



## BOOK REVIEW: SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. REVIEW AND COMPARISON OF SELECTED ISSUES

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Comparisons of national spatial governance and planning systems have long taken centre stage in the European literature and are recently witnessing a revamped attention (Cotella et al., 2021; Berisha et al., 2023; Nadin et al., 2024). Whereas planning systems across Central and Eastern European countries – the New Member States of the European Union (EU) – have largely been integrated into these analysis, the area is very often depicted as rather homogeneous, in so doing neglecting internal differentiation and nuances. It is against this background that the book *Spatial Planning Systems in Central and Eastern European Countries. Review and Comparison of Selected Issues*, authored by a team of renowned scholars from the area coordinated by Maciej J. Nowak, positions its objective, that is to compare a number of key aspects of spatial planning systems in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland. The spatial planning systems of said countries are meticulously discussed throughout the book, in so doing filling a significant gap in the literature. Importantly, the authors bring to the forefront the nuanced and complex nature of planning systems in countries that have transitioned from centrally planned economies to market-oriented systems, within the broader framework of EU policies and standards (Cotella & Dabrowski, 2021). More in detail, the monograph is structured to first establish a comprehensive classification of spatial planning systems across the nine countries, that will then serve as the foundation for a deeper analysis of national interpretations of spatial planning concepts and the institutional frameworks that support them.

In Chapter 1, the authors present the readers with a thorough investigation into the various methodologies for classifying and comparing national spatial planning systems. They effectively highlight the barriers these systems face in implementing planning concepts and regulations. A critical aspect concerns the discussion on terminological discrepancies, which underscores the challenge of achieving a unified understanding of spatial planning across different national

contexts. This chapter sets the stage for the subsequent analysis by providing a solid theoretical grounding and referencing current international discussions on the subject.

Chapter 2 then delves into the historical and spatial contexts of Central and Eastern European countries, providing a brief yet comprehensive overview of key spatial planning features and instruments. The use of tabular depictions, accompanied by concise commentaries, provides the readers with a precious compass to navigate the fundamental aspects of each country's planning system. This chapter is particularly effective in illustrating the commonalities and differences among the countries studied, making it a valuable resource for comparative analysis.

The heart of the monograph lies in Chapter 3, where an extensive comparative analysis is conducted. The authors skilfully highlight both similarities and differences, at the same time assessing the strengths and weaknesses of national solutions in their respective countries. The detailed case studies of select planning instruments provide an in-depth look at the practical challenges and successes elements within these systems. The special focus on integrating environmental and natural dimensions with spatial planning is timely and relevant, considering the increasing importance of sustainability in spatial development.

One of the key strengths of this book is its critical examination of the strategic versus regulatory dimensions of spatial planning. The authors provide a nuanced discussion on how planning concepts are translated into regulations, a process that varies significantly across the countries under scrutiny. The findings reveal that strategic guidelines are often too vague to be legally enforceable, and in some cases, they are not implemented at all. Conversely, excessively detailed legal provisions can stifle development. This balanced analysis underscores the need for flexible yet robust regulatory frameworks that can adapt to the specific needs and contexts of individual countries. The book also engages with the broader theoretical implications of its findings. It suggests that the role of law in spatial planning systems warrants further study, particularly regarding the detailed approach to spatial planning legislation. This is a critical insight, as the book reveals that similar legal solutions often yield different outcomes in practice, highlighting the importance of understanding national planning cultures and practices.

In conclusion, I consider *Spatial Planning Systems in Central and Eastern European Countries. Review and Comparison of Selected Issues* an indispensable resource for anyone engaged in comparative spatial governance and planning studies. The book's thorough and methodical approach to comparing and contrasting spatial planning systems across the nine countries subject to investigation provides a much-needed perspective on the unique challenges and opportunities these countries face. The depth of analysis, particularly in the examination of strategic versus regulatory dimensions of planning, offers critical insights that are applicable beyond the CEE context. One of the book's most commendable aspects is its ability to present complex and varied information in a coherent and accessible manner. The use of tables and concise commentaries in Chapter 2, for example, allows readers to quickly grasp the essential features of each country's planning system, facilitating easier comparison and deeper understanding. This methodological clarity is essential for scholars and practitioners who need to navigate the intricate landscape of spatial planning across different national contexts. Furthermore, the case studies included in Chapter 3 provide practical examples of how planning instruments are applied in different contexts, offering valuable lessons for practitioners and policymakers. These case studies illustrate the real-world challenges and successes of spatial planning, grounding the book's theoretical discussions in practical reality.

Perhaps most importantly, the book's emphasis on the integration of environmental and natural dimensions with spatial planning is particularly relevant in today's struggle towards a just green transition (Fleming & Mauger, 2021). By highlighting the importance of these dimensions, Nowak and his coauthors underscore the need for planning systems that are not only efficient and effective but also sustainable and resilient. This focus aligns with global trends in spatial planning and development, making the book a timely contribution to the field.

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