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Transnational Brief

# **New thinking in spatial planning: From methodology to implementation – views from the ESPON Transnational Outreach events in Western Europe**

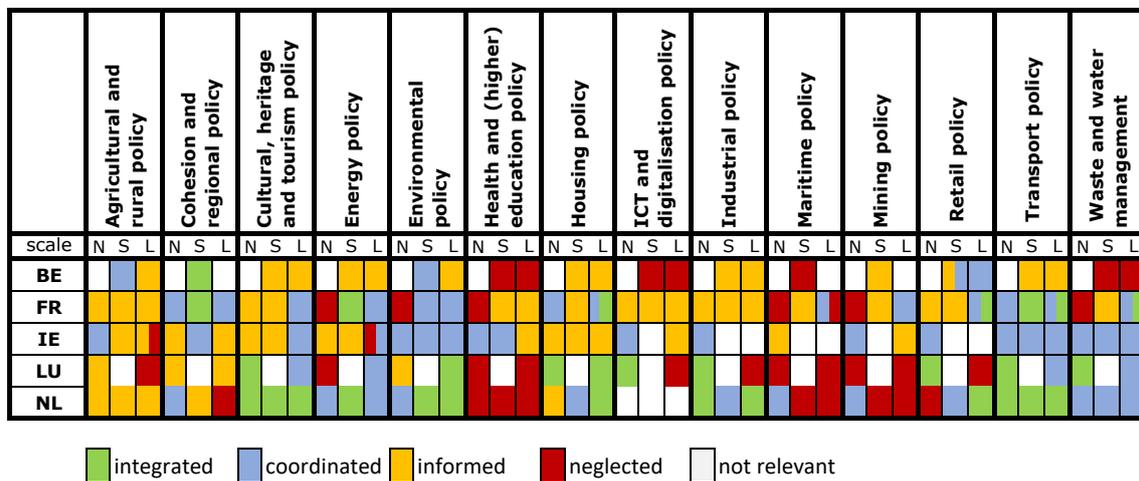
# New thinking in spatial planning: From methodology to implementation – views from the ESPON Transnational Outreach events in Western Europe

## Introduction

This policy brief gives an overview of some of the main topics the four previous transnational outreach workshops and seminars that took place in Western Europe in 2018 and provides a context for the final conference in the Netherlands in April 2019.



Spatial planning systems<sup>1</sup> are the ensemble of tools or mechanisms that are used to mediate competition over the use of land and property, to allocate rights of development, to regulate change and to promote preferred spatial and urban form. While major reforms of spatial plans are rare, change is constant as spatial plans both structure and adapt to economic, social, demographic, political and technological change. The four Transnational Outreach Seminars and Workshops in 2018 outlined in the next pages examined some of these trends.



**Figure 1** The role of spatial planning within different sectoral policies at the national (N), sub-national (S) and local (L) level

Source: ESPON COMPASS - Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe

## The four Transnational Outreach seminars and workshops

### France - new challenges and opportunities for regional and national spatial planning

There is a renewed interest in regional spatial planning with new regional spatial plans being developed in Belgian regions and Ireland. France, through the SRADDET, and the Netherlands will renew spatial plans in 2019.

Spatial planning, although tempered by national policies and contexts, has a shared vocabulary understood across Europe. This common vocabulary is needed to deal with shared territorial challenges, the demands of improved coordination and the involvement of an increasing number of actors (especially civil



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems>

society) in planning processes which are dealing with an increasingly ‘fuzzy’ world, growing territorial complexity and a wider set of stakeholders. Thus, spatial planning should actively include regional stakeholders and economic players with **more emphasis on governance and implementation** rather than the development of a catalogue of measures.

The implementation of new regional planning strategies also means articulating these strategies with other comprehensive approaches and existing strategies such as environmental protection. This means that an element of synchronisation is required to avoid conflict. **Convince rather than constrain should be the watchword in developing a regional project** that receives broad approval following processes of negotiation between stakeholders.

Spatial planning requires specialists who must work within a framework of territorial institutions and territorial governance. However, there is increasing concern regarding regional capacities, in terms of political and financial resources, to develop and implement spatial planning strategies. Furthermore, there is now more attention on the role of metropolitan areas – often the economic drivers of regions and key players in regional development. Within this framework, how do we decide between ‘hard’ (space as marked, administered and regulated) rather than ‘soft’ (shifting configurations, fuzzy boundaries often delineated by functional criteria) approaches to space and which is the more effective for different types of policies, structures or spatial scales? How do we develop a mix between a softer more consensus focused approach<sup>2</sup> and a harder regulation, power and investment focus?

A new law adopted in France in 2015, known as the NOTRe Act, reformed the territorial organisation of the country and updated the former regional spatial plans, as part of a decentralisation plan aimed at strengthening the capacities of the regions and public institutions involved in inter-municipal cooperation. The new scheme SRADDET – “Schéma Régional d’Aménagement, de Développement Durable et d’Égalité des Territoires” – allows regions to set the main guidelines for their territory and becomes the region’s main tool for land use planning and sustainable development. The main added value of SRADDET lies in its transversal character. It incorporates the regional layout and equality scheme (SRADT) which it replaces, but also other planning documents such as the regional scheme for infrastructure and transport, the regional scheme for intermodality, the climate, air and energy scheme (SRCAE) and the regional waste prevention plan. By incorporating the thematic sectoral schemes listed below, this new “super” scheme is moving towards more coherent regional planning, which is gaining momentum from a strategic point of view:

- Intermodality and transport
- Climate-Air-Energy
- Protection and restoration of biodiversity
- Prevention and waste management

In conclusion, the development of SRADDET represents a strong challenge in terms of coherence of territorial planning at all scales.

### **Ireland - the ‘Architecture of effective regional development’**

The new Irish National Planning Framework<sup>3</sup> provides stronger alignment between investment and place-based strategies. The NPF is evidence of a stronger focus on transformational rather than transactional processes and the importance of strengthening the ‘strategic dimension’ of the planning process and the integration of multiple sectors to enhance the chances



<sup>2</sup> See the ESPON ACTAREA project - Thinking and Planning in Areas of Territorial Cooperation <https://www.espon.eu/actarea>

<sup>3</sup> <http://npl.ie/>

of success. There is also a need to develop further the competences for planning and territorial governance in functional regions with more attention to shared-governance at a multi-level scale, within and beyond 'metropolitan areas'. This could stimulate the emergence of soft governance areas to fill existing governance gaps, while providing the required resources and political framework to operate.

Challenges include the integration of metropolitan areas and to strengthen the role of regional governance in the implementation of strategies. At the time of writing a challenge yet to unfold is BREXIT and how to deal with the Northern Ireland border of 380 kilometres and 275 crossing points. The issue of the border reminds us that regional strategies should not just be about borders or barriers but also act as bridges for collaboration and pooling resources.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) addresses key challenges such as the domination of Dublin which is growing at four times the rate of the Northern and Western Region and twice as fast as the Southern Region of Ireland. These growth figures tell a tale of two Irelands: growth above average in the east and below average in the rest of the country. The domination of Dublin is linked to the challenge of a growing population. By 2040, it is expected that the Irish population will grow by 1 million with 600,000 more jobs and a need for 550,000 new homes. Whilst this population growth is driven by a high (but falling) birth rate and modest in-migration, Ireland also faces other significant challenges: ageing population, falling household sizes and a population growth rate now below the replacement rate.

The NPF covers macro spatial considerations which include balanced and concentrated development and an increased focus on compact growth and an alignment with infrastructure. The core strategy thus aims for 50% of future growth in Dublin (and the wider Eastern and Midland Region) with 50% in the two other regions. 50% of growth is to be directed into 5 cities, with a target to construct 50% of new build on brownfield and infill sites.

The NPF will need institutional and financial backing which is supported by a new regional tier of governance and more attention to metropolitan areas whose plans need to be aligned with the NPF and the new National Development Plan. The key issue will be how the three regional assemblies implement the NPF through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The three regions have been preparing their plans through issues papers and consultations and, at time of writing are concluding the first public consultation on the draft strategies. These RSESs will, for the first time, align the economic and spatial importance of place in a context specific way and guide investment and infrastructure to ensure that development is plan-led. Reflecting the growing urban emphasis/urban regionalism emerging in Ireland, the development of Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASP), as part of the RSES process, gives recognition of the importance of city areas within regions.

The key challenges for the NPF will be policy integration (linking existing strategies such as transport) and governance (balancing regional and local perspectives). Another challenge will be delineating boundaries of metropolitan areas, clarifying relationships and competences.

### Luxembourg - Public participation in spatial planning

Public participation and consultation in the area of spatial planning is gaining importance across Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Public participation in the spatial planning process at either local, regional or national level can bring new ideas and insights. By bringing in a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. school children and visitors to a ploughing competition in Ireland) it can widen the scope of thinking. Successful public participation processes can provide legitimacy of both the process



<sup>4</sup> See ESPON COMPASS Project Final Report (page 27) publicity to the preparation of planning instruments alongside new opportunities for engagement and the inclusion of public hearings in procedures.<sup>4</sup> Luxembourg would be a good example of such new opportunities of engagement <https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems>

and the product (the plan) and strengthens the democratic process. Thus, public participation will improve the content of the plan and may generate solutions and prevent future blockages by anticipating possible future issues.

However, it is important to gain political support and commitment for the process and remain flexible and adjust where necessary. It is also necessary to consider the expectations of the participants. Meaningful engagement requires significant planning, resources and creative thinking. The Luxembourg workshop also illustrated that for new regions or administrative structures, public participation can help build a regional identity and ambitions as in France and Ireland. In Brussels, public participation has had an important role in place-building and helping a new or diverse public identify with their geographical area. In order to avoid chaotic situations due to diverse and contradictory inputs which may be engendered by an over-simplification of problems, NIMBYism and undue influence from stronger, more articulate groups, a key lesson is to clarify the rules, the objectives and manage expectations of the process to avoid disillusion.

The current revision process of the Luxembourgish Master Programme for Spatial Planning – Programme directeur d'aménagement du territoire (PDAT), a non-binding strategic document, is characterized by a collaborative approach and large-scale public participation process. Innovative thinking in Luxembourg on public participation through its strategy for 'collaborative change-making' placed great emphasis on involving a wide and diverse range of participants (not just 'the usual suspects'). The main aim of this participatory process was to co-create shared development visions and recommendations for the purpose of revising the Master Programme – with a strong focus on collaboration and not just consultation. The revision of the Master Programme therefore focused on a greater involvement of the public through Innovation Labs defined as places to bring together a wide range of participants to fuel collaborative innovation.

The Innovation Lab approach was broken down into two aspects: Policy Labs and Regional Labs. The Policy Lab was an inter-ministerial group that defined the scope of work, identified themes, processes and methods and retained strong links with the relevant ministries. The Regional Labs were set up in four areas of Luxembourg: east, south, north and centre.

Another innovative element was the involvement of cross-border commuter groups from Belgium, France and Germany in the process.

### **Belgium - Implementation, governance, finance and regulations**

Blueprint planning is over because the world and Europe has become too complex and there are massive global challenges (e.g. migration, ageing, energy transition, mobility as a service, climate change, and circular economy). The three regions illustrate different challenges.

For Brussels the main challenges are how to develop a relatively small world class metropolis, retain attractiveness and deal with city challenges such as demographic growth, housing supply, pollution, security, social division, mobility issues and the provision of infrastructure.



The Brussels region has just approved its Regional Sustainable Development Plan (strategic development plan by 2025-2040). This plan identifies twelve priority areas and the Canal territory, each of which could be developed through a Master Development Plan which will play both as strategic and regulatory role while retaining some flexibility. European funding contributes directly and deeply to the development of Brussels by funding miscellaneous projects. Support from the European ERDF funding will be required along with enhanced collaboration between European institutions and funding recipients.

The key challenges for Flanders are quite stark. The region has a large built environment footprint (with a settlement area of 33% – containing housing, infrastructure, gardens, parks, etc.) and a daily increase in land take of 6 hectares. The challenge, therefore, is to make better use of the existing settlement area. This will require a paradigm shift towards spatial efficiency. There is evidence of increasing political and civic support to ‘stopping concrete’ as well as political support to revoke some existing residential land use permissions.

The Flanders Spatial Policy Plan for 2050 has several long-term goals such as reducing car use by enhancing the use of public transport and locating growth to support local services. The Plan will also aim to keep Flanders economically competitive in the world and sustain a high quality of life. In terms of sustainability, the Plan will ensure enough open space for agriculture and biodiversity is preserved and make space climate proof.

Wallonia has identified key challenges such as social and territorial cohesion, population growth and health and well-being, competitiveness, mobility and climate change among others. One of the barriers to implementation is that there is no legal obligation for previous local planning tools to conform to the spatial plan (SDT). Another challenge is that local municipalities must understand the legal scope of SDT and be convinced of the importance of spatial planning at the local level.

The Wallonia Spatial Development Plan ‘Le Schéma de Développement du Territoire (SDT)’ is now in its consultation phase. The SDT is the legal tool through which the regional authority will define the territorial strategy for Wallonia and guide the actions of the government from a territorial perspective. At the sub-regional level, municipal authorities will have to implement the objectives of the key aspects of plan which include the need to fight urban sprawl, strengthen socio-economic development and a qualitative management of the environment and mobility management.

Spatial planners often share the same concerns, objectives, and even proposals. But these plans, visions and strategies need to be implemented. The main barriers often have a budgetary and political dimension. But often the main barrier to implementation appears to be governance which involves building coalitions, commitment and consensus. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. At the EU, national and regional levels more effort should be made to develop a narrative as a framework for strategic planning. This narrative should promote the integration of sectoral policies. At the local level, more use should be made of the regulatory function and at all levels monitoring should be strengthened.

### **The Netherlands - Spatial planning in Western Europe: current trends, policies and research**

This conference is an opportunity to examine the spatial planning challenges of the Netherlands and find out more about the new National Environment and Planning Strategy “Nationale Omgevingsvisie”. The Conference will examine new thinking on green infrastructure and sustainable land use.

The ESPON project GRETA – ‘Green infrastructure: Enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services for territorial development’<sup>5</sup> examines green infrastructures (GI) which are considered a benefit, inter alia, for territorial development because they provide multiple functions in the same spatial area. The underlying



principle of GI is that the same area of land can offer many environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits at the same time, provided its ecosystems are in a healthy condition.

The ESPON project SUPER – ‘Sustainable Urbanisation and land-use Practices in European Region’<sup>6</sup> argues that land is a finite resource and the way it is used is one of the principal drivers of environmental change. Increasing land take affects fertile agricultural land, puts biodiversity at risk, increases the risk of flooding and water scarcity and contributes to both the causes and effects of global warming. The main objective of this project on sustainable land-use is to build on existing key relevant studies and projects and suggest measures on how sustainable land use can be promoted and how land-take, soil sealing and urban sprawl can be avoided, reduced and compensated in Europe, its cities and regions.

The roadshow regions will provide conclusions about new challenges and solutions in West European spatial planning covering public participation, strategic planning, governance and regulation, urban development and environmental spatial planning.

Conclusions from the conference will provide a state-of-the-art overview of spatial planning in western Europe. The conference will also identify future spatial planning research needs in Western Europe.

Information, reports and presentations from the first four ESPON Transnational Outreach Roadshows in 2018 (seminars and workshops) can be found at <https://www.espon.eu/news-events>.

ESPON research projects featured in these seminars and workshops were COMPASS <https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems>, SPIMA <https://www.espon.eu/metropolitan-areas>, ACTAREA <https://www.espon.eu/actarea>, RESSI <https://www.espon.eu/ressi>, GRETA <https://www.espon.eu/green-infrastructure> and SUPER <https://www.espon.eu/super>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.espon.eu/green-infrastructure>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.espon.eu/super>

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