



Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

## **CASE STUDY REPORT //**

# **Cross-fertilisation between spatial planning and EU Cohesion Policy in the Czech Republic**

Case study report // August 2021

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# Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1	Introduction to the system of Czech spatial management.....	7
1.2	The 'parallel universes' of EU Cohesion Policy and domestic spatial planning.....	10
1.3	The Czech case in context.....	10
<b>2</b>	<b>Specific challenges in the Czech Republic in strengthening relations between EU Cohesion Policy implementation, regional policy and spatial planning at the national level .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1	Institutional challenges.....	14
2.2	Cultural challenges .....	15
2.3	Potentials .....	16
<b>3</b>	<b>Recommendation for practical mechanisms of policy integration .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1	Themes of relevance for improving integration between EU Cohesion Policy implementation and spatial planning.....	19
3.2	Pragmatic approach: Reaching for the 'low-hanging fruit' .....	19
3.3	Strategic approach: What matters for the long-term .....	21
<b>4</b>	<b>Inspiring good practices .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions, with discussion points and open questions .....</b>	<b>25</b>
5.1	Conclusions from the research and consultations.....	25
5.2	Open questions.....	26
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Annex.....</b>	<b>29</b>

# List of figures and tables

## List of figures

Figure 1 Diagram explaining the planning system in the Czech Republic.....	8
Figure 2 EU Cohesion Policy allocations in 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 .....	11

## List of tables

Table 1 Influence of EU Cohesion Policy and its components (Territorial Cooperation and Urban Policy) on domestic territorial governance and spatial planning systems between 2000 and 2016, by significance and trend .....	12
Table 2 Summary of challenges and potentials for cross-fertilisation .....	17
Table 3 Overview of issues and corresponding recommendations .....	22
Table 4 Selected examples of ESPON COMPASS inspirations for the Czech case study .....	23

## Abstract

This report presents the results of the case study on cross-fertilisation between spatial planning and the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy in the Czech Republic, conducted as part of ESPON Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning (COMPASS) Dialogue and Case Study project. The case study entailed a survey and interviews with the key planning and Cohesion Policy stakeholders in the Czech context, complemented by insights from an online 'interactive dialogue', a workshop with Czech and international experts, all held in 2021. The report overviews the key challenges and opportunities for cross-fertilisation and outlines a set of pragmatic and strategic recommendations to strengthen the relations between spatial planning, regional policy and EU Cohesion Policy in the Czech Republic.

# 1 Introduction

ESPON COMPASS Dialogue and Case Study project set out to explore the potential for linking more closely EU Cohesion Policy and spatial planning in EU Member States. The project, on the one hand, builds on the original COMPASS study to investigate the scope for this cross-fertilisation across a range of 32 countries. On the other hand, it provides more in-depth insight into how to make cross-fertilisation work, based on the case of the Czech Republic, a country where Cohesion Policy has been playing a major role in deployment of regional policy and driving changes in territorial governance.

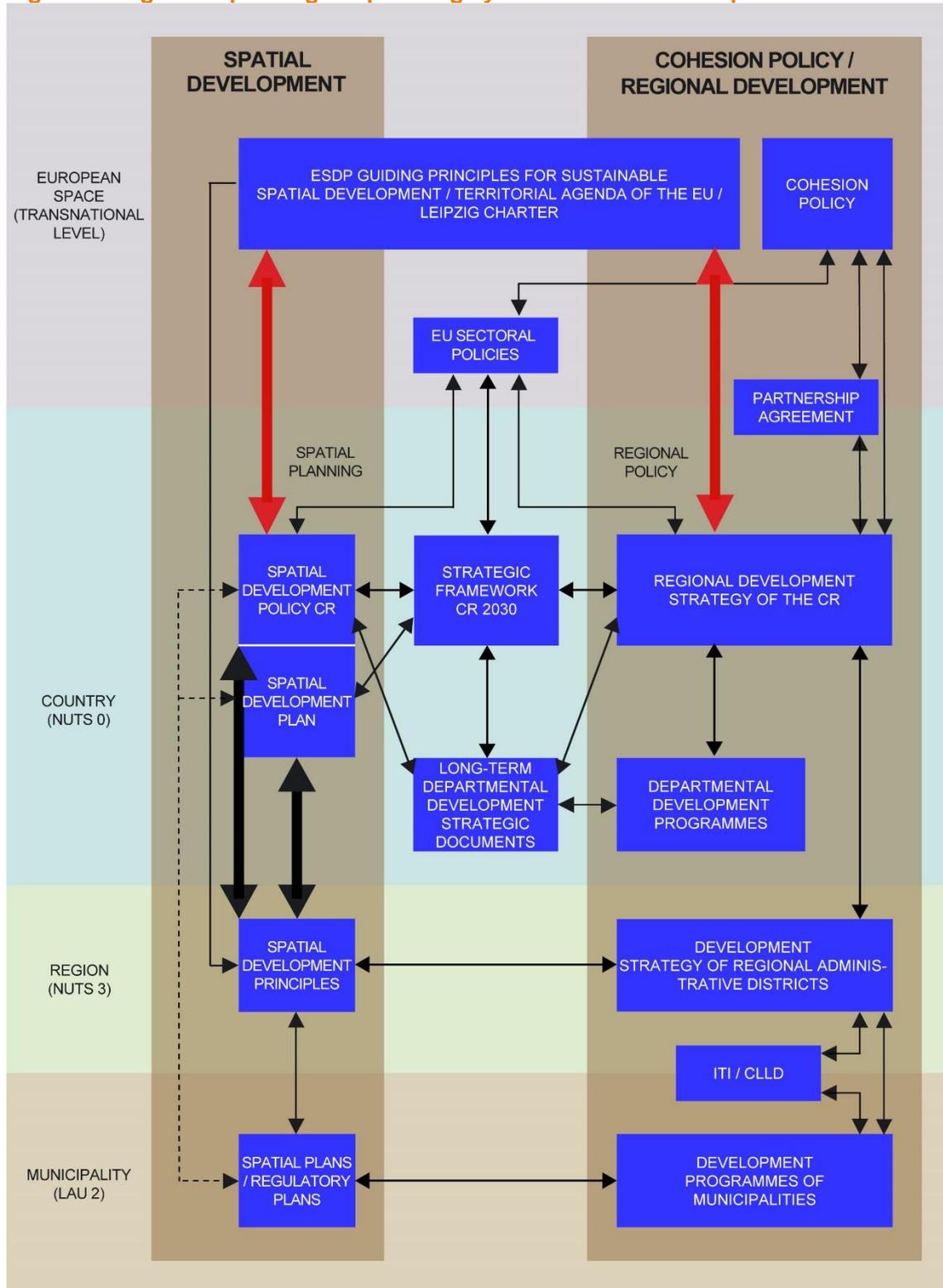
This report builds on findings from the Czech case study conducted as part of ESPON COMPASS Dialogue and Case Study between December 2020 and February 2021. Additionally, desk research of planning literature, in particular expert debates in the Czech journal *Urbanismus a územní rozvoj* [Urbanism and spatial development] was executed. Also the preliminary results from the recent study 'Analysis, recommendations and legislative proposals for a Building Act reform in the area of spatial planning' (DG REFORM, 2020), delivered by Deloitte Czech Republic, were found to be useful. Drawing on these resources, a questionnaire for Czech planners and planning administrators was elaborated and distributed among 24 experts, with following interviews with 15 respondents from state offices (ministries and regional administration), planning practice and research. A draft briefing paper was then elaborated and circulated among the participants that were invited for an interactive dialogue session, which served for validation and comparison of the case with practices elsewhere in Europe.

The report is structured as follows. The remainder of this introductory section, first, sets the scene for the discussion on cross-fertilisation between Cohesion Policy and spatial planning in the Czech Republic, by introducing the features of the Czech planning system. After having provided this background information, the introductory section outlines how the implementation of Cohesion Policy and the spatial planning practice operate in 'parallel universes', with hardly any overlaps and connections, limiting the scope for cross-fertilisation between these two policy realms. Finally, the last part of the introduction will set the Czech case in context of the ESPON COMPASS results covering 32 European countries (ESPON, 2018a). In the second section of the report, we overview the main challenges and opportunities for cross-fertilisation in the Czech context, building on the insights from the case study research. In the third section of the report, we discuss recommendations for making cross-fertilisation work. We hereby distinguish between shorter-term, pragmatic recommendations, and more strategic long-term ones. The fourth section of the report covers inspiring examples of integration or synergies between Cohesion Policy and spatial planning from across Europe, sourced from the original COMPASS study and from the interactive dialogue with experts. The report closes with a concluding section, summarising the main take-away messages and opening the discussion on the lessons-learned from this study for other countries.

## 1.1 Introduction to the system of Czech spatial management

Czech spatial management consists of institutionally separated regional (economic) policy and spatial "territorial" planning, which operate on national, regional and local levels in parallel and without many links and much cross-influence.

**Figure 1 Diagram explaining the planning system in the Czech Republic**



Source: Ministry for Regional Development; Policy of Spatial Development (Czech Republic, 2021); original graphic adapted by the Authors.<sup>1</sup>

Spatial planning (the literal translation of the Czech name is “territorial planning”) is requested to coordinate public and private interests in land use, and examine the possibilities of land use with regard to territorial conditions. Spatial planning has undergone a number of changes since the first legal regulation of this activity in the second half of the 1940s. It has, however, maintained legal and factual continuity throughout.

The agenda of regional policy was introduced by the national government in 1998 in the Regional Development Act (Czech Republic, 2000). The Act requires that a national Strategy of Regional Development is elaborated and updated regularly. Since EU accession, Czech regional policy has been integrated with EU Cohesion Policy. The sequence of its updates follows the planning periods of ESIF. The Strategy is expected to use the outcomes of territorial planning and coordinate sectoral policies. In practice however, sectoral policies frequently do not take spatial effects into account (Sýkora, 2006, p. 114, 132).

The Planning and Building Act of 2006 (Czech Republic, 2006) deals with spatial planning. The proclaimed aim of the legislation is to streamline the process of development and to promote sustainable development as the ultimate aim of planned development. Following the requirement of the European Landscape Convention “to integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies” (CEC, 1990: Art. 5 b), natural landscape receives the same importance in planning as the built environment. Planning documents are structured according to national, regional and local (municipal) levels. Documents for 'higher' territorial levels incorporate binding decisions that must be considered in the documents for the 'lower' levels. Regions can, however, intervene in local development only in matters of regional importance.

To ensure improved and more effective information flows, a permanent database with all territory-relevant data on the levels of micro-regions and regions is created, updated and digitally displayed on web pages of particular regions and micro-regions. This permanent database enables monitoring to become an integral part of planning: the reviewed analyses of the territorial data serve the periodic reviews of each local or regional plan, and the evaluation of sustainable development on local and regional levels. Different regions use different data models to store the data; monitoring and analyses on the national level is therefore limited. Majority of the data describes infrastructure and environment.

The national Spatial Development Policy [*Politika územního rozvoje*] sets national priorities for sustainable development as frameworks for regional and local planning, and for the management of sustainable development. It identifies development areas, development axes and specific areas where the balance between environmental quality, social cohesion and the economy is distorted, and assigns requirements for planning and decision making to these areas and axes. A set of area specific requirements is another part of the policy. This mostly deals with the territorial impact of large projects for new motorways, roads and other infrastructures. It is binding to consider requirements in all planning documents and during the issuing of planning permissions. (Maier, 2014).

Spatial planning documentation consists of Development Principles [*Zásady územního rozvoje*] (regional tier), Local Plans [*Územní plány*] for the jurisdictions of municipalities, and Regulatory plans [*Regulační plány*] for selected parts of municipalities. It has a legal status of general nature, measures are binding for any actor in a change in the territory, and is organised in a top-down hierarchy<sup>2</sup>. However, the Development Principles must not infringe upon planning powers of self-governed municipalities. This condition limits their influence on cross-municipal coordination, particularly in the context of bigger projects as well as setting target population across municipal boundaries. Local Plans are the central and immediately operational instruments of territorial management and land use regulation while Regulatory Plans are not widely used in the practice of Czech spatial planning. Therefore, development tends to be managed without detailed regulations on building volumes, shapes and bulk, with considerable negative impact on maintaining the character and quality of the built environment.

Spatial planning is heavily influenced by sectoral policies, particularly concerning transportation, energy and manufacturing. It is expected to only address the impact of sectoral investment plans rather than to coordinate these. The institutional actors who defend the specific public interests that are expressed in sectoral policies have a very strong legal position when negotiating plans.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The diagram does not include links to documents related to the NUTS 2 level (Cohesion Regions), since there is no spatial planning documentation for this level. The red arrows indicate the implementation of the EU Territorial Agenda.

<sup>2</sup> The set of spatial planning documentation was recently complemented by the newly introduced Spatial Development Plan [*Územní rozvojový plán*] on national level.

## 1.2 The ‘parallel universes’ of EU Cohesion Policy and domestic spatial planning

The national Strategy for Regional Development is a key tool for the implementation of regional policy and the coordination of other public policies on regional development. The strategy especially regards the dynamic and balanced economic and social development of the State and its individual regions and lays down the basic conditions for the fulfilment of objectives of regional development. As such the national Strategy for Regional Development is the immediate link to EU Cohesion Policy, via the national priorities identified within its frameworks.

Unlike spatial planning, regional policy is immediately connected to and aligned with the implementation system of EU Cohesion Policy via the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), which are the main source of funding for the Strategy for Regional Development. The periodic updates of the Strategy for Regional Development are coordinated with the programming periods of the EU Cohesion Policy.

In the run-up to the EU accession in 2004, the Czech Republic, like many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, introduced a regional tier of government to comply with the requirements for implementation of Cohesion Policy at the regional level. However, the regions established remained relatively small, most of them corresponding to NUTS 3 level, as opposed to NUTS 2 level at which Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) for Cohesion Policy were designed and implemented. This resulted in a situation in which ‘artificial’ regional entities were created at NUTS 2 level specifically to manage ROPs after accession to the EU. These entities lacked clear legitimacy (councils nominated from selected regional (NUTS-3) councillors) and a clear embeddedness in the territorial governance system as well as links to spatial planning system (Dąbrowski & Piskorek, 2018; Maier, 2014). The (territorial) impacts of Cohesion Policy in relation to spatial planning remained at best moderate in the Czech case (ESPON, 2018), hence limiting opportunities for cross-fertilisation between the two policies.<sup>3</sup>

Regional assistance has been channelled to the Regions of the Concentrated Assistance of the State since 1998. The delimitation of these regions is periodically reviewed on the basis of a multiple criteria method among which unemployment rate plays a dominant role. The shifts in this delimitation reflect the changing nature of the problem: while rural peripheries were assisted in the 1990s, since 2008 the assistance has been focused on Structurally Affected Regions of North-western Bohemia and the Moravian-Silesian (Os-trava) regions<sup>4</sup>.

Since 2014 novel territorial instruments have been introduced as part of the EU Cohesion Policy: integrated territorial investments (ITI) and community-led local development (CLLD). In practice they have not functioned as an appropriate tool to support the spatial planning system, which remained strongly constrained by jurisdictions of municipalities and regions. Particularly in the case of the Prague Metropolitan Region, which involves the Capital City of Prague as a region and the significant part of the Central Bohemian Region, any effort for coordinated planning among Prague and the surrounding municipalities belonging to Central Bohemia faces extreme difficulties. This is one of several examples of how in the Czech context (but also in many other ESIF recipient countries) “a top-down conforming pressure from the EU, usually by means of requirements for EU funding, may lead to rather formal adjustments in terms of superficial arrangements that would not affect the actual processes as the essence of planning” (Maier, 2015: 27).

## 1.3 The Czech case in context

To understand the implications of the results of this investigation against the ‘big picture’, it is necessary to set the Czech case study in the wider European context as portrayed in the ESPON COMPASS report (ESPON, 2018a). Czech Republic shares a lot with other Central and Eastern European countries which

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, as ESPON COMPASS results indicated, at least partial alignment between Cohesion Policy and spatial planning in terms of goals, implementation mechanisms and timing can be observed only in a limited number of countries (e.g. France, Poland, Portugal).

<sup>4</sup>The three structurally affected regions focused on the mining, processing and chemical industries in the past, are currently characterised by a low rate of economic growth, low attractiveness for living, a smaller offer of promising job opportunities for qualified professionals and worse conditions and low attractiveness for business.

accessed the European Union in 2004 and 2007: from legacies of centralised communist regimes, to experiences of transition towards liberal democracy and market economy from 1989, and processes of Europeanisation from the run-up to the accessions. Given its relative underdevelopment, as compared to the 'old' EU Member States, this group of countries is among the biggest beneficiaries of EU funding derived from EU Cohesion Policy (see Fig. 2).

**Figure 2 EU Cohesion Policy allocations in 2014-2020 and 2021-2027**



Data source: Bachtler, J., Mendez, C. & Wislade, F., 2020, p.19; geographic representation: Authors' own

The Czech Republic received the 8th biggest ESIF allocation in 2014-2020. All Czech regions apart from Prague itself were classified as 'less developed' regions for 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy programming period, whose GDP per capita is less than 75% of the EU average, with a co-financing rate of 80-85%. Importantly, Cohesion Policy plays a major role in financing public investment. ESIF accounted for 42.52% of overall public investment in the Czech Republic in 2017<sup>5</sup>, which is on par with countries like Romania (44.86%), Bulgaria (48.54%), but less than, for instance, Poland (61.17%), Lithuania (74.36%) or even Portugal (84.20%). It is, however, in striking contrast to other countries that still benefit from large ESIF budget, like Italy (12.71%) or Spain (16.59%), let alone 'net contributor' countries like for example Austria (1.31%).

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

For the 2021-2027 period Cohesion Policy allocations are set to be lower for most countries, including Czech Republic. Several Czech regions previously classified as Less Developed Regions are expected to move to the Transitions Regions category and the country is expected to face a reduction of the allocation from EUR 23.3 bln in 2014-2020 to EUR 19.3 bln in 2021-2027, and in per capita terms, respectively, from EUR 2213 to EUR 1829 (Bachtler, Mendez & Wislade, 2020). Still, in the upcoming programming period the average Czech citizen will benefit from the 6th largest allocation of ESIF funding, far above the EU average of EUR 818 per capita.

In sum, ESIF matters for Czech Republic given the amount of funding transferred and how important it is in financing public investment, as is the case in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe and to some degree in countries of the South of Europe (in some of them, like Italy, only some regions benefit from similar magnitude of funding). The ESIF funding requires for co-financing from national or local resources, which effectively makes most of public investments to certain amount dependent on the Cohesion Policy priorities.

The findings from the Czech case study will provide lessons for those countries, and vice-versa, the Czech Republic can draw lessons from other big beneficiaries of ESIF, albeit paying attention to institutional and cultural specificities in both cases.

Previous ESPON COMPASS study showed that the influence of the mainstream Cohesion Policy (implemented via sectoral and regional operational programmes funded by ERDF) was moderate, unlike in some other main beneficiaries of ESIF, like Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria or even Italy (see Table 1 below). However, moderate influence was also noted in Croatia, Latvia or Slovakia. It should be noted that between 2000 and 2016 this influence has been increasing in the Czech Republic, as is the case in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, apart from Hungary and Slovakia where it was deemed constant. More specifically, concerning territorial cooperation the influence of this strand of Cohesion Policy remained low in the Czech case, similarly to Romania or Latvia and Estonia, but in contrast to moderate influence for instance in Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Portugal or Spain. The influence of territorial cooperation on spatial planning and territorial governance in the Czech case has been increasing, though, as is the case in most Central and Eastern European countries. Finally, when it comes to the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy (e.g. URBAN initiative), the influence on Czech planning is moderate, as it is in Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, or Portugal, and it has also been increasing. Thus, overall, the influence of the different aspects of Cohesion Policy in the Czech Republic has been assessed as low to moderate, but generally increasing over time.

These comparisons, however, should be taken with a degree of caution because it has been impossible to distinguish any clear clusters of countries when looking at those trends. At best, one can conclude that the amounts of ESIF funding matter for the strength of influence of Cohesion Policy on planning, but not always, as the Czech case shows.

**Table 1 Influence of EU Cohesion Policy and its components (Territorial Cooperation and Urban Policy) on domestic territorial governance and spatial planning systems between 2000 and 2016, by significance and trend**

Influence of EU policies (2000 - 2016)	significance				trend			
	strong	moderate	low	no	increasing	constant	decreasing	swinging
<b>Cohesion Policy</b>	BG, ES, HU, IT, PL, RO, SI	BE, CY, <b>CZ</b> , DE, EE, EL, FR, HR, IE, LV, MT, PT, SK, UK	AT, FI, LT, LU, NL	DK, SE	AT, BG, CY, <b>CZ</b> , DK, EE, FR, HR, IE, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI	BE, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LU, NL, SE, SK	UK	
<b>Territorial Cooperation</b> <sup>(a)</sup>	FR, IT, LV	BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, ES, HU, IE, PL, PT, SK, UK	<b>CZ</b> , EE, HR, LT, LU, MT, NL, RO, SI	AT, DK, SE	BG, <b>CZ</b> , DE, DK, EE, IE, FR, HR, HU,	AT, BE, CY, EL, ES, IT, LU, MT, NL,		UK

Influence of EU policies (2000 - 2016)	significance				trend			
	strong	moderate	low	no	increasing	constant	decreasing	swinging
					LT, LV, PL, PT, RO,SI	SE, SK		
<b>Urban Policy</b>	IT, HU, RO	BG, CY, <b>CZ</b> , DE, EL, FR, LV, MT, PL, PT, SK, SI	BE, DK, EE, ES, FI, HR, IE, NL, UK	AT, LT, LU, SE	BE, BG, <b>CZ</b> , DE, DK, FR, HR, MT, NL, LV, LT, PL, PT, RO, SI	AT, CY, EL, FI, IE, LU, SE, SK, UK	IT	EE, ES,HU
<sup>(a)</sup> No answers from FI expert.								

Source: Adapted from ESPON 2018b, p.25

What are the specific barriers for closer alignment between spatial planning and EU Cohesion Policy between them and are there actually any potentials for cross-fertilisation that could be tapped into in the Czech case? The following section will address those questions.

## 2 Specific challenges in the Czech Republic in strengthening relations between EU Cohesion Policy implementation, regional policy and spatial planning at the national level

This section identifies the specific challenges in the Czech Republic in strengthening relations between EU Cohesion Policy implementation in this country, its domestic regional policy and spatial planning, mostly at the national level. It also deals with how spatial planning can take advantage of the potential offered by EU policies to strengthen social and territorial cohesion.

Czech regional policy, similarly as in the cases of Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, has been basically driven by the EU policies and priorities. In fact, the very institution of regional policy was re-established in the pre-accession period before the country entered the EU in 2004, after the previous regional planning of the command economy had been abolished in 1990 as an 'unwanted relic' of the totalitarian regime. The influence of EU policies and, consequently, EU structural funds, was increasing with the volume of the EU resources available for projects and with their recognition as the means to support development and enhance prosperity.

Spatial planning operates with longer time periods than the programming periods of the EU, in which the priorities for spatial development reflected in objectives of structural funding are usually set. However, certain inertia of spatial planning is considered a value by many planning professionals as the physical environment cannot effectively adapt to the ever-changing socioeconomic environment and the building processes by which people transform the physical environment are slower than the ever-changing economic and social needs.

Support from political elites for the ideas of sustainable development, green policy and social cohesion as they are coming from the EU forums is sometimes weak *vis-à-vis* immediate political targets dictated by populist considerations. Also, the spatial planning professionals who are mostly private tradespersons seeking contracts for the acquisition of spatial planning documentation, follow the wishes of contracting authorities when developing planning documents, rather than the distant and abstract goals declared in the EU policies.

Findings from the previous stages of the ESPON COMPASS projects, research from relevant Czech literature and enquiry with following interviews were used for identification of specific challenges in the Czech Republic in strengthening relations between EU Cohesion Policy implementation, regional policy and spatial planning.

The identified challenges are mainly related to the organisation of the spatial planning system, including its position in the context of spatial management, and the implementation of spatial policies in practice. It is by tackling these very challenges that the necessary preconditions can be created for a better link between EU Cohesion Policy implementation and spatial planning.

The challenges are classified into two categories: institutional, related to the institutional structures, regulations, distribution of competencies; and cultural, related to the less tangible, but no less important, deeply embedded features of the Czech political and planning culture.

### 2.1 Institutional challenges

- 1 The institutional duality of regional (economic) policy and spatial planning is the main challenge. The two parallel systems are loosely coordinated with other policies with spatial impact, such as transport policies. Spatial planning is only loosely connected with financial planning and budgeting of municipalities and regions; economic feasibility and sustainability is often weakly considered in plans.
- 2 Spatial planning is driven by sectoral policies, for which specific ministries are responsible, rather than coordinating them in space. In other words, spatial planning remains reactive rather than proactive in spatial coordination of policies. This is the case both on national and regional levels, but even on local

level, where the decisions made by, for example, the Directorate of Roads and Motorways, are requested to be simply transferred to local plans.

- 3 Spatial planning often deals only with investment activities, but lacks perspectives about sustainability of the planned projects in the long run and how they contribute to strategic development goals for a specific territory. Impacts of the planned projects on territorial cohesion are not effectively considered in planning.
- 4 Fragmented, incompatible and sometimes unshared data on territory<sup>6</sup>.
- 5 The weak professional capacity of planning and building authorities (local building offices as well as planning offices at the regional and municipal levels) and their difficult position between state executive and self-government makes them hardly able to consider a more strategic perspective when dealing with EU-funded investment projects.
- 6 Planning permissions are issued by the officials of planning and building authorities who act in service of the state, but their contracts are influenced by local offices controlled by local councils (so-called transferred or delegated competence)<sup>7</sup>. This exposes the officials to pressures from local power groups who may follow their particular interests contrary to Cohesion Policy and, at the same time, the decision-making of the office is not subject to public scrutiny.
- 7 In contrast to the internal vertical hierarchy between the individual levels of spatial planning instruments stipulated by law, there is a weak regulation of the horizontal relationship between sectoral policies and strategies at different territorial levels, except for the requirement to obtain consent from the respective authorities, who represent specific public interests.

## 2.2 Cultural challenges

In addition to the aforementioned institutional problems, cultural barriers were identified as well. These barriers may be much more difficult to overcome, due to their deep embeddedness in the ways in which public affairs are run in the country and the socialisation of generations of officials in this cultural setting. The challenges stemming from the cultural barriers are as follows:

- 8 Top-down governance model being predominant in the Czech Republic, the emphasis is on formal compliance even on the account of design quality and territorial equity and/or social fairness. Consequently, despite strong top-down hierarchy between planning documents at different levels in the spatial planning system, the national policies and priorities of the Spatial Planning Policy may be meticulously cited, but, in reality, are not considered in the actual design of local plans.
- 9 Weak capacity for compromise is another feature of the Czech political culture, which also weighs on the capacity to coordinate across jurisdictions and sectoral boundaries between policies. The predominant perception among the officials representing different institutions and levels is a 'zero-sum game' thinking about interactions with others instead seeking for 'win-win' solutions. That hinders the much needed dialogue and a perspective going beyond one's own institutional remit.
- 10 Related to the above, a low awareness among the public sector officials of their mission as representatives of the public interest is another obstacle. Regional policy and planning stakeholders are not aware (or choose to ignore) the wider context of their activities, the possible externalities of their decisions for other fields, their impacts on the pursuit of the public interest and follow just their narrowly defined institutional interests.
- 11 Pragmatic approach applied to cohesion funds related to spatial planning, where instead of an effort to make use of EU structural and investment funds to accomplish the place-based strategic objectives, spatial planning is sometimes expected to adjust their plans so that currently available European funds are consumed. Spending all the available money is proclaimed to the public as a proof of good governance, instead of their use to create highest added value.

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<sup>6</sup> Spatial planning authorities collect and regularly update data on territory, but the data models vary among regions. Apart from this database, other public authorities collect geographical data on, for example, the environment, health and transport services, but some of these databases are not shared with spatial planners.

<sup>7</sup> The transferred / delegated competence of territorial self-government means that the content of the performance of state administration is to a certain extent transferred (delegated) from the state to territorial self-governments. In essence, the state performs state administration in a delegated capacity through officials who are not employees of the state, but employees of municipalities or regions.

This is a consequence of the principle of a mixed model of public administration applied in the Czech Republic, which aims to bring the state administration closer to citizens. When exercising independent powers, the size of the municipality is not decisive, and all municipalities are equal.

- 12 A gap exists between formal planning practice, as prescribed by the planning system, and its rules and informal components of planning embedded in planning cultures. In fact, the official objectives of planning, e.g. sustainable development based on the balance between social cohesion, environmental protection and economic development, are proclaimed in official policies and documents, but seldom reflected in an actual behaviour and decisions by planning stakeholders (officials, politicians, investors). A pursuit of particular economic interests is often disguised behind the officially declared concern for producing positive societal and environmental impacts (cf. e.g. Tynkkynen 2009). An example of this is the 'lip service' paid to the transferred 'European' approaches and procedures like Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and possibly Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA).
- 13 Finally, the planning culture in the Czech Republic is rooted in the Germanic *Städtebau* tradition (Maier, 2020: 53), with most of planners having an educational background in architecture and consider spatial planning as an extension to architecture and urban design. This, combined with exposure to neo-liberal *laissez-faire* policies and approach in planning, makes the planning professionals in the Czech Republic ill-prepared to cope with the challenges of sustainable development, spatial equity, climate change and decarbonisation that the European Union set out to address.

## 2.3 Potentials

Even though many barriers were identified, there are, however, several opportunities to be explored, in order to facilitate closer integration between spatial planning and Cohesion Policy in the Czech Republic. The interviewees brought the following opportunities:

- 1 The legal position of spatial planning in the Czech context is strong. The regions are obliged to define regional principles of spatial development. Most municipalities have valid local plans, which are obligatory for any change of land use, particularly for decisions by planning and building offices. One can build on this potential to anchor Cohesion Policy implementation in spatial conditions.
- 2 By the same token, the Czech Republic boasts a fully developed, 'mature' three-tier system (CEC 1997; Reimer et al 2014: 219) of hierarchically coordinated statutory planning documents (national, regional<sup>8</sup>, municipal), which is an asset to build on. In addition, there is access to planning data, GIS information, analyses and documents provided via the internet, which can facilitate linking Cohesion Policy programmes to spatial conditions, making them truly place-based, while at the same time, facilitating territorial assessment of their impacts.
- 3 The said 'mature' planning system is underpinned by a widespread network of planning offices, which can work with the authorities responsible for Cohesion Policy implementation at different levels.
- 4 The Czech Republic has in place a system of legal protection of specific public interests related to spatial planning – protection of nature and landscape, water resources, mineral resources, air, agricultural land, forestry, cultural heritage, flood protection, noise protection, etc. This can counterbalance the above-mentioned low emphasis on wider context and consequences of planning decisions but, at the same time, it is anchored in the sectoral approach.
- 5 Finally, spatial planning is a matter of increasing interest of the citizens for the space they live in. In the recent years, planning has become a widely debated issue in communal elections. A recent obvious shift from protests against planned projects towards attempts for a dialogue between the public and the planners creates favourable conditions for future pushing the agenda of cross-fertilisation and going beyond the debates on how to best 'spend' the EU funding, towards how to best use it to achieve the strategic goals outlined in the municipal planning documents.

Besides these existing opportunities within the system of Czech spatial planning, current external factors and overall trends in technology and governance can contribute to cross-fertilisation in the future:

- 6 Positive influence of continuous and predictable EU Cohesion Policy expressed in structural and investment funds can speed up the overcoming of the existing challenges and bottlenecks.
- 7 Among the technological potentials, ICT can contribute to a restructuring of the existing departmentalised, top-down spatial planning system towards more balanced system of governance in planning. This could be done by establishing two-way communication between authorities and interested parties

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<sup>8</sup> Regional tier of planning relates to the NUTS 3 regions; this fits the territorial division for governance and has more logics than somehow artificially created NUTS 2 regions. The linkage of EU funds to NUTS 2 territorial units was practically abandoned after the experience from the 2007-2013 programming period and their management was transferred to the central level.

- (stakeholders as well as citizens) and using ICT also in the more initial phases of the creation of strategies and plans. This may also result in a shift towards greater use of ‘soft’ methods in spatial planning based on online participation in the process.
- 8 The Just Transition Fund gaining prominence in 2021-2027 period has a stronger territorial orientation, in particular focusing on supporting regions that are the most carbon-intensive or with the most people working in fossil fuels. As such these regions will be most affected by the transition towards a climate-neutral economy (Böhme et al., 2020). This may create opportunities for closer alignment and cross-fertilisation with domestic planning for sustainability transitions in those specific regions – in the case of the Czech Republic these are NUTS 2 Severozápad (Northwest) and Moravskoslezsko (Moravian-Silesian).
  - 9 For the 2021-2027 period, the EU Cohesion Policy will be also connected to post-COVID recovery package, including REACT-EU (Recovery Assistant for Cohesion and Territories of Europe), as part of Next Generation EU. This entails topping up the already planned Cohesion Policy allocations with additional EUR 50.6 billion, to be disbursed swiftly and with greater flexibility to cushion the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by investing in health services, but also in support for SMEs and in projects promoting the transition towards green and digital economy, especially in sectors and territories most affected by the crisis (dependent on tourism, culture, hospitality services). In addition, InvestEU Programme, the successor of the so-called Juncker Plan, will also leverage private and public and offer EU budget guarantees which could be combined with grant-based EU support from Cohesion Policy. These instruments are expected to assist in post-COVID recovery and generate synergies with Cohesion Policy implementation by covering similar thematic areas for investment. However, they also bring the risk of overlaps and dilution of the territorial focus of EU investment. The focus on quick implementation, easier administration at the national level and greater flexibility, may entail competition between the funding instruments and preference of beneficiaries for REACT-EU funding at the expense of Cohesion Policy, due to the former being potentially less demanding in terms of project quality and long-term strategic impacts. This could, to some degree,

**Table 2 Summary of challenges and potentials for cross-fertilisation**

<b>Challenges</b>	<i>Institutional</i>	1. Duality of regional policy and territorial planning
		2. Reactiveness of spatial planning
		3. Focus on investment as opposed to strategic planning
		4. Fragmented database on territory
		5. Weak professional capacity and status of planning authorities
		6. Dual service of planning administrators: state and local / regional councils
		7. Weak horizontal coordination between sectoral policies and strategies
	<i>Cultural</i>	8. Top-down governance model
		9. Weak consensus-building capacity
		10. Low awareness of the need to represent public interest
		11. Fund spending instead of their sustainable usage
		12. Officially proclaimed objectives of planning not reflected in actions on the ground
		13. Planning culture restricted to architectural perspective
<b>Potentials</b>	<i>Internal</i>	1. Strong legal position of spatial planning
		2. Mature three-tier planning system and availability of spatial data
		3. Network of planning institutions
		4. Legal protection of specific public interests related to spatial planning
		5. Citizens increasingly aware and interested in spatial planning
	<i>External</i>	6. Continuity and predictability of EU Cohesion Policy
		7. The increasing use of ICT in spatial planning
		8. Just Transition Fund
		9. New tools for post-COVID recovery and updated Invest-EU programme as a complement but also possible challenge to Cohesion Policy.

Source: own elaboration

counteract the efforts to ensure a strategic, place-based and territorial orientation of Cohesion Policy (Bachtler et al., 2020; Böhme & Lür, 2020). By this, the additional funding supplementing Cohesion Policy in the context of post-pandemic recovery may hinder the territorial and strategic focus in Cohesion Policy, an aspect of this where there is the most scope for cross-fertilisation with spatial planning.

### 3 Recommendation for practical mechanisms of policy integration

This chapter is devoted to recommendations for the Czech Republic to introduce additional practical mechanisms of policy integration to facilitate better coordination between spatial planning, regional development policy, and EU Cohesion Policy implementation.

First, a series of themes in response to the challenges and potentials discussed above was formulated (listed below from 'A' to 'H'). Subsequently, for each of the themes specific recommendations were developed (each recommendation is marked with a letter corresponding to the abovementioned themes) and divided into two sets: pragmatic recommendations for the short-term, and strategic recommendations for the long-term.

#### 3.1 Themes of relevance for improving integration between EU Cohesion Policy implementation and spatial planning

The following main issues were identified in the enquiries and interviews with stakeholders and practitioners in the Czech Republic:

- (A) linkage / integration of regulative, strategic, visionary co-ordination of inter-sectoral planning and territorial management – on national, regional, local levels;
- (B) spatial planning on the level of functional urban areas (FUAs) and metropolitan regions, where there is a high level of spatial integration;
- (C) digitalisation & ICT, specifically in terms of means to simplify the processes of coordination and broadening the citizen's participation and to enable interoperability and open access to the data;
- (D) ex-ante assessment (Territorial Impact Assessment - TIA) and monitoring of planning policies and major development projects.

Moreover, additional themes, related to the long-term or far-reaching changes in the policy and institutional context, were brought up. These relate to aspects, which are much less likely to change, due to path dependencies and entrenched and immutable interests of stakeholders:

- (E) alignment between ESIF programming and the acquisition of national spatial and strategic planning tools;
- (F) link to Territorial Agenda 2030 – synergies with national spatial planning and sectoral policies;
- (G) increase in the size of basic territorial unit for local spatial planning and incentivise cooperation among those units;
- (H) capacity development and multi-disciplinary perspective in the planning profession.

#### 3.2 Pragmatic approach: Reaching for the 'low-hanging fruit'

More specifically, on that basis, one can list several recommendations that concentrate the effort to where the effects could be tangible and the change could be 'within reach' (albeit by no means easily). These are as follows:

- (A1) Integrate strategic and spatial planning policies on national level and for metropolitan / city region agglomeration (ITI). Find a common language: unify the terminology across the related fields, particularly harmonise the definitions of development areas, axes and specific areas in spatial planning with the classification of types of territories in strategic documents of regional policy (these developments are already underway);
- (A2, C1) Finalise and publish an integrated set of open-access, regularly updated GIS data related to all branches of spatial management (i.e. spatial planning, regional development, strategic planning), supported by on-line links to statistical data, census, departmental database and the Planning Data [*Územně analytické podklady - ÚAP*]. These data should be used for monitoring, benchmarking and

assessment of environmental, social and economic development of territories and for ex-ante assessment of territorial impact of major projects (see below). Make use of INTERREG for open GIS data for spatial management;

- (C2, F2) Establish an information feedback mechanism from local and regional level of spatial planning to EU policies and territorial agendas, using the evidence from the spatial management-related data;
- (D1, E3) Introduce assessment of territorial social, environmental and economic impact of major infrastructural investment (transportation lines, energetics, water supply and management, major commercial establishments), based on the data / indicator evidence. The assessment should consider how many people will be positively / negatively affected by the project, how much the project will contribute to social cohesion in terms of equal / improved access to public infrastructures and services, how much the project will contribute to improved ecosystem services, how much the project will improve access of businesses to their partners and / or customers, how the project will impact on viability of existing facilities, etc. (Some interviewees deemed this a bureaucratic hassle, following the experiences with some other 'imported' procedures, such as EIA);
- (E1) Coordinate planning periods of the updating of spatial planning documents (Spatial Planning Policy, Development Principles - *ZÚR*) with the programming periods of ESIF so that the ESIF objectives as well as the relevant priorities of the Territorial Agenda can be immediately reflected. Coordinate the schedules for making of and updating of local strategic and spatial plans so that they could reflect the shifts in EU Cohesion Policy and territorial agenda. Alternatively, a more predictable and reliable long-term policies of EU could also contribute to a better cross-fertilisation among EU policies and spatial planning;
- (D2, E2) Modify the structure of the national EU expenditure database on the ESIF project support, so that the territorial destination of the projects can be easily identified;
- (B1) Complement the existing hierarchy of statutory, binding documents of spatial planning on national, regional and municipal levels with visionary and strategic planning for functional territorial areas – ITI, FUAs, rural micro-regions, as informal input for the statutory documents within the system of spatial planning. This recommendation is already followed in several parts of the Czech territory, e.g. some ITI infrastructure studies and landscape studies for micro-regions; however, it has remained a major hurdle in the case of Prague and its metropolitan region<sup>9</sup>;
- (A3, F1) Redefine the roles of spatial planning documentation to better reflect EU Cohesion Policy and Territorial Agenda 2030. Cohesion Policy should be used to support and enhance the Spatial Development Policy, especially in terms of nurturing more strategic (as opposed to reactive) approach to planning. The role of the regional tier, i.e. the Development Principles (*ZÚR*) should be promoted to actively coordinate local land-use Plans (*ÚP*) and specify the EU Cohesion Policy objectives and relevant priorities of the Territorial Agenda for them. Local Plans (*ÚP*) should provide strategic reference for the infrastructure projects assisted by ESIF, with respect to the national spatial policy priorities. Local plans should be motivated to seek for place-based application of policy objectives. Their development strategy should reflect wider (regional) context in the extent of built-up areas, as well as character of unbuilt landscape. For development and redevelopment areas, detailed Regulatory Plans should be requested, supplemented by planning contracts among stakeholders of development on co-financing investment in infrastructures (all these measures are in line with current legislation).

In general, it is recommended to make EU funding available to support implementation of the recommended changes during the 2021-2027 programming period, particularly in terms of development of continued support and capacity development of for cooperation and planning in functional areas (ITI, CLLD), interregional knowledge transfer on this topic (INTERREG), development of spatial data platforms and capacity to employ it, and use of Technical Assistance to support the efforts to align spatial planning and Cohesion Policy documentation and intervention goals. As was mentioned by the participants of the Interactive Dialogue, one

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<sup>9</sup> In the inter-war period, there existed the State Commission for Regulation, which had a power to make plans for Prague and its hinterland as far as ca 20 km from the city borders. It was exempt from the immediate control of municipalities

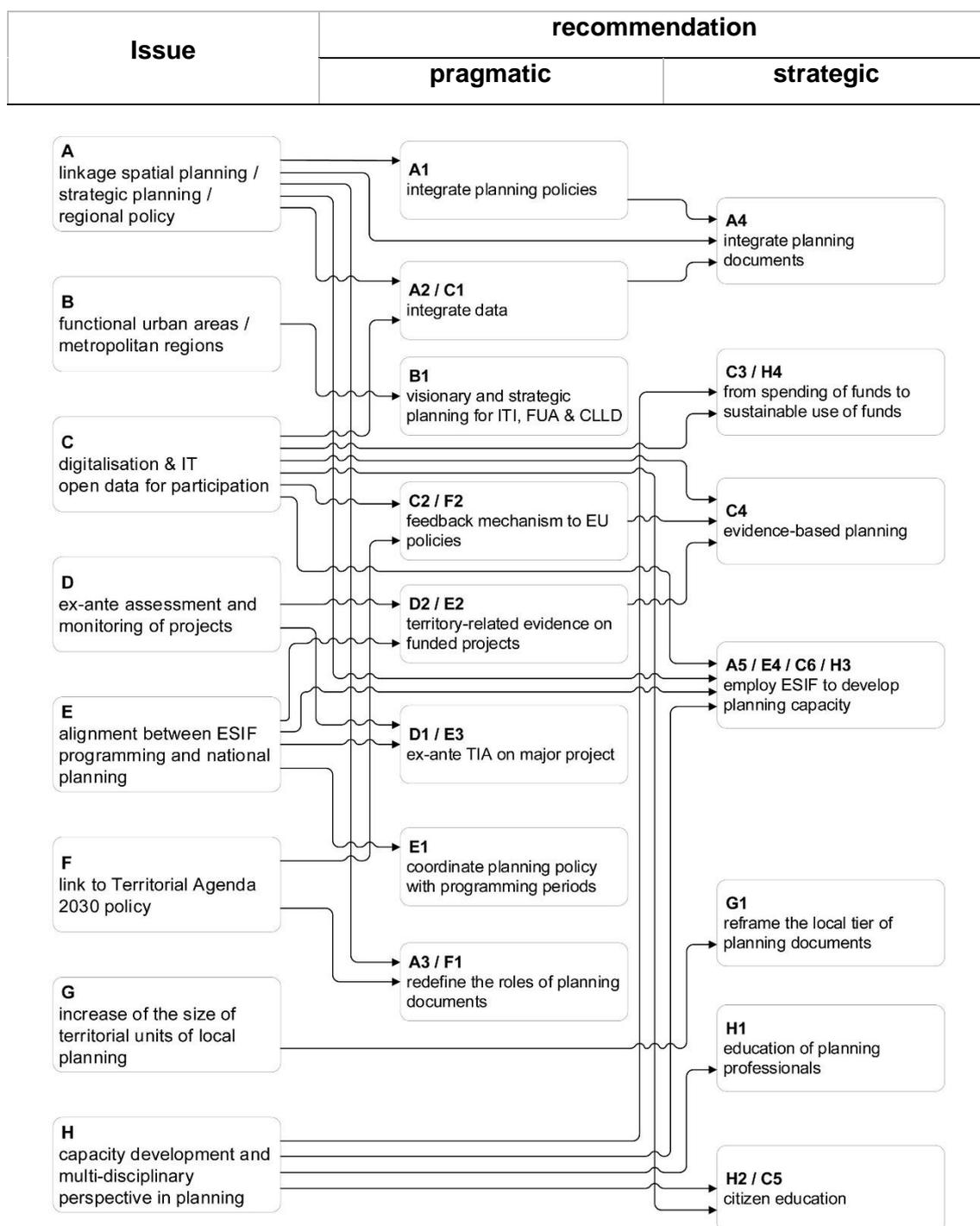
does not need to 'reinvent the wheel'. Rather one should work with the existing funding instruments to develop capacity and implement ESIF to support the implementation of spatial strategies and plans, while strengthening the emerging decision-making structures for functional areas spanning across municipal boundaries. At the same time, however, the new programming period creates new opportunities. Namely it is worth exploring the potentials opened by the new cross-cutting Policy Objective 5 'A Europe closer to citizens' focusing on territorial strategies and local initiatives for sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas with greater degree of participation of civil society.

### 3.3 Strategic approach: What matters for the long-term

There are also recommendations that can be considered more strategic and able to bring long-lasting positive effects. However, these recommendations are more difficult to follow, because in some cases, they relate to deeply embedded institutional or cultural features. These strategic recommendations are as follows:

- (C3) Change the way how planning officers and practitioners understand EU policies. An objective of this change is to reorient the debate and the perceptions from the concern for spending EU money towards a concern for making strategic use of that money, in order to forward the agenda of the spatial planning policy;
- (C4) Turn towards an evidence-based spatial planning supported by openly available data and their application in indicators, ex-ante assessment as well as monitoring of the changes triggered by implementation of the plans and strategies;
- (A4) Integrate strategic and spatial planning documents on the national level and possibly also on regional level. Coordinate strategic and spatial planning with longer term financial perspectives of public budgets, both domestic and European;
- (G1) Reframe the local tier of planning towards planning for functional urban areas and micro-regions in rural areas: move from standalone local plans for each community / municipality towards more integrated plans that cover functional groupings of more communities / municipalities up to the scale of micro-regions, with the complement of detailed Regulatory Plans as defined above (A3, F1), while dedicating more attention to open landscape as an important factor for sustainability. To support this aim, micro-regional councils comprising of local mayors and selected councillors as the approval body for the local tier of plans in rural areas, should be established;
- (H1) Education of planning professionals is critical. The acknowledgement of spatial planning as a discipline of university education is desirable in this regard, based on insights from a wide range of knowledge and skills in the fields of social, economic, environmental, technical and artistic disciplines. Make use of INTERREG for cross-fertilisation and capacity building of planning officers;
- (H2, C5) Citizen education can ensure support for strategic and integrated planning for sustainability. Introduce the theme of sustainable urban development, perception of urban quality and sustainable treatment of natural resources into educational programmes of primary and secondary schools.
- (A5, C6, E4, H3) Use Cohesion Policy funding to set the foundation and develop capacity for the above-mentioned shifts in evidence-based planning and education of planning practitioners and the wider public. In this respect, continued engagement in the use of Cohesion Policy instruments oriented towards functional and urban areas in 2021-2027 and beyond will be critical for sustained learning and capacity-development. By the same token, INTERREG has the potential to trigger cross-country transfer and co-creation of knowledge on evidence-based planning and integration between Cohesion Policy and domestic spatial planning, it is thus recommended to orient the priorities and goals of this instrument to support this kind of learning processes in 2021-2027.

**Table 3 Overview of issues and corresponding recommendations**



Source: own elaboration<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The table depicts the links and relationships between issues (left column), and recommendations (pragmatic in the middle column and strategic in the right column). For example, the issue F – link to Territorial Agenda 2030 policy needs that the roles of planning documents should be redefined (pragmatic recommendation A3 / F1, which will also tackle the issue A – linkage between spatial and strategic planning and regional policy), and at the same time it needs to create feedback mechanisms to EU policies (pragmatic recommendation C2 / F2, which also solves the issue of digitalisation and ICT open data) and in the strategic approach it will result in evidence-based planning (C4).

## 4 Inspiring good practices

For the identification of examples of good practices to strengthen relations between spatial planning, regional policy and EU Cohesion Policy, a selection of national cases covered in the COMPASS study provided a first valuable inspiration and lessons for addressing the challenges identified in the Czech case. The interactive dialogue as part of the current ESPON COMPASS spin-off project indicated additional sources of lessons for cross-fertilisation in the Czech Republic. A summary of the findings from these two sources is listed in table 4 below.

**Table 4 Selected examples of ESPON COMPASS inspirations for the Czech case study**

Country	Inspiration for the Czech case	Link to recommendations
Bulgaria	Regional development councils are an attempt to create a regional tier in the Bulgarian context, which has been missing. The councils are involved first in the planning process (these would be district and municipal administrations of up to 15 000 citizens located in each NUTS2 level) – they are brought together to agree on and adopt the Integrated territorial strategy at NUTS2 level. The Councils will then participate in the selection of projects funded under the Regional Development Operational Programme 2021-2027 (which is fully focused on PO5). This is also an attempt to involve smaller municipalities (which were excluded from funding in the previous period) in the management of the funding and create connections between them and core cities nearby. (Source: Interactive Dialogue)	B1; G1
Hungary	<p>Planning for functional regions: Budapest agglomeration as an example. The creation of the land-use plan for the suburban region adopted by the Hungarian Parliament in 2005 was also based on a region-wide consultation process with the affected local governments. Planning documents on different levels (Budapest agglomeration, Pest county and Budapest city) have set common goals, including promoting polycentric and more balanced territorial development in the suburban region.</p> <p>Integrated urban development strategy has been introduced since 2014 for the metropolitan region of Budapest, as a statutory local level planning instrument. It pays much attention to the territorial aspects of the planned developments, concentrates on areas of actions overcrossing district borders and determines the urban structure. It also sets up a horizontal goal of having a proactive and coordinative role in the metropolitan region. During the planning phase intensive civic involvement was of core importance. The continuously updated website provided information after every working group meeting; it also enabled the public to share their opinion regarding the updated materials and to send their own project suggestions. Besides, four open forums were held, with professional and civic organisations, along with public representatives participating. The opinions of the participants were incorporated into the final materials. (Source: ESPON COMPASS)</p>	B1; G1; C3
Ireland	The Irish case offers an example of a structure of spatial planning instruments that is fully integrated with the structure of spatial and economic strategies / policies, avoiding the kind of duality observed in the Czech case, which hinders cross-fertilisation. In Ireland, a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy was put in place, facilitating such integration across scales, along shared strategic objectives, defined at the higher levels, and detailed proposals elaborated locally <sup>11</sup> (Source: ESPON COMPASS)	A1; A4

<sup>11</sup> See also Williams & Varghese (2018).

Country	Inspiration for the Czech case	Link to recommendations
Italy	<p>Municipalities with population less than 3000 inhabitants are obliged to share their planning agendas. This creates a legal base for enforcing collaboration on planning for issues that span across municipal boundaries in small municipalities (which are a typical feature of the Czech local tier of government).</p> <p>The Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) is a good example of national initiative providing room for cross-fertilisation between EU Cohesion Policy and spatial governance and planning at the different territorial levels (multi-level, multi-fund and multi-actor approach). It is directly derived from the place-based approach (both are ideas of Fabrizio Barca) and it is going to be re-launched in the period 2021-27 (Source: Interactive Dialogue)</p>	B1; G1
Poland	<p>EU funds were used to support work on compiling a series of supra-municipal documents, as opposed to local spatial management plans. Unlike municipal regulations (such as study of conditions and directions of spatial management, local plan), such documents emphasise the need for rational investing, economic efficiency, etc. Unfortunately, these documents were not mandatory at the stage of implementing their resolutions and provisions being the local law acts. One example of this is the use of ITI as a platform to develop a strategy for the Warsaw Metropolitan Area. (Source: ESPON COMPASS, Interactive Dialogue)</p>	B1; G1
Portugal / Spain	<p>More than a 100 cross-border institutional agreements were established, sometimes leading to visions and strategies. Six Eurocities were established between both countries<sup>12</sup>. (Source: Interactive Dialogue)</p>	C6, E4, H3; H1
Spain / Catalonia	<p>Creation of intermediate institutions in between the regional government managing Cohesion Project programmes and local authorities at NUTS3 level or metro level of Barcelona. They provide financial, technical and methodological support for municipalities in planning and in flow of knowledge, methods and funds from the EU to the local level. When large amounts of funding appear on the horizon like in the Next Gen, it becomes much easier to implement this funding for large infrastructure, again, here it will be difficult to draw this funding to the local scale to address place specific local needs. (Source: Interactive Dialogue)</p>	B1; G1
Spain / Valencia	<p>Valencian region pushes municipalities to create an urban agenda in preparation for next rounds of EU funding, this increases changes for cross-fertilisation at the local level. (Source: Interactive Dialogue)</p>	G1; E1
Italy / Slovenia	<p>The INTERREG Operation Programme Italy-Slovenia applies the Integrated Territorial Investment approach to develop an integrated cross-border strategy for the twin cities of Nova Gorica Gorizia – Šempeter Vrtojba, which are also acting as EGTC since 2011. The ITI tool allows to deliver a long-term territorial strategy aimed at facing common social and economic challenges for a well-defined geographical area that spans national borders.<sup>13</sup> (Source : Interactive Dialogues)</p>	C6, E4, H3; B1

Source: Authors, on the basis of COMPASS, 2018a, 2018c, and the Interactive Dialogues 2021/04/09.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Almonte, Pazos-García & Castanho (2020).

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://euro-go.eu/en/programmi-e-progetti/piani-strategici/>

## 5 Conclusions, with discussion points and open questions

In this closing section, we outline the main conclusions from the Czech case study and the Interactive Dialogue on the recommendations for cross-fertilisation, followed by a set of open questions for further investigation and policy debate.

### 5.1 Conclusions from the research and consultations

The cross-fertilisation between EU Cohesion Policy and national spatial management is a process that in the case of the Czech Republic originated as back as in the pre-accession period before 2004. The practice of carrying out this process has been marked by the institutional separation of the spatial planning system from regional policy and strategic planning, which have developed as a direct partner for the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy.

For the next phase, it is necessary on the Czech side to proceed towards the gradual alignment / integration of spatial and strategic planning, especially at the national and also on regional level. This can lead to closer interconnection and interaction of development policies agreed at EU level with their application in specific territorial conditions. The starting point for the integration process is the current legal and institutional situation. In the first phase, it is necessary to "find common language"; make full use of ICT and GIS to ensure general and continuous availability of data on the territory and its development; and to use all possibilities of spatial planning tools – binding and indicative – for planning with regard to functional territorial units.

The strategic goal for Czech spatial planning should be to increase its institutional capacity by strengthening awareness of European agendas through the training of planners and strengthening active public participation. As one of the participants of the Interactive Dialogue put this, while 'Cohesion Policy is driven by outputs – jobs, new roads, spatial planning should be driven by outcomes – quality of lives, accessibility' (Source: Interactive Dialogue).

On the EU side, the issues of subsidiarity and less formal regulation in ESIF while stricter demands on cohesion in planning practice were raised in the Interactive Dialogue. The EU Cohesion Policy should be better and more clearly communicated also in the phase of preparation of programmes, not only towards politicians and the professional public, but also (especially) towards the public. This could contribute not only to deeper understanding the objectives and priorities but also to better preparedness of territorial governance and spatial planning to use the ESIF resources to achieve them. In this respect, the cross-cutting Policy Objective 5 putting emphasis on greater citizen engagement in decision making on Cohesion Policy implementation in specific territories brings opportunities to use ESIF to improve not only the communication and dialogue but also to engage in co-decision on the interventions and co-evaluation of impacts of Cohesion Policy with the citizens and local or regional stakeholders.

INTERREG should be widely used for support of cross-fertilisation and capacity-building, as well as to promote open data GIS for spatial management, while one should continue to exploit the potential of territorial delivery mechanisms aiming at urban and functional areas (such as ITI or CLLD) to trigger capacity for integrated planning across administrative boundaries. New mechanisms proposed for INTERREG in 2021-2027, such as European Cross-Border Mechanism could create scope for removing barriers and developing joint cross-border services for this purpose, not only international but also intra-national.

It is worth stressing a potential caveat for the 2021-2027 period. The Just Transition Mechanisms will be quite relevant for the transition regions of the Czech Republic; as such it can contribute to the cohesion policy on national level. Besides, EU Cohesion Policy will be also relying on the pairing of ESIF with financial instruments under the InvestEU programme, which may make available more capital for the regions and local entities.

## 5.2 Open questions

- How to find and maintain a balance between the desirable alignment of spatial planning and Cohesion Policy, without overshadowing the place-specific strategies of spatial planning with the general goals and priorities specific to the Cohesion Policy and ESIF?
- How to rethink communication and citizen engagement activities to trigger active public support for the promotion of Cohesion Policy goals in the daily practice of planning and decision-making on spatial development in a given territory?
- How to overcome the legal jurisdiction barriers between the territorial units that hamper the operation and planning for functional areas?
- How to balance the need for flexibility and subsidiarity to let the local stakeholders take a more proactive role in decision-making on and monitoring of the EU Cohesion Policy resources with their responsibility for the appropriate use of the funds in line with the objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy?
- How to avoid the risks of diluting the territorial focus of Cohesion Policy in the face of the new EU funding mechanisms put in place to support post-COVID recovery, in order to continue exploiting opportunities for cross-fertilisation with spatial planning?

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# Annex

# 1 Questionnaire and interview results on linkage between EU Cohesion policy and Czech spatial planning

## 1.1 Introduction

The questionnaires were distributed on January 7th 2021 and the interviews were conducted between January 18th and February 11th 2021. A representative group of 24 experts was addressed, from which 15 have been processed by filling the enquiry and interviewing on the background of the completed enquiry. This group of respondents consists of 8 state officers (5 of them from regional policy departmental unit, 2 from spatial planning unit and 1 from EU policy unit), 3 planning officers from regional and city offices, 3 planning practitioners and 1 research worker. In three cases, the enquiries were responded by two colleagues and the interviews were organised with these two people at one time, so the responses were actually received from 18 people overall.

The names of the respondents were anonymised in this report. In order to anonymise the results, random number has been assigned to each respondent. No section of any answer in the questionnaires is referenced verbatim.

The questionnaire was divided into 3 parts, each focused on a specific topic on linkage of EU cohesion policy and Czech spatial planning:

- Part A addresses five policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy in the 2021-2027 period and how spatial planning can contribute to implementation of the particular policy objectives;
- Part B examines how spatial planning can make use of the Territorial Delivery Mechanisms (TDMs) in Cohesion Policy and a new instrument – European Urban Initiative (EUI);
- Part C is focused on the Territorial Agenda 2030 and how its priorities can be implemented in spatial planning.

## 1.2 Results

### 1.2.1 General

In general, the highest average score was returned within the Part C of the questionnaire addressing the Territorial Agenda 2030, followed by Part A and lastly by part B. The lowest standard deviation in the scoring was observed within the Part A dealing with the Cohesion Policy, followed by the Part C and lastly by the Part B. The Part B was, therefore, evaluated with the lowest score and with highest deviation among respondents.

From the small sample of experts, it seems that the opinions are different for participants from state governmental offices and those from regions and planning practice. It can also be observed that within state administrators there are different opinions between the officers responsible for spatial planning and those dealing with regional policy and development.

The experts from practice state offices are in general more sceptical about the linkage between spatial planning and EU policies than the respondents from state offices. The state officers are better informed on EU policies than regional administrators and spatial planning practitioners. In three cases the experts on spatial planning were unable to respond questions they considered related to regional policy (part C) or, on the opposite, the experts on regional policy felt unqualified to respond to the questions they considered related to spatial planning (parts A, B). This illustrates how fragmented the professional scene of spatial / urban management is.

Weak connection between spatial planning and strategic planning was frequently mentioned as a major barrier (Respondents 4, 5, 6, 11, 14). The underlying problem is a lack of communication between respective departmental units. This mostly occurs on the regional and national levels while on the local level this problem diminishes, simply because agendas of spatial and strategic planning are often handled by the same staff.

The EU funding is crucial for cross-fertilisation because apart from these incentives there is little incentive to support it. In this context, ITI is mentioned as a useful tool for planning for agglomerations, overcoming the jurisdiction limits of municipalities. However, the Czech law does not provide any spatial planning instruments for functional urban areas with legal power extending municipal jurisdiction. Planning for functional areas is a new concept and needs time to 'sink in' before being fully utilised.

The aforementioned lack of Czech legislative tools to plan agglomerations can be an opportunity to create such an instrument or change the existing instrument to accommodate for FUAs and, therefore, be able to use ITI without the need of an *ad hoc* legislation that significantly delays the whole process, sometimes rendering the project impossible due to temporal reasons, as it would not be made in the current programming period (Respondent 5).

Any changes to the Czech legislation are, however, discussed with caution. There are worries concerning increased bureaucracy and negative impact of poorly designed amendments to the law code. It is particularly the case of planning regions tailored to functional areas which would not respect jurisdictions. Here, it is necessary to define precisely the obligations, rights and responsibilities associated with their acquisition, negotiation and approval (Respondents 3, 12, 13).

In the interviews over the completed questionnaires, the opinion was expressed that the discussion in Czech media revolves around how much money was spent, but it should revolve more about how well it was used (Respondents 1, 13).

### 1.2.2 Part A – Contribution of Czech spatial planning to implementation of the EU cohesion policy objectives

Part A addresses five policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy in the 2021-2027 period:

- PO1 – a smarter Europe;
- PO2 – a greener Europe;
- PO3 – a more connected Europe;
- PO4 – a more social Europe;
- PO5 – Europe closer to citizens.

The highest average score was returned for PO3 – a more connected Europe, closely followed by PO5 as second and PO2 as third. PO1 scored even less and PO4 averaged the lowest score.

Hence, the respondents strongly suggest that spatial planning can best contribute to better connectedness (PO3) and to a carbon-free Europe (PO2). That said, the possible contribution of spatial planning with respect to smart and social Europe is considered as limited; planning practitioners mention that this would be rather a task for regional policy.

Several respondents strictly distinguished the actual practice of spatial planning from its potentials. The practice of spatial planning and decision-making process sometimes does not follow the principles and priorities set out in the Spatial Development Policy of the Czech Republic. Spatial planning is often seen only as implementation part of other policies or even as an obstacle. The current practice is also burdened by fragmented databases, variable terminology, loose integration of spatial development and transportation planning, and weak connection of spatial planning to economic aspects as well as the issues of social sustainability.

Still, most respondents consider spatial planning capable of ensuring adequate and well positioning of housing, employment, education or healthcare. The need is highlighted for other policies to come afterwards and ensure availability of planned services and equal and inclusive access to those services (Respondent 13). Failing to provide such services is something spatial planning cannot directly influence, but it has a crucial role in adaption of the plans it is generating. Objectives of the cohesion policy (e.g. PO4 or PO1) are often underrepresented in spatial planning implementation (Respondent 9). Some respondents came up with proposals for making spatial planning more effective with respect to the EU cohesion policy, namely by a strategic approach in developing areas where spatial planning can contribute to spatial clustering of innovation activities, cooperation on the agglomeration-level planning, digitisation of planning data, procedures and documents, building densities that support use of public transport, coordination and streamlining of preparation of crucial infrastructures, allowing citizens to express their opinion on future development of cities and countryside and on proposed changes in an early stage of plan preparation.

Overall, the respondents showed strong confidence in digitisation and standardisation. Good knowledge about the territory is a prerequisite for good planning in that territory (Respondent 12). Some mentioned the benefits in unifying terminology across fields related to spatial planning, e.g. housing construction (Respondent 13). Absent concept and legislative instrument on the national level to deal with high-speed internet connection is criticised in view of the pursuit of a smarter and more connected Europe goal (Respondent 5).

Another strong contribution of spatial planning was seen in the field of polycentric development (Respondents 1, 5). However, it is doubtful whether the planned transport networks fully support the polycentric development of settlement structure or the principle of sustainable development. Spatial planning priorities should be better reflected in sectoral legislation. The ITI and CLLD strategies are insufficiently linked to spatial planning.

### 1.2.3 Part B – Usage of Territorial Development Mechanisms / European Urban Initiative in spatial planning

The second part of the questionnaire examined how spatial planning can make use of the Territorial Delivery Mechanisms in Cohesion Policy and / or possibly also European Urban Initiative for the different types of territories – functional urban areas, other urban areas, rural areas and other territories, such as sparsely populated areas.

The highest average score was returned in the case of FUAs (most respondents mentioned ITI), followed by rural areas (CLLDs). Other urban areas (EUI) and other territories received the lowest score. On this account, it was shown that spatial planning can best use the EU Territorial Development Mechanisms in FUAs and the most potential was seen in adapting Czech legislation to the FUA concept. Other urban areas and rural areas are less prepared to use the TDMs, at least in the opinion of the spatial planners interviewed. Several respondents urged for functional urban area planning – especially for development and transport coordination, and introduction of more ‘soft’ planning instruments (Respondents 4, 8, 11). Fragmented subdivision into self-governing municipalities should be considered. Joint planning, provision of amenities and public administration should be incentivised in metropolitan areas as well as in rural areas with small communities / municipalities.

The delimitation of FUAs in the Czech Republic from the perspective of the spatial planning does not correspond to the delimitation for the purpose of cohesion policy. Due to the different needs of spatial and regional planning, different delimitations of FUAs were set for the same areas, making it difficult to compare the metropolitan / city agglomeration with each other and to draw tangible conclusions from critical comparisons and / or subsequent evaluations (Respondents 5, 6, 12, 13).

Apparently, the flow of information on the potentials of EU policies is weak outside the governmental units that are immediately involved in the preparation of these policies / documents.

The hitherto contribution of European Urban Initiative in spatial planning is not much appreciated. The officials from the regional policy unit explain that spatial planning priorities may be well reflected, but specific design and targeting is not clear, given the fact that adjustments on European and national levels will still have to be developed. In any case, this would be a matter rather for institutional collaboration and governance. Some spatial planning experts consider the European Urban Initiative as an agenda outside the domain of spatial planning while the others admitted they did not know or fully comprehend EUI (Respondents 9, 12, 13).

The most frequently mentioned barrier is directly related to FUA, i.e. the mechanism with the highest potential, as was expressed by the respondents by awarding the highest score. The described problem consists in the adaptation of the Czech legislation to the FUA concept. In their view, current legislation is not flexible enough and it limits cooperation and cross-fertilisation among neighbouring municipalities within FUA (Respondent 5). One respondent even argued that more advanced legislation could bring variety for planning regions and allow less fixed borders of those regions, based on the specific (functional) needs of different regions (Respondent 13).

Overall, the ITI is a good motivation to address spatial planning for agglomerations. But again, any changes to the Czech legislation are discussed with caution. There are worries concerning increased bureaucracy and poorly designed law code. Suggested solutions included cooperation of Ministry of Regional Development and Ministry of Interior (Respondents 5, 6). Another suggestion for cooperation that was mentioned is with Local Action Groups (MAS – *Místní akční skupiny*), which identify spatial planning priorities. Part C – Implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 objectives by spatial planning

The last part C is focused on the Territorial Agenda 2030 and how its priorities can be implemented in spatial planning. The two overarching objectives, a Just Europe and a Green Europe, are broken down into six priorities, three each:

Just Europe:

- balanced Europe;
- functional regions;
- cross-border integration;

Green Europe:

- healthy environment;
- circular economy;
- sustainable connections.

The highest average score was returned for functional regions, followed by sustainable connections as second, healthy environment as third, balanced Europe as fourth, cross-border integration as fifth and circular economy averaged the lowest score. On average, spatial planning can best contribute to the priorities of sustainable connections, functional regions and also healthy environment. The role of spatial planning in the priority of circular economy is considered as rather small. However, the state officers from regional policy unit did not make a significant difference in their assessment of the role of spatial planning in implementation of the particular priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030, while the assessment of planning practitioners is more differentiated. For the priority of balanced Europe, the respondents commented that the size of the country requires cooperation also within the supra-national area of central Europe or possibly the V4 format. Some respondents indicated much potential in EU-wide cooperation beyond V4, e.g., cooperation with France (Respondent 5). Continuous cooperation with other EU countries in the field of spatial planning beyond regional groupings of states is the best way to ensure the functioning of cohesion policy and achieve a balanced Europe. The intensity of cooperation in spatial planning is now low compared to other fields of activity.

FUA-level integrated planning has been repeatedly mentioned as a prerequisite for local and regional development and less spatial disparities, for effective management of settlement structure with ensuring access to facilities in cooperation among core city and other places.

The opinions on cross-border integration were affected by COVID-19 pandemic, revealing how vulnerable the cross-border integration is (Respondent 5). The role of spatial planning in cross-border infrastructure planning has been mostly fulfilled in terms of designing new and improved infrastructure linkages, but the implementation of the plans as well as a truly functional cross-border integration is still lagging behind. Great potential is seen at coordinated approach to landscape planning (e.g. flood protection and management). One of the reasons are different legal constraints on the opposite sides of national borders. Some respondents also expressed lack of interest about cross-border integration, i.e. decline in the agenda covering the topic (Respondents 5, 12). The role of spatial planning in the shift towards circular economy is not quite clear. Also, the aforementioned small role of spatial planning in the priority of circular economy might be due to perceived higher importance of other prerequisites required to support circularity, such as cooperation or recycling legislation (Respondent 13).

The opinions on the role in sustainable connections are different, too. Most respondents agreed that this requires a comprehensive policy of spatial planning comprising the issues of quality and people-friendliness of public spaces, ban for gated communities, revitalisation of open landscape and promoting appropriate urban densities. The respondents from the regional policy unit consider the priority of sustainable connections the most important from the spatial planning perspective, especially in terms of availability of communication networks. The latter are a missing a tool for ex-ante assessment of the territorial impact of big infrastructure investments, particularly the transportation ones. Some of their colleagues are afraid that this tool may change into yet another bureaucratic nuisance. Other respondent insisted that the key tools are outside planning, e.g. toll roads and land property taxation.

Most respondents bring up suggestions to improve implementation and / or enhance cross-fertilisation of EU Territorial Agenda and spatial planning. In this respect, some respondents suggest implementation of legislative instruments helping with overcoming obstacles at the state borders, e.g. integrated emergency services or flood prevention (Respondent 5).

### 1.3 Use of the outcomes

The outcomes from the questionnaire results and interviews were used as a background material for elaboration of the Czech study report, namely for identification of challenges and potentials, and particularly for the themes of relevance for improving integration between EU Cohesion Policy and Czech spatial planning.

The results were presented and discussed as part of the programme of online Interactive dialogue on April 9th 2021. The discussion revolved around the aforementioned topics; however, those topics also encouraged the participants to reach yet other solutions to the barriers and potentials

### 1.4 List of the respondents

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- Jindřich Felcman, Šindlerová & Felcman Planning
- Beata Hanousková, Department of Regional Policy, Ministry of Regional Development
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- Lenka Kriegischová, Implementation of Integrated Instruments, Ministry of Regional Development
- František Kubeš, City of Brno
- Pavel Lukeš, Department of Regional Policy, Ministry of Regional Development
- Lukáš Makovský, independent research worker
- Josef Morkus, Department of Spatial Planning, Ministry of Regional Development
- Filip Novosád, Department of Spatial Planning, Ministry of Regional Development
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