. the large industrial platforms in cities have turned during the transition period into brownfield with little regeneration capacities;
- b. the large housing units created during the mass urbanization and industrialization of the '70-es and '80-es of last century have created poor housing and living conditions and have generated during the transition period – through increased motorization and spatial mobility – immense traffic problems in the large cities (Bodocan et co., 2018);
- c. half of the villages underwent a passive deurbanization: that means that no public investments in their housing stock or economic diversification was allowed during the 'systematization' policy which has generated a massive outmigration and reduction of vital functions like education, sanitation, transportation or infrastructure, generating during the transition period one of the most territorially unequal societies in Europe (Veres et co., 2022).

The planning system resulted from the Europeanization process could't tackle all this immense socialist heritage, one reason more to consider non-traditional factors of planning systems like the recent historical development path and history (Bădescu et co., 2024).

The establishment of a democratic institutional framework for spatial planning

The basic question of this paper is concerned with the major shift that have marked the spatial planning in Romania, following the change of regime started in 1989. We assume that institutions plays an important role for the content and quality of the spatial planning activities, or, with other words, "institutionalization" matters. Moreover, legal instruments are intensively used in the international literature as classifying criteria of the spatial planning systems.

The analysis of the legislation offers three turning points in the evolution of the post-socialist spatial planning. Following a change of the ideological system, after 1989, spatial planning was placed on new grounds: new legislative framework was adopted, the old planning institutions were restructured and new specialized institutions were established. Therefore, during the so called "Romanian revolution", the new post-socialist transitory government have abolished the socialist spatial planning law adopted in 1974 and the State Planning Offices working at county level, but failed to develop soon a new law for spatial planning. As a consequence, we have a short period of time, between 1990 and 1991, when spatial planning and development was not regulated. The outcomes were disastrous, mainly in the cities, where this time we used for occupying public space with new functions and for the mixing of functions on small areas.

The second stage of spatial planning evolution (1991-2001) was an under-regulated period. The first law for spatial planning, adopted in 1991, was a first step forward the democratization of the planning system. It has failed to produce any important effect, lacking mainly on methodological details related to the structure and content of the planning documents. However, on this legal basis a range of local and county authorities became engaged in developing spatial planning documents in a wide variety of structure design and content.

The third period started when, as a result of new socio-territorial realities (restructuring, deindustrialization, liberalization, etc.) and the influence of external factors (integration into the EU and NATO, etc.), the spatial planning objectives were reformulated. The Law no. 350 of 6 July 2001 introduces two concepts for the regulation of planning activities, first being spatial planning and second the urbanism. It represents a more sophisticated and detailed law on spatial planning and urbanism, which permitted the development of spatial planning documents of the second generation. The law introduces the difference between spatial planning and urbanism, which is mainly a conceptual and scale-related differentiation. Spatial planning operates at the national and regional level, when urbanism refers to the local level.

According to the law the main aim of spatial planning and urbanism is the spatial management of the country, in line with the community interests of the territory and the European integration requirements. Spatial management means the formulation and implementation of territorial strategies, policies and development programs as well as the follow-up of their application.

Urbanism on the other hand comprises land monitoring activities by creating and updating a local database.

On this legal basis it was created a planning system composed by three groups of actors: the local and central administration, planning companies and civil society. The local and central administration has specialized departments for spatial planning which have a trifold role: to formulate the main problems which has to be solved in the spatial planning documents, to control and monitor the spatial processes and the building activity, and to advice and implement the spatial planning documents. The planning companies are composed by private firms and public universities or research institutions whose activity is related to spatial planning. They are competing for winning tenders organized by public administration for the development of spatial planning documents. The civil society is involved at a low degree in the planning process and practice via public consultation. In each phase of the planning process there is a mandatory obligations for the public administration and planning companies to organize public consultation, with generally a low level of activity and with no direct consequences for the content of the documentations.

The Europeanization process and the spatial planning system

The major European trends of spatial planning and space management have been dominated in the last decades by the challenge of ensuring a more cohesive development in a way that do not undermine the international competitiveness of European regions and cities. The argument for an Europeanisation of planning is relatively recent in this field of study (Waterhout et co., 2016). Europeanisation means in this context "...an umbrella concept to describe the pattern of responses of EU member states to what has been termed the European spatial policy environment" (Waterhout et co., 2016, p. 240). During the negotiations for the EU integration, spatial planning was not among the chapters of the 'acquis communautaire', therefore there is no direct linkage between EU accession and the Europeanization of the spatial planning. But this moment had an important effect on the Romanian spatial planning by creating a regional policy system based on the law 315 from 2004, which has created eight NUTS 2 level development regions with the related institutional base (Regional Development Councils, Regional Development Agencies and a National Council for Regional Development). At this way it was created an institutional network which has set many objectives which have overlapped with development objectives of the spatial planning. Among the main objectives of the regional development are the followings: reduction of interregional disparities, correlation of the sectorial politics of the government on the regional level, support of the domestic, international, interregional and cross-border cooperation, the first two is overlapping with the main objectives of the spatial planning. As a consequence, the post-socialist regional policy and spatial planning in Romania have emerged as two completely parallel formal policy-systems, with overlapping attributions concerning spatial development but with no cooperation and dialogue between them. In this way spatial development policy is regulated by two laws, and the management of spatial development is organised by two institution where the horizontal coordination is completely missing. It is not a particular situation for Romania, we can find identical situation for many national settings (Trkulja et co., 2012; Schmitt and Smas, 2023).

Other consequence of the EU integration was that Romanian planners became part of what Waterhout (2008) has termed as European planning community. Despite the fact that the overall level of engagement of CEE actors in ESP is proportionally lower in comparison with that of the Northwestern European countries (Cotella and co., 2012), the progress in this respect is evident. A huge role in this integration was the interplay between policy and science after 2001, when policy actors realized the huge need for more evidence for empirical based policy interventions. The result was the increasing role assumed and played by universities where spatial planning have an important place in the curricula and research: Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism Bucharest, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj, Technical University Cluj, Al. I. Cuza

University Iasi. Moreover, the latest became the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) point for Romania. ESPON, together with the INTERREG IIIB programs are regarded as important pillars of the European spatial planning discourse. Some authors (Böhme and Schön, 2006; Waterhout, 2008; Nagy and Benedek, 2021) consider that the European spatial planning discourse is carried by influential documents like the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the Territorial Agenda of the EU (TA) and the Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU (TSP). The adoption of this strategic documents has highly influenced the national spatial planning documents at national scale in Romania, but the diffusion of the European mainstream discourse remained concentrated at governmental level and in some smaller academic communities located at universities. The next milestone, the Territorial Agenda adopted in Leipzig (2007) and its up-date from 2011 adopted in Gödöllő, Hungary, proposes as a major objective of the European Union (EU) the achievement of territorial cohesion defined as a “set of principles for harmonious, balanced, efficient, sustainable territorial development” (Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, 2011, p. 3). The latest version of the TA 2030 adopted in 2020 in Berlin made two new additions to the existing TA-s: a renewed cohesion understanding and an active implementation of the cohesion concept (Böhme and Redlich, 2023). The TA 2030 is considered a key document for the European spatial planning (Lüer and Böhme, 2023).

Specially the call of the Territorial Agenda for an integrative territorial approach not only in the spatial planning but also in the field of regional development policy has found high resonance in Romania in the framework of the Regional Operative Programmes (ROPs), priority development axe nr. 1, aimed for supporting urban development (Benedek et co., 2022). In this framework the larger cities (rank 1 and 2 cities) had to develop so called *Integrated Urban Development Plans* (PIDU) in order to formulate their development priorities and to get access to EU financial support to achieve the proposed development objectives (Nagy and Benedek, 2018).

Table 1. The interconnection of spatial planning with sectoral policies in Romania

Sectoral policies	Policy Levels	Integrated	Coordinated	Informed	Ignored	Not relevant
Energy policy	National		x			
	Sub-national			x		
	Local			x		
Environmental policy	National				x	
	Sub-national			x		
	Local	x				
Transport policy	National	x				
	Sub-national		x			
	Local	x				
Cultural heritage and tourism policy	National	x				
	Sub-national			x		
	Local	x				
Housing policy	National	x				
	Sub-national					x
	Local			x		
Cohesion and regional policy	National	x				
	Sub-national			x		
	Local		x			

Agricultural and rural policy	National		x			
	Sub-national		x			
	Local		x	x		
Industrial policy	National		x			
	Sub-national		x	x		
	Local	x				
Retail policy	National				x	
	Sub-national				x	
	Local			x	x	
Waste and water management	National		x			
	Sub-national		x			
	Local		x			

Source: Schmitt and Smas (2023), own compilation.

This measure was one of the few initiatives to generate both vertical integration and horizontal coordination between planning documents from different spatial scales and between sectoral and spatial development policies. It does not change on the broad picture: that means a generalized mismatch in coordinating the two large vertical systems of spatial policy making: the spatial planning policy and the sectoral and regional development policies. This statement is largely reinforced by the latest study realized by Schmitt and Smas (2023), focusing on ten sectoral policies (energy policy, environmental policy, transport policy, cultural heritage, tourism policy, housing policy, cohesion and regional policy, agricultural and rural policy, industrial policy, retail policy, and waste and water management) from nine countries grouped in three macroregions (Scandinavian countries, Western European countries and Eastern European countries: Oland, Hungary and Romania), all assigned in the European Compendium to a comprehensive integrated planning type. The findings of this study indicate clearly low levels of vertical and horizontal integration, especially in the case of Romania (see table 1). for a wide range of policy-intersections. A similar recent result is indicated for the coordination between spatial planning and environmental policies (Erős et co., 2022), indicating a convergence of ideas stemming from empirical studies towards the unfit of Romania's assignment to the comprehensive integrated planning type.

The use of a significant amount of ESDP terminology like the concept of “balanced, harmonious and polycentric development” (CEC, 1999) can be documented (Cocheci, 2016). Although the regional policy measures adopted makes it clear that this simply reflects the adoption of EU rhetoric rather than the active engagement with such concepts. For example, the concept promoted by the ESDP, rural-urban partnership was not implemented in programs and projects. The establishment of ten metropolitan zones, including one major city and a varying number of communes offers a good framework for such partnerships, but this framework was used only for the benefit of the national growth poles, who needed such a partnership for creating and implementing the urban development goals in the framework of ROPs. Polycentric spatial development, another basic ESDP concept, was adapted in Romania, on the base of the settlement hierarchy developed in the National Spatial Planning Document (PATN), section four (settlement network), but the way of adoption favoured the seven urban growth poles, and the 13 development poles, which have earned the largest share of financial resources. At this way the implementation of the concept of polycentricity has rather contributed the growing territorial disparities than to the balanced spatial development of Romania (Benedek et co, 2019).

Characteristics of the Romanian Spatial Planning System

Newman and Thornley (1996) classifies the spatial planning systems in Europe in five legal/administrative families: Scandinavian, German, Napoleonic, British and East-European. There is little doubt that the Romanian planning systems belongs to the East-European family, characterized by its strong state planning system established after the Second World War, during the long-lasting period of socialism. Although the strong Europeanization of the spatial planning systems following the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, there is a distinct mixed between the inherited spatial structures and the planning instruments aimed for the solution of the problems resulting from this heritage that makes Romania and the Eastern European countries a homogenous group of legal/administrative family in Europe.

A more in depth insight was offered by the conceptual framework and systematic analysis offered by the “European Union Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies” (ECSP), published by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), a key reference publication for comparing spatial planning systems. It has identified the characteristics of different, ideal types of planning system according to the following eight criterias:

- a. the scope of the system;
- b. the extent and type of planning at national and regional levels;
- c. the locus of power;
- d. the relative roles of public and private sectors;
- e. the nature of the system of law;
- f. constitutional provisions and administrative traditions;
- g. the maturity or completeness of the system;
- h. and the distance between expressed objectives and outcomes (CEC, 1997).

This complex analysis resulted in the identification of four planning systems and traditions in the EU-15 member states:

1. The urbanism tradition (Mediterranean model) model concerned with urban design and building control through zoning regulation;
2. the land use management (British model) model with the main task of controlling the land use, with powers shared between local authorities and central governments;
3. the regional economic planning approach (French model) model, where spatial planning has a broad meaning related to the socio-economic regional inequalities, a strong position of central government in public investment; and
4. the comprehensive integrated approach (German model) model is considered a mature system and is based on: a) a vertical integration of plans and policies in the framework of a formal hierarchy of planning documents from the national to the local level; and on: b) the horizontal coordination of the spatial impacts of different sectoral policies, with local and regional authorities playing a key role (CEC, 1997).

Romania was at the time of the realization of the ECPS not member of the EU, being part of the study. Later, in 2006, the European Spatial Planning Observatories Network (ESPON) project 2.3.2 “Governance of territorial and urban policies from EU to local level” uses the same classification and focuses on the territorial governance as a process related to the development and implementation of policies. The Final Report of the ESPON project considers Romania as a centralized unitary state together with Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Hungary and the Baltic States. What concerns the dominant planning style, surprisingly, Romania is included in the category of countries with comprehensive integrated approach. Why the surprise? Because this approach considered a mature one, associated with countries like the Netherlands or Germany, having sophisticated institutions and mechanisms, a long tradition of spatial co-ordination, economic development coordination and of coordination of the public investments across different sectors (ESPON, 2007). The follow-up ESPON 2020 project on the Comparative Analysis of Territorial

Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe (COMPASS) included Romania as well (EU 28 countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) was based on expert-interviewing, enlarging the empirical study field to 14 sectoral policies (ESPON, 2018), but did not provided any additional improvement on the assignment of individual countries to an idealized planning type or model.

We contest in this paper this assignment of the Romanian planning system to the comprehensive integrated approach. Our contest is justified by the more complex spatial and socio-economic realities – largely inherited from the socialist past - which are at the core of planning interventions. Not to speak about recent critiques and contestation in the international planning literature (Schmitt and Smas, 2023), which - based on recent empirical findings from nine countries – considers the comprehensive-integrative planning model as an idealised planning model being in a state of dissolution. Doing so we argue and try to bring arguments for a sensitized discourse in planning theory towards a culturally oriented interpretational context (cultural norms, values, traditions and attitudes) in line with Reimer and Blotevogel (2012), Getimis (2012) or Knieling and Othengrafen (2015). The later authors have even proposed an intriguingly provocative “culturized planning model” with three main dimensions: planning artefacts, planning environment and societal environment (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2015).

Turning back to the Romanian case, we observe that the spatial planning documents („planuri de amenajare teritorială”) at national and regional scale, and the urbanistic documents („planuri urbanistice”) at local scale are considered the most important tool of spatial planning in Romania (table 3). The strongest regulating and orienting function is held by the National Spatial Planning Document (PATN), which is constituted by six sectorial plans, each of them developed under governmental coordination and adopted as laws by the Romanian Parliament. As a consequence the development objectives and priorities formulated at this scale has to be taken over and detailed in all of the spatial planning documents situated at regional level and by the urbanistic documents of the local level. The six sectorial plans represents important elements of the national spatial development policy: transport network, water management, protected areas, settlement network, natural risks and tourism. Two additional plans are under construction, representing the rural development and the educational infrastrucure, and are coming to complete the National Spatial Planning Documents.

The regional level corresponds to the style of the comprehensive integrated approach (table 2), the structure of the spatial planning documents reflecting this comprehensiveness: natural resources, economic potential, population, settlement hierarchy, public infrastructure, natural risks, integrated development strategy. It is the most weakest element in the hierarchical planning system. All spatial planning documents developed at this level have only orientative character, which means that the local authorities (local and county councils) or the deconcentrated institutions of the central government have no obligation in order to implement the development objectives formulated in this documents. As a result, although the high variety of documents existing at this scale (inter-county planning documents/PATIJ, regional planning documents/PATR, county planning documents/PATJ, inter-communal planning documents/PATIC, zonal planning documents/PATZ, etc.) the effectiveness is at a low level. In addition, the planning documents developed by the Regional Development Agencies (like the regional development strategies), or by the County Councils (like the county development strategies), all embracing the regional economic approach, have no legal obligations to take into account the development objectives formulated in the spatial planning documents.

Table 2. Planning styles and main characteristics of the planning system in Romania

Planning style/characteristics	Comprehensive integrated approach	Urbanistic, land-use oriented approach
Focus	Spatial structures and processes	Object-centred
Planning process	Cyclic, open, indirect	Linear, closed, direct
Character	Orientativ, weak	Normative, strong
Disciplines	Inter-disciplinary	Architecture
Output	Spatial planning documents	Urbanistic documents
Spatial scale	Regional	Local
Time	Middle- and long term	Short term

Source: Benedek (2013).

We find the greatest mixture at the local level, with elements of the land-use and urbanistic approaches. The local planning activity has theoretically a strong normative character. It is represented by three urbanistic planning documents related to different local and sub-local scales. The General Urbanistic Document (PUG) covers the entire administrative territory of a town or commune. It regulates the land-use, the functional zoning, the traffic, infrastructure, protected areas and historical monuments and limits the maximum build area, fulfilling a strong control role in the spatial planning on local level. In practice, the planning face in the main cities and in the dynamic suburban areas a strong pressure from landowners in order to increase the build up area, which, with few exemptions, happens, the PUG being updated in order to the rapidly changing ownership dynamic. There is generally a continuous adaptation of the planning instruments to the changing realities of individual building behavior. It means with other words that, although the regulatory character of planning, controlled by legally binding plans, in the planning practice we find rather a discretionary character, where planning action is shaped by contextually decisions.

The Zonal Urbanistic Document (PUZ) regulates the land-use in the main functional zones of the city (historic centre, industrial zones, recreational zones, residential zones etc.), while the Detailed Urbanistic Document (PUD) plans the building and the land-use parameters on the smallest scale.

The local level of spatial planning in Romania has definitely an urbanistic tradition, common for the Mediterranean countries, where building regulations play a central role. It has a strong architectural focus and concern with urban design, townscape and building regulation, all undertaken through the strong codification building parameters and functional zones (“Regulament de urbanism”). This tradition have no great political priority or general public support. As a result it have been less effective in controlling development. In addition we can find also elements of the land use spatial planning, one of the main aim of local planning being the control of the change of land use with the instrument called “territorial balance” which aims the functional zoning of the territory, made in accordance with major land use categories. At this scale the regulation have normative character. In this situation, local authorities in cooperation with public or private planning companies undertake most of the planning work, but the central administration is also able to exercise a degree of control though supervising the system and through setting policy objectives at the national level.

In conclusion there is a mixture of three styles in Romania, and as opposite to the statements of the Final Report we can not identify a general convergence tendency in Romania towards the comprehensive integrated approach, the local level still presenting a mixture of land-use and urbanistic approach.

Table 3. The typology of spatial planning and urbanistic documents in Romania

	National scale	Regional scale	Local scale
Type of planning document	PATN (National Spatial Planning Document)	PATZ, PATIJ, PATR, PATJ	PUG, PUZ, PUD
Focus	Sectorial: transport infrastructure, water management, protected areas, settlement network, natural risks, tourism	Balanced spatial development	Urbanistic development, building control
Responsible authorities	Government, Parliament	Local- and county councils	Local councils
Character	Normative, strong	Orientative, weak	Normative, strong

Source: Benedek (2013).

Conclusions: plea for a culturally contextualised categorisation of national spatial planning systems across Europe

Overall, the main findings of this article show the reductionist character of introducing of the Romanian spatial planning system in a certain general category of European spatial planning models. There are significant differences between our case study and the general characteristics of the four types identified in the European Compendium (CEC, 1997) in terms of the role of spatial planning, the legal/institutional arrangements, the territorial governance and planning practice. Hence, these contextualised differences are equally important for policy-makers and spatial planning scholars across countries.

In conclusion, we are questioning ‘one size fits all’ approaches in spatial planning and instead of doing so, we are arguing for a plurality of planning styles and types of planning action. Even more, our multi/scalar approach points at different actor constellations and policy styles at different spatial levels: at national level the Romanian spatial planning has a strong sectorial character, at regional level it takes a clear comprehensive integrated shape, while at local level it presents a mixture of land-use and urbanistic approach. In addition, the Law for regional development has created parallel institutions, which have adopted a regional economic approach. On the other side, we have identified a trend towards European convergence in the formal characteristics of the Romanian spatial planning system, and a gradual process of adaptation to the major European documents like the ESDP. Universities and research institutions have played a crucial role in this process. This convergence, which can be regarded as a sign of a clear Europeanization process, do not rule out the existence of cultural specificities in planning practice.

References

- Bădescu, G., Angi, D., Benedek, J., Constantinescu, S. (2024): Historical Legacies and Their Impact on Human Capital: Comparing Regions within Romania. *East European Politics & Societies and Cultures*. Forthcoming.
- Benedek, J. (2001): *Introducere în planning teritorial*. [Introduction into Territorial Planning] Ed. Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca.
- Benedek, J. (2004): *Amenajarea teritoriului și dezvoltarea regională*. [Spatial Planning and Regional Development] Editura Presa Universitara, Cluj-Napoca.
- Benedek, J. (2013): The Spatial Planning System in Romania. *Romanian Review of Regional Studies*, 9:2, 23-30.
- Benedek, J., Török, I., Máthé, Cs. (2018): Evidence-based designation of development regions in Romania. *Regional Statistics*. 8:1, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.15196/RS080105>
- Benedek, J., Varvari, Ș., Litan, C. (2019): Chapter 8: Urban pole policy and regional development: old vine in new bottles? In: Lang, T., Görmar F. (ed.) *Regional and local development in times of polarization. Re-thinking spatial policies in Europe*, pp. 173-196 Palgrave/MacMillan, Basingstoke https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1190-1_8

- Benedek, J., Ursu, C., Varvari, Ş. (2022): Growth pole policy's induced development and spatial inequalities in the metropolitan areas of Romania – a critical assessment. *Tér és társadalom (Space and Society)*, 36:2, 47-67, <https://doi.org/10.17649/TET.36.3.3435>
- Bodocan, V., Benedek, J., Rusu, R. (2018): Twenty first century cities: from global challenges to local responses. In: Solarz Wojchich Marcin (ed.) *New geographies of the globalized world. Routledge Studies in Human Geography*, p. 77-92. 256 p. Routledge, New York.
- Böhme, K., Redlich, S. (2023): The territorial agenda 2030 for places and a more cohesive European territory? *Planning Practice & Research*, 38:5, 729-747, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2023.2258029>
- Böhme, K., Schön, P. (2006): From Leipzig to Leipzig. Territorial Research Delivers Evidence for the New Territorial Agenda of the European Union. *disP* 165, 61-70.
- CEC (commission of the European Communities) (1997): *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* (Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Community). Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/059fcedf-d453-4d0d-af36-6f7126698556> (accessed 25.11.2023).
- CEC (Commission of the European Communities) (1999): *European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the EU* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities). Available at: <https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/ESDP.pdf> (accessed 25.11.2023).
- Cocheci, R.M. (2016): Planning in Restrictive Environments – A Comparative Analysis of Planning Systems in EU Countries. *Journal of Urban and Landscape Planning*, 1, 78-94.
- Cotella, G., Adams, N., Nunes, R.J. (2012): Engaging in European Spatial Planning: A Central and Eastern European Perspective on the Territorial Cohesion Debate. *European Planning Studies*, 20:7, 1197-1220. DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2012.673567.
- Erős, N., Török, Z., Hossu, A., C., Réti, K., O., Malos, C., Kecskés, P., Morariu, S., D., Benedek, J., Hartel, T. (2022): Assessing the conceptual substance of sustainability of the urban development plans in an Eastern European country. *Sustainable Cities and Society*. 85, art. Number 104070, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2022.104070>
- ESPON (2007), ESPON Project 2.3.2—Scenarios on the Territorial Future of Europe. Ministry of Interior and Spatial Development in Luxembourg. Available at http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_ESPON2006Projects/Menu_PolicyImpactProjects/governance.html (accessed 12 October 2013).
- ESPON (2018): COMPASS – Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe. Final Report. Available at <https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems> (accessed 25.11.2023).
- Getimis, P. (2012): Comparing Spatial Planning Systems and Planning Cultures in Europe. The Need for a Multi-scalar Approach, *Planning Practice & Research*, 27:1, 25-40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2012.659520>
- Knieling, J., Othengrafen, F. (2015): Planning Culture—A Concept to Explain the Evolution of Planning Policies and Processes in Europe? *European Planning Studies*, 23:11, 2133-2147, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1018404>
- Lüer, Ch., Böhme, K. (2023): Reenergizing European spatial planning. *Planning Practice & Research*, 38:5, 714-728, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2020.1852675>
- Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development (2011): Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions, Gödöllő. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-

- [cohesion/territorial_agenda_2020.pdf](#) (accessed 25.11.2023).
- Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development (2020): Territorial Agenda 2030: A future for all places, Berlin. Available at https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/TA2030_jun2021_en.pdf (accessed 25.11.2023).
- Nadin, V., Fernández-Maldonado, A.M. (2023): Spatial planning systems in Europe: multiple trajectories. *Planning Practice & Research*, 38:5, 625-638, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2023.2258568>
- Nagy, J., Benedek, J. (2018): Towards a balanced metropolitan governance: combating the “back-door” status of peripheral rural areas. *Transylvanian Review*, 27:1, 3-20.
- Nagy, J., Benedek, J. (2021): Can the EU Cohesion Policy Fight Peripheralization? In: Rauhut D., Sielker, F., Humer, A. (eds.) *EU Cohesion Policy and Spatial Governance. Territorial, Social and Economic Challenges*, 142-156. Elgar Studies in Planning Theory, Policy and Practice, Edward Elgar.
- Newman, P., Thornley, A. (1996), *Urban Planning in Europe—International Competition, National Systems and Planning Projects*. London, Routledge.
- Reimer, M., Botevogel, H.H. (2012), Comparing Spatial Planning Practice in Europe: A Plea for Cultural Sensitization. *Planning Practice & Research*, 27:1, 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2012.659517>
- Schmitt, P., Smas, L. (2023): Dissolution rather than consolidation – questioning the existence of the comprehensive-integrative planning model. *Planning Practice & Research*, 38:5, 678-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2020.1841973>
- Török, I., Benedek, J. (2018): Spatial Patterns of Local Income Inequalities. *Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning*. 9:2, 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.24193/JSSP.2018.2.01>
- Trkulja, S., Tosić, B., Živanović, Z. (2012): Serbian Spatial Planning among Styles of Spatial Planning in Europe. *European Planning Studies*, 20:10, 1729-1746. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2012.713327>
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE (2008): Spatial Planning. Key Instrument for Development and Effective Governance with Special Reference to Countries in Transition. Economic Commission for Europe Report ECE/HBP/146 (Geneva: UNECE). Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/spatial_planning_e.pdf (accessed 25.11.2023).
- Veres, V., Benedek, J., Török, I. (2022): Changes in the Regional Development of Romania (2000 – 2019), Measured with a Multidimensional PEESH Index. *Sustainability*, 14, 14500, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114500>
- Waterhout, B. (2008): *The Institutionalisation of European Spatial Planning*. Delft, TU Delft.
- Waterhout, B., Mourato, J.M., Böhme, K. (2016): The Impact of Europeanization on Planning Cultures. In: Knieling, J. (ed.): *Planning Cultures in Europe*, Chapter 13, 275-290, Routledge, London.