

Velislava SIMEONOVA
University of Barcelona, Spain

Ivaylo STAMENKOV,
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria

Hristo DOKOV
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DIFFERENT BALKAN SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS: THE CASES OF BULGARIA, CROATIA, SERBIA AND ALBANIA

Велислава Симеонова
Университет в Барселона, Испания

Ивайло СТАМЕНКОВ,
Софийски университет „Св Климент Охридски”, България

Христо ДОКОВ
Софийски университет „Св Климент Охридски”, България

СРАВНИТЕЛНО ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА РАЗЛИЧНИ БАЛКАНСКИ СИСТЕМИ ЗА ПРОСТРАНСТВЕНО ПЛАНИРАНЕ: ПО ПРИМЕРА НА БЪЛГАРИЯ, ХЪРВАТИЯ, СЪРБИЯ И АЛБАНИЯ

The author’s interest in this topic and its general relevance are provoked by the insufficient research in the field of spatial planning in the Balkan region – especially concerning the period after the political changes that started in the 90s. To widen the scope of the study, we concentrate on four countries that differ in terms of socio-economic parameters, European integration stage, trends in the conceptual evolution of their spatial planning systems, etc. The main idea of this article is to offer a theoretical and methodological points for empirical research designed to compare the different notions of territory/space, to scrutinize the diverse planning cultures, and to summarize the guiding principles set in the legislative frameworks and main planning documents.

Keywords: spatial planning systems, planning cultures, Europeanization, Balkan region, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Albania.

Introduction

The spatial and geographic structure of South-East Europe encompasses the national territories of many countries that, based on specific criteria, form also the territory of the Balkans. The collision of diverging historical and geopolitical impacts on this relatively small in size region has deprived it to a large extent of the possibility

to catch-up with the rest European territories in terms of political, social and economic development.

The study makes reference to the interconnections between planning and complex historical development of the region, to EU enlargement in South-East direction, and to the influence of the European territorial policy over the spatial planning systems. In this connection, one of the major tasks of the study is to compare some important aspects in the national planning systems of four selected countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, and Albania. The reasoning standing behind that selection is rooted in our aim to compare countries that differ (often to a large extent) in terms of European integration stage, trends in the conceptual evolution of their national documents and practices in the sphere of spatial planning, socio-economic parameters, etc. The author's longstanding interest in these topics is based upon own researches in the domain of spatial planning in Bulgaria lasting several years, and also upon the belief that the scientific community should take a further step in understanding the specifics of the national planning cultures in the Balkan countries and develop new comparative analyses and thorough studies that would uncover the dynamics of the actual processes and provide the needed evidence-based conclusions and recommendations. Despite the lack of a common EU definition we don't aim to put emphasis on clarifying the term spatial planning, taking into consideration the existing different interpretations of the term in Europe.

1. Spatial planning in Europe

Some definitions and language specifics for interpretation of the spatial planning

The interpretation, the translation and the explanation of the spatial planning terminology in Europe are turning more and more into an important challenge considering the vast diversity of languages in the 28 EU member states. Like the usage of the terms “territory” and “space”, the cultural embeddings of many words used in the practice and in the explanation of the spatial planning is connected with social specifics, including planning practices and instruments, which could only make sense in “domestic, national context and language” (Dühr et al. 2010: 22).

Williams (1996) puts emphasis on the significance of the language, of the linguistic interpretation and understanding of the spatial planning concepts in the EU in the context of the different official languages in the Community. He also attaches importance to the different English linguistic variations of the term “spatial planning”.

Terms used in the Slavic-language countries are also often different at conceptual level. For example, in Russia, besides the terms “организация пространства” and “организация территории”, the most commonly used terms are “(об)устройство территории” (in the sense of engineering-technical public services) and “территориальное/пространственное планиране”, while in Croatia the most popular term is “Prostorno planiranje”, in Poland – “Planowanie przestrzenne”, in Czech Republic – “Územní plánování”, in Serbia – “просторно планирање”, etc.

In the Roman-language countries the term “territory” is traditionally used when defining the spatial planning. For example, in Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries the term “ordenación del territorio”, respectively “ordenación territorial”, is most commonly used, while in France we have “aménagement du territoire” (even though it has a bit different concept and connotation).

The “spatial planning”, an Euro-English term used as a neutral expression of the various planning styles at different geographic levels in Europe (Willams 1996), is defined and perceived in different ways in the academic literature, as it could simultaneously take diverse forms depending on the political context, the institutional and legal framework or simply the variation of the planning cultures and traditions (Adams et al. 2006), and the evolution of the national social models (Nadin and Stead 2008).

Sometimes the spatial planning is substituted or used in parallel with terms like “spatial development”, “strategic planning”, “strategic spatial planning”, etc. (Luukkonen 2011).

Comparative planning studies in Europe and South-eastern context

The first attempts for comparing the European spatial planning systems are realized already in the late 80s, although at that point we could hardly speak of existing “European spatial planning model” (Stoyanov 2009). The majority of the early typologies designed to compare the European social models, government cultures and planning systems, however ignore the countries in Central, East and South-East Europe because of the fact that they were often defined and treated as countries in transformation (Maier 2012). Moreover, the inner division of the Balkans (East and West Balkans), as well as the diverse dimensions and roles of the European integration and the Europeanization at different levels (national, regional, local), complicate additionally the studies and the comparisons between these differing in many aspects countries.

In the 90s Newman and Thornley (1996) study and classify the planning systems in Europe. They distinguish five different planning families: Scandinavian, German, Napoleonic, British, and East-European. In 1997 the European Commission publishes the Compendium of Spatial planning policies and Systems in The European Union, in which four groups of planning traditions are identified: Regional economic planning approach (French model); Comprehensive integrated approach (German model); Land use management (British model); The “urbanism” tradition (Mediterranean model). Years later this classification is actualized by ESPON (2006 – ESPON project 2.3.2) (Trkulja et al. 2012). These categorizations of the planning systems are quite useful as they set some ideal types against which reality can be compared. However what is clearly stated in all the studies is that there are many variations of planning systems in the different countries depending on the criteria used for their categorization. In addition, it is difficult to “clear-cut” categorize these planning systems due to the fact that aspects of different traditions are intertwined in each of them. On the other hand some studies (by Dühr et al. 2007 and 2010, Nadin and Stead 2008, ESPON 2.3.2 project, etc.) show that there is a convergence of planning systems mostly due to the Europeanization processes (Allkja 2012).

In the context of the historic-geographical “production of space” in the Balkans, together with the presence and the subsequent fall of the socialist regimes and the dynamics and growing influences of the Europeanization process, the hypothesis that spatial planning in most countries in the region can be considered a “product of oscillation” between the EU (through Europeanization) and the communist/socialist regimes that have established various principal elements of how to understand and

plan territory (space), is not so strange. In that sense, when thoroughly studying the features of the national planning systems against the historical dynamics and the formation of a special type of identity (the so-called Balkanism), the Balkans (except for Greece) appear to be an interesting case of development in Europe (Simeonova 2015).

Europeanization of the spatial planning

The Europeanization of the planning has already turned into a hot topic in the academic literature, but at the same time the understanding of the reasons and conditions for the realization of the process in the different planning systems is still quite limited (Giannakourou 2012). Some researchers reduce the Europeanization to the level of the impact from the European integration (institutions and national policies), while others interpret the European integration influence in a wider scope, or as Stead (2013) specifies – the Europeanization is “the instrument for convergence of the territorial policies in the EU”. The Europeanization consists of processes of construction, diffusion, and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing things” and shared beliefs and norms which are defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies (Radaelli 2003). Another major interpretation of the process is also its identification with the EU enlargement. From that point of view many scientists support the idea that the Europeanization in the EU stimulates and influences the changes in the political system of the East-European countries.

Considering the national spatial planning systems, Giannakourou (2012) states that the process of Europeanization has many variations according to the prism of the analysis and the chosen analytical framework. Thus, the Europeanization of planning is perceived as: a process of governing; institutional transformation; policy transfer and lesson-drawing process; discourse process generating new mechanisms, practices and connections “power-legitimacy”, where the planning actors are involved under the conditions set by EU-based policies. Europeanization may produce different effects on domestic planning systems and policies ranging from changes in planning discourse, structure, and instruments to shifts in domestic planning styles and patterns of territorial governance (Giannakourou 2012: 131).

East-European (post-socialist) context

In her paper for Ukraine and Slovakia, Zolkina (2013) defines the process of Europeanization in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the post-communist period as one of the most topical issues in the field of Europeanization studies. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the appearance of independent states in the region, the question for their transition to democracy arose. In the early 90s, newly independent states in the CEE region developed under relatively similar democratization and European integration starting conditions, predetermined mainly by their common post-communist problems in the political, economic and social realms.

As of today, many specific methodological and empirical studies of the East-European post-socialist planning in the context of the European spatial model have already enriched the scientific literature. However the majority of them are not thorough as they concentrate only on specific aspects of the process, consider a limited time frame or simply are a case-study of the dynamics in a given country. Nevertheless, in the last few years some researches of the spatial planning systems require special attention, such as studies concerning the Baltic region (Raagma and Stead 2013), Estonia (Raagma et al. 2013), Poland (Zaucha 2007), Slovenia (Peterlin and Mackenzie 2007), Albania (Allkja 2012), Romania (Ionela 2013; Manteanu and Servillo 2013), Bulgaria (Yanchev 2012), Serbia (Nedovic-Budic et al. 2011; Djordjevic and Dabovic 2009; Trkulja et al. 2012), as well as some general studies for the Europeanization of spatial planning of the region (Bachtler et al. 2013; Iaier 2012), etc.

2. Methodology

In order to accomplish the goal of the current study, we scrutinize the planning systems in the Balkans with the exception of few countries, whose territories does not belong to the Balkan Peninsula according to some of the geographic and political notions. Therefore, countries like Greece, Turkey and Moldova were initially excluded from our analysis of the different systems. On the other hand Kosovo was not considered as a “specific case” because due to the lack of unanimous recognition of its political status, most of the time the scientific literature treats its territory as part of the Serbian planning system. Most challenging in the selection process of objects for our study was the decision considering the countries forming the territory of the former Yugoslavia that are characterized with apparent institutional differences in the sphere of spatial planning. After in-depth researches we finally chose to include in the study Serbia, where the planning system has most thorough structure, and Croatia, because of its recent membership in the EU and the subsequent significant dynamics in the transformation of the system in the last few years. Our study encompasses also Bulgaria – not only because we have solid experience and author’s analyses for the country, but also because we would like to shed light on its actual position and progress in comparison with the others. The fourth country included in our research is Albania as we aim to represent the traditions in a state, which is quite different in ethnical, linguistic and cultural aspect from the other three, but despite all shares (up to 1970s) common socialist elements and habits in its planning system, which Allkja (2012) draws as a reference for the spatial planning in the Balkans.

Our research concentrates on the specifics of the region that define to a large extent the conditions for the Europeanization, as well as on the characteristics of the spatial systems and the attempt to find common traits in the planning cultures. According to Faludi (2005) the planning cultures are bound with the collective spirit and the prevailing attitudes of the actors involved in the planning process, the role of the government, the market forces, the civil society, which liken the culture of planning to the political culture and beliefs, to emotions and values of the society that relate to the political system and to political issues (Stead 2013). From that point of view

Table 1 is aimed at contextualizing some prerequisites for development and some conditions for European integration and Europeanization that are taken into consideration in the analysis of the national planning systems.

Subsequently, we design a matrix with some of the most important characteristics of the planning system that provides a general overview for each of the studied countries. One in-depth comparative assessment however demands also historical contextualization of the planning and detailed analysis of the structural changes after the dissolution of the communist regimes in the studied territories, including the dissolution of former Yugoslavia.

Table 1:

Some key characteristics and prerequisites for Europeanization of the Balkan space

Characteristics	Space
Politico-geographic	Border space Strategic transport Certain geopolitical conflicts of influence Discussion for the political boundaries of the region
Socio-cultural	Historic-cultural region Ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity Identity and image problems Weak organizational capacity of social actors and weak civil society Ethno-religious fragmentation Nationalism Deepening social crisis
Politico-economic	Slow development and integration problems Socio-political fragmentation (Balkanisation) Incomplete or “superficial” democratization and reinstitutionalization Inexperience of political division and pluralism Nationalist and regionalist movements Socialist past Market economy (transition) Problems caused by privatization Monocentric development models EU enlargement

Source: Jelavich (1993); Karastoyanov (2002); Demetropoulou (2002).

A keystone in the methodological framework of our comparative analysis is the interpretation of the spatial development concept and the references in the national planning documents to the supra-national (European) ones that regulate the principles for spatial development in the EU (even though they are only in form of recommendations).

The authors attach special importance to the impact of the Europeanization process in the spatial planning and to the need for uncovering the power of that impact and the transformation stage of the laws and planning system. That approach starts up a new line of research considering the actuality of the topic, the insufficient scientific literature, and above all – the lack of a real methodological model and a

framework for studying the Europeanization of the national planning systems. The potential mechanism and trajectories of domestic change have not yet been fully explored or systematized in this context and the existing literature has not yet proposed an optimal methodological model for analysing the EU influence on domestic planning systems and policies (Giannakourou 2012).

A future challenge in this field of study is the content analysis and the interpretation of the legal framework, as well as national, regional and local plans/strategies, including the elaboration of general methodological framework for comparing the Balkan countries, which share socialist elements in their territorial history.

Table 2:

Some key characteristics of the spatial planning systems in Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, and Albania

Parameters/Country	BULGARIA	SERBIA	CROATIA	ALBANIA
Legislation (Spatial planning act)	Law of Spatial planning (since 1999)	Law on Planning and Construction (since 2009)	Law on Physical Planning (since 2013)	Law 10119 "On Territorial Planning" (since 2009)
Levels of government and policy-making	National Local	National Regional Local	National Regional Local	National Regional Local
Territorial-Administrative organization	National state-Statistic Regions-Districts-Municipalities-cities and villages	National state-Autonomous provinces-Statistical regions-municipalities, cities and district	National state-Counties/Regions – Municipalities and cities	National state-Regions/administrative countries- municipalities- villages
Types of plans for spatial planning	National Concept for Spatial Development, Regional Schemes, District Concept for Spatial Development, Municipal Concept for Spatial Development, Municipal plans for spatial planning, Master Spatial Plan for the city, Detailed spatial plans	The Spatial Plan of Republic of Serbia, Regional spatial plans, The Spatial Plan for Special-Purpose Areas, Spatial plans of the local communities, Urban plans	Spatial Development Strategy of the State, Spatial Planning Programme of the State (1999) Regional spatial plans, Spatial plans for special areas, Plans for spatial planning of towns and municipalities	Planning at the state level (national strategic spatial plan and state spatial plan), b) planning at the local level (municipal spatial plan / Municipal - part strategic and the operational plan urban; detailed spatial plan municipality/municipal), c) inter local level planning (regional spatial plan), and d) the integrated planning level
Actors, Decision and Policy-Makers	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, National Expert Board on Spatial Planning and Regional Policy; Regional expert board on spatial planning; Municipality councils	Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning; National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia for Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia Agency for Spatial Planning; Municipal or city Assembly	Ministry of Construction and Physical Planning and Construction; Croatian National Institute of Physical Development, Municipality councils	National Territory Council, Territory Planning Directorate, Ministries with Planning Competences, Municipalities, communes

Source: own compilation

3. Specifics of the spatial planning in Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia and Albania

Historical context and EU membership

According to Castelan (2002) the revolutions projected on the territory of the Balkans after the dissolution of the USSR mark the beginning of a period, which, because of the lack of homogenous characteristics and clear perspectives, is defined with the vague term “post-communism”. Subsequently, the democracy, sought by everyone, starts a vicious circle of political, social and economic transformations in the Balkan countries.

The beginning of the transition period starts with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The following events complicate further the long-lived questions provoked by the process of Balkanisation. From that point of view we can analyse on one hand the “transition” through the prism of the socio-economic collapse and the crises in the 90s, but on the other – in view of the new political boundaries in the context of

European integration and the common aspirations for “Europeanization” of the Balkan countries.

As of today, only two of the studied in these paper countries are EU members – Bulgaria (joined 2007) and Croatia (2013). Serbia, along with 5 other Western Balkans countries, is identified as a potential candidate for EU membership. In line with the decision of the European Council in June 2013 to open accession negotiations with Serbia, the Council adopted in December 2013 the negotiating framework and agreed to hold the 1st Intergovernmental Conference with Serbia in January 2014. Albania is also identified as a potential candidate for EU membership. Since June 2014 it received the official statute of EU-candidate.

Planning systems

The review of the legal frameworks concerning the spatial planning in the Balkan region reveals the significant differences between the countries. That could be explained on one hand – with the political, politico-geographic and economic conditions, and on the other – with the development and the gradual transition in the perception of the territory and its planning – concepts that have been actually locked for decades in the chains of the centralized and communist principles for development and government. After 1989 some countries, such as Bulgaria, make the first step in the conceptualization and the elaboration of this framework (years of denying the role of the spatial planning). A key factor for pushing forward this process were the requirements on the way of Eurointegration and EU membership for those countries. From that point of view Serbia is a peculiar case given the dynamics in the changes of the political boundaries and the corresponding inner-territorial issues. Its candidature for EU membership (2009) results in favourable attempts for coordination of the regional policy with the spatial planning and gives birth to the National plan for spatial planning and the preceding new law (from 2009). As is the case with the ideas in the Bulgarian National concept for spatial development (adopted in 2012), the National plan for spatial development of Serbia (2010) founds its planning principles on the Guiding Principles and documents with commendable purpose adopted by the EU.

Croatia adapts its national system for spatial planning shortly after its membership in the EU, although the law for physical planning (from 2013) had already developed the idea for integral spatial planning and some principles for territorial development in coordination with the European directives and documents.

In Albania, the Law 10119 “On Territorial Planning” tries to harmonize policies and territorial planning law principles of the EU (inclusive territorial planning that combines all the political issues at all territorial levels). The new planning system in Albania lists a number of principles that comply with the European philosophy of planning and include almost all the features of other models. The law does not stop only to territory planning, but pays significant attention to the development of the territory and its control (Nikolli et al. 2014).

4. First results and observations

The trends in both EU-members and candidate states in East and Southeast Europe reflect their intense work in trying to elaborate and adopt strategic documents

in compliance with the EU recommendations and the general planning concepts given as reference in the corresponding EU papers. These strategic documents differ in name (concept, plan, strategy or program), but not as much in essence and functions. That incorporates little by little the ideas for integration of the regional and spatial planning and the corresponding policies.

Notwithstanding, the countries, which have followed the centralized government model for years and have witnessed long transitional periods after the fall of the political regimes, are still working on the transition in the territorial and political decentralization. A distinct example supporting the above statement could be found in the delegation of competencies to the local and regional spatial planning bodies that often results in bad coordination and functioning of the system connected with the decision-making process and with the preparation and approval of the corresponding planning instruments (plans, strategies, programs). In countries like Bulgaria, where the discussion for the design of a second level of self-government lasts for more than 20 years, the negative trends and practices deepen – on one hand, because of the imperfect functioning of the municipal level in taking planning decisions, as well as the financing of the spatial planning process, and on the other – because of the difficulties in the methodical coordination of the decision-making process between the different territorial levels. Similar problems are also typical for the other studied countries.

The long political and socio-cultural transition implies that we should also observe the spatial planning issues through the prism of their cognitive aspects, with emphasis on the learning process in the relevant training centres that prepare professionals and specialists in the subject. Spatial or physical planning has for decades been competency of the architects and engineers. However, the integral approach in the territorial studies manifests and strengthens the idea that the elaboration of complete spatial concept and models should be at interdisciplinary level that involves a vast number of sciences whose studying object is the territory. From that point of view geography has a key role. In some countries (Serbia and Croatia) the training in spatial planning and projecting is organized in the geographic faculties of the state universities. In Bulgaria similar education is possible at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia.

The design of this study and the comparison between Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, and Croatia provide new opportunities for studying the regional similarities and differences and could also complement majority of the studies dedicated to the transition in the urban planning, to the comparative studies of the planning evolution between cities, etc. The actualization of the information for the national planning systems is undoubtedly a crucial starting point for studying the Europeanization and the Eurointegration that also provides multitude of opportunities to compare countries that remain scantily studied in the scientific works. A focal point in the research is the further development and the deepening of the methodological model and the elaboration of a methodical matrix for comparing the Balkan countries.

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