EUROPEAN SPATIAL RESEARCH AND POLICY

Volume 28 2021 Number 1

https://doi.org/10.18778/1231-1952.28.1.11

PART II

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MULTI-LEVEL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE: A EUROPEAN TYPOLOGY

Abstract. The European Union identifies the regional level as the ideal spatial scale for resources' redistribution, in so doing turning European regions into key spatial development players. This raises challenges due to the heterogeneity of the EU in terms of administrative configurations, and spatial governance and planning systems. The contribution of this article draws on the results of three interlinked ESPON research projects to shed light on the matter. Building on an overview of the institutional variables that may influence successful regional development, it proposes a typology of multi-level regional development governance in the EU and reflects upon the potentials for delivering economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

Key words: EU cohesion policy, multi-level governance, territorial governance, spatial planning systems, regional development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the cohesion policy in the late 1980s and the subsequent reform of the Structural Funds, the European Union (EU) has been investing in the cohesive spatial development of countries and regions. As a consequence, the development of synergies between supranational and domestic regional policy has gained importance over time, especially with the financial constraints cast by the global financial crisis on national public budgets. Despite the undisputed role played by Member States' national governments[1], the European Commission identified the regional level as the main operational channel for setting up development programmes and managing funds, while at the same time dedicating increasing attention to the engagement of local actors and institutions[2].

This articulated approach raises a number of issues in relation to the institutional heterogeneity that characterises the European context. Particularly, while the authorities responsible for delivering EU cohesion policy have generally been identified with the NUTS2 level[3], not all countries feature such administrative layer. Moreover, even when NUTS2 regions exist, they may be either fully autonomous federal units (e.g. Austria, Germany), directly elected subnational entities (e.g. Italy, Poland, Spain), non-elected bodies characterised by second-level democracy, or directly nominated by the central government (e.g. Portugal) or purely statistical units (e.g. Hungary, Slovenia). Similarly, EU countries and regions differ significantly in a number of other issues that, directly or indirectly, impact the governance of spatial development: their administrative and technical cultures, the spatial governance and planning systems, the quality of governance, etc. Such heterogeneity constitutes a challenge when aiming at achieving the EU objective of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, and shall be carefully considered in policy development.

To provide a contribution in this direction, this article develops a typology of multi-level regional development governance in the EU and uses it to reflect on the

[1] The research projects upon which the paper is grounded were completed before the conclusion of the Brexit process, and the produced typology builds on evidence collected in relation to the 2007–2013 and the 2014–2020 EU programming periods. In this light, the United Kingdom is also included in the analysis.

[2] Further attention dedicated to local actors and institutions is demonstrated by the multiplication of instruments dedicated to the development of integrated territorial and urban strategies (e.g. Integrated Territorial Investments and the Community Led Local Development approach) and, more in general, by the growing relevance awarded to the urban and metropolitan dimension within the EU cohesion policy since the 2000s (Medeiros, 2019; Cotella, 2019; Armondi and De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020). However, in most cases, the choice to activate new tools and to introduce new governance models remains in the hands of the national and regional authorities, as recently highlighted by the ESPON METRO project (ESPON, 2021).

[3] The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) is a geocode standard for referencing the subdivisions of countries for statistical purposes. It is has been developed and regulated by the EU and is instrumental in the Structural Fund delivery mechanisms. Additional information is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background.

potentials and challenges for a cross-fertilisation between European and domestic development policies. In doing so, it builds on the results of three ESPON research projects to which the authors contributed in recent years, namely: ESPON TANGO (Territorial Approaches for New Governance)[4], ESPON ReSSI (Regional Strategies for Sustainable and Inclusive Territorial Development)[5], and ESPON COMPASS (Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in the European Union)[6]. After this introduction, the article outlines the theoretical framework upon which the study is based, dedicating particular attention to various dimensions that characterise the EU's multi-level institutional landscape and, more, in particular, the promotion of regional development therein. Section three briefly introduces institutional similarities and differences among European countries based on existing studies. The fourth section explores the current operational configuration of the EU cohesion policy within Member States, to reflect upon the existing (or missing) links between EU programming activity and domestic spatial planning devices. Building on this analysis, the mentioned typology is proposed and discussed in relation to the actual potentials and challenges to delivering economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the different countries. A concluding section completes the contribution, summarising the main findings in the light of possible future developments and indicating the need for a formalisation of the role of domestic systems of spatial governance and planning with respect to European territorial governance.

2. THE MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE OF EU REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT. SOME CONCEPTUAL COORDINATES

The EU is a unique, hybrid institutional entity. It has been consolidating incrementally since the end of the Second World War, as a consequence of a process combining both federal and intergovernmental characteristics (Nugent, 2006) and featuring swinging momentum and pace (D'Ottavio *et al.*, 2020). The result of this process

[4] The applied research project ESPON TANGO (Territorial Approaches for New Governance) focuses on the need for coherent public action and allocation of resources within the different territories across the EU, in a times of restricted public budgets. Additional information is available at: https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/tango-territorial-approaches-new-governance.

[5] The targeted analysis ESPON ReSSI (Regional Strategies for Sustainable and Inclusive Territorial Development – Regional Interplay and EU Dialogue) focuses on how sustainable, inclusive and smart development can be promoted in Europe, with particular attention to the regional level. Additional information is available at: https://www.espon.eu/ressi.

[6] The applied research project ESPON COMPASS (Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe) focuses on the evolution of spatial governance and planning systems in Europe since 2000, with particular attention to the impact of the European Union on the changes which occur. Additional information is available at https://www.espon.eu/planning-systems.

is an organisation based on the rule of law, whose action is legitimised by treaties voluntarily and democratically concluded by its Member States (Hix, 2005). These treaties regulate the distribution of sovereignty and competences on a number of issues between the various administrative levels, as it is effectively described through the concept of 'multi-level governance' (Scharpf, 1994; Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Importantly, due to the 'open-ended' nature of the EU integration process, its multi-level governance is a rather 'unstable equilibrium', which continuously reshapes through the means of reciprocal influence between the EU, the Member States and subnational institutions (Ferlaino and Molinari, 2009; Shackel *et al.*, 2015). In particular, while the distribution of competences and their implication for the functioning of EU regulation and policy-making is rather consolidated in those fields for which the Member States have transferred a high level of sovereignty to EU institutions (e.g. competition rules, monetary policy, customs etc.), the fields that are characterised by shared competences between the EU and the Member States may be subject to further uncertainty, depending on changing political attitudes of the various national (and subnational) actors (Sutcliffe, 2000).

This is further evident in those policy fields in which the introduction of an EU competence has followed a particularly bumpy road, as it is the case with spatial development and planning (Faludi, 2001). As a matter of fact, the European Union has developed its spatial agenda through time, with the latter that has become increasingly explicit since the end of the 1980s (Faludi, 2010), which has become increasingly explicit with the progression of the integration process. At the same time, however, Member States have at a different points in time argued against the attribution of a spatial competence to the EU as they were afraid that this could limit their sovereignty on the development and planning of their respective territories (Faludi, 2008). A compromise was found at the end of the 1980s when the conclusive steps to establish the European single market were coupled with the agreement that the EU should be allowed to intervene to mitigate the resulting unbalancing trends. To this end, the economic and social cohesion objective – which was explicitly extended to its 'territorial' dimension in 2007, with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon – was included in the Single European Act of 1986, affirming the need for a Community action of regional balancing (Dühr *et al.*, 2010; Janin Rivolin, 2010). The Structural Funds were subsequently reformed in 1988, giving birth to the EU cohesion policy, a complex mechanism through which the EU redistributes to regions a good share of the resources it draws from Member States[7].

The importance of the EU action on regional development has been acknowledged by multiple studies (Baron *et al.*, 2010; Davies, 2017; Gagliardi and Percoco,

[7] During the recently concluded programming period, the resources redistributed from the EU to its Member States through the EU cohesion policy amount to 351.8 billion euro, accounting for about one third of the total EU budget. Additional information is available at: https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/overview#.

2017; Fratesi and Wishlade, 2017), even more so in the historic moment in which national public investment was cut on average by 20% in real terms between 2008 and 2013, as a consequence of a significant deficit caused by the financial crisis, and now that regional economies are further threatened by the pandemic[8]. The implementation of the EU cohesion policy is, however, subject to a number of challenges. On the one hand, this reflects the inherent complexity that characterises the economic, social, and territorial dimensions of EU development (CEC, 2017). On the other, it is a consequence of the instability of the cohesion policy governance. In particular, due to the lack of spatial planning competences at the EU level, the programming, management, and implementation of the EU cohesion policy in individual countries varies widely, with Member States being offered considerable leeway in adopting the operational configuration, as they see fit for their institutional frameworks.

While the need to establish synergies between the EU cohesion policy and spatial development policies put in place at various levels in Member States is a crucial precondition for the achievement of the cohesion objective, at present the success of this operation is largely influenced by the capacities and choices of local institutions. This has been clearly acknowledged by the European Commission's 11th key thematic objective for the programming period 2014–2020, as it recognised the crucial coordination challenge posed by the high heterogeneity that characterises the EU institutional landscape. In view of that, in order to shed light on the actual potentials for cross-fertilisation between European and domestic development policies, the following sections will explore in more detail the institutional heterogeneity that characterises the EU in terms of administrative culture, governance capacity, and spatial governance and planning, to afterwards reflect on the implication which these variables may have for the establishment of effective frameworks of coordination between European and domestic regional development policies.

3. UNFOLDING THE INSTITUTIONAL HETEROGENEITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

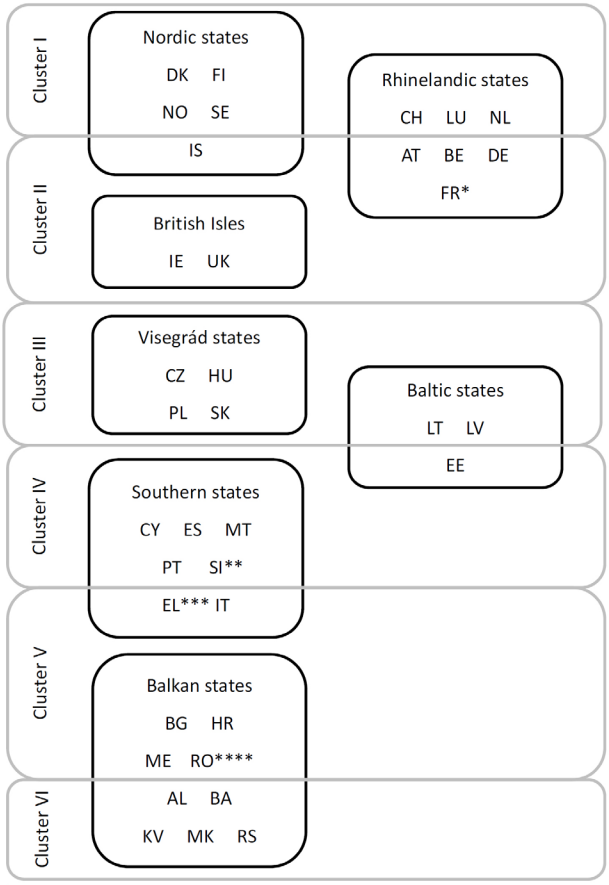
A primary level of complexity that depicts the institutional heterogeneity of the EU well is represented by the different administrative traditions that characterise its countries[9]. First attempts to produce classifications on the matter date back to the

[8] The austerity policies put in place in numerous EU countries (Arestis and Pelagidis, 2010; Mastagannis and Leventi, 2014; Cotella *et al.*, 2015a; Tulumello *et al.*, 2020), have led to an increasing reliance on the EU cohesion policy to finance development investments. In particular, in the 2014–2020 period, about a third of the EU budget is invested under cohesion policy to help address disparities between regions, equivalent to over 20% of the total of Member States' public investment and peaking to around 60% of the total public investment in the regions, falling into the cohesion objective (CEC, 2017).

[9] For a comprehensive overview, see ESPON, 2013, pp. 27–54.

early 1990s, with Hesse and Sharpe (1991) who distinguished between Northern European, Anglo-Saxon, and Napoleonic countries on the basis of the degree of local autonomy. A similar exercise was produced by Goldsmith (1992) who has argued that the Southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Spain, but also France) are characterised by patronage-oriented administrative models, where the primary duty of local politicians is presumably to ensure that the interests of their communities are well promoted and defended at higher levels of government. In contrast, Northern European countries feature a more welfare state-oriented model, that has formed over time as a consequence of an efficient delivery of services. Additionally, the promotion of spatial development within each context is also influenced by the respective 'quality of governance' (see De Mello and Barenstein, 2001; Rodriguez-Pose and Gill, 2003). A preliminary account of this subject, and in particular of the capacity of vertical and horizontal coordination among different territorial levels and among actors and sectors at the same territorial level, has been elaborated by the ESPON 2.3.2 project *Governance of Territorial and Urban Policy from the EU to the Local Level*. This project grouped EU countries into four categories (ESPON, 2007): (i) countries characterised by strong a vertical and horizontal coordination (Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia); (ii) countries with mainly vertical coordination and weak horizontal co-ordination (Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Norway, Romania, Slovenia); (iii) countries featuring a good level of horizontal coordination and scarce vertical coordination (Slovenia, Luxembourg, Malta, Sweden, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Cyprus), and (iv) countries characterised by weak vertical and horizontal coordination (Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal). These aspects were tackled more comprehensively in the ESPON TANGO project (ESPON, 2013), which ranked and clustered the European countries on the basis of the number of indicators reflecting their quality of governance (Fig. 1)[10]: (i) government effectiveness, i.e. the quality of public services and its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies, (ii) regulatory quality, i.e. the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development, (iii) rule of law, i.e. the extent to which agents have confidence in, and abide by, the rules of the society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, and the courts, and (iv) control of corruption, i.e. the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, as well as the level of the 'seizing of the state by elites and private interests'.

[10] These indicators were drawn from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) database (Kraay *et al.*, 2010).



AL	Albania
AT	Austria
BA	Bosnia
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CH	Switzerland
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
LV	Latvia
KV	Kosovo
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
ME	Montenegro
MK	FYROM Macedonia
MT	Malta
NL	The Netherlands
NO	Norway
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
RS	Serbia
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

Notes:

* Some of the comparative politics literature categorises France as a Southern (or Mediterranean) state (e.g. Hendriks et al, 2010), rather than a Rhinelandic state (as indicated in the diagram)

** Part of Slovenia belongs to the Balkan region although the country is not generally classified as a Balkan state

*** Although Greece is also located in the Balkan region it is often categorised as a member of the Southern (or Mediterranean) states in comparative politics literature

**** Only a small part of Romania belongs to the Balkan region but the country is categorised above as a member of the Balkan states since it does not belong to the other country groups

Fig. 1. Governance quality clusters in Europe and its macro-regions

Source: ESPON (2013, p. 42).

The administrative tradition and the quality of governance that characterise EU countries and regions have influenced at least partly the development, consolidation, and functioning of spatial governance and planning systems. After preliminary comparative studies that were based on different 'juridical families'

characterising various countries (e.g. Davies *et al.*, 1989; Newman and Thornley, 1996), a more comprehensive representation of the EU heterogeneity in this field was proposed by the *EU Compendium of spatial planning systems and policies* (CEC, 1997) and then tentatively updated by the analysis of the ESPON 2.3.2 project (ESPON, 2007). Building on a number of variables, this work developed four Weberian ideal types or 'traditions of spatial planning' in Europe (Table 1), arguing that some countries might exhibit a strong tendency to one tradition while others showed a more complex combination of types.

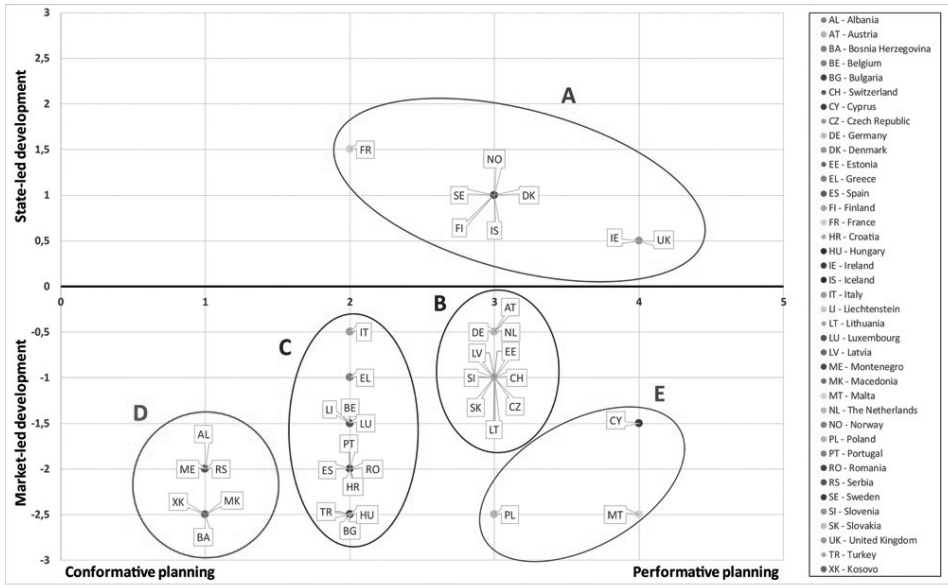
Table 1. Traditions of spatial planning in Europe

	Comprehensive integrated	**Regional economic**	**Land use management**	**Urbanism**
Legal basis	Mixed	Mixed	Discretion	Code
Scope of planning	Wide	Wide	Narrow	Narrow
Scale of planning	Multilevel planning	National planning	Local	Local
Locus of power	Mixed	Centre and local	Centre	Local
Public or private	Public	Public	Mixed	Mixed
Maturity of the system	Mature	Mature	Mature	Immature
Distance between goals and outcomes	Narrow	Mixed	Narrow	Wide
Examples (CEC, 1997)	AT, DK, FI, DE, NL, SE	FR, PT, (+DE)	IE, UK (+BE)	GR, IT, ES (+PT)
Examples (ESPON, 2007)	AT, DK, FI, NL, SE, DE, BG, EE, HU, LV, LT PL, RO, SL, SV, (+ BE, FR, IE LU, UK)	BE, IE, LU, UK, CY, CZ, MT, (+ PT, ES)	FR, DE, PT, HU, LV, LT, SK, (+ IE, SE, UK)	GR, IT, ES CY, MT

Source: own work based on CEC (1997), Nadin and Stead (2008), and ESPON (2007).

More recent analyses, such as those performed in the context of the ESPON COMPASS research project (ESPON, 2018), offer an account of an even higher heterogeneity. The conceptualisation of spatial governance and planning systems as 'institutional technologies' through which public authorities allocate rights

for land use and development (Janin Rivolin, 2012, 2017) allowed Berisha *et al.* (2021) to reflect on the actual capacity of public control of spatial development embedded in each system (Fig. 2). In particular, their analysis indicated the lower capacity of public control intrinsic in the traditional 'conformative' models operating in Southern European countries, especially in comparison to the 'performative' models that characterise Anglo-Saxon countries (Janin Rivolin, 2008). However, it also shows that while most North-Western and Eastern European countries have been progressively moving towards a 'neo-performative' model (Muñoz Gielen and Tasan-Kok, 2010), the results achieved as a consequence of this shift are highly variable.



A, State-led systems
B, Market-led neo-performative systems
C, Conformative systems
D, Proto-conformative systems
E, Misled performative systems

Fig. 2. A typology of European systems of spatial governance and planning with respect to the capacity for public control of spatial development

Source: Berisha *et al.* (2021).

As it will be further explored in the following sections, the quality of governance and the differential spatial governance and planning systems have implications for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy in each country, in turn allowing or constraining the development of synergies between the latter and domestic development tools.

4. EUROPEAN AND DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVES IN SEARCH FOR COORDINATION

Since the programming period 2007–2013, all European regions have been eligible for some sort of support in the framework of the EU cohesion policy, with the vast majority of funding being allocated to the regions where investment needs are arguably the greatest[11]. Despite the influential role played by national governments, the EU looks at NUTS2 regions as the main institutional level to invest its resources in. However, not all Member States have equivalent administrative layers and, even where NUTS2 regions exist, they can be fully autonomous federal units, directly elected sub-national entities, indirectly nominated second-tier bodies, authorities directly appointed by the central government, or purely statistical units. Due to this heterogeneity, the most successful way to promote regional development may vary from place to place, also in relation to the capacity of domestic spatial planning systems to establish virtuous links with the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy.

In order to shed light on the matter, the research project, ESPON ReSSI (ESPON, 2017) put together a qualitative characterisation of EU Member States, considering how each of them has been involved in the EU cohesion policy during the 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 programming periods (Table 2). The results of this analysis show that countries may be divided into four groups: (i) countries managing EU cohesion policy exclusively at the national level; (ii) countries managing the EU cohesion policy through non-elected bodies strongly dependent on the central level; (iii) countries managing the EU cohesion policy through non-elected bodies whose actions are influenced by both central government and lower levels; and (iv) countries managing the EU cohesion policy through elected sub-national entities.

The proposed representation triggers a number of considerations. First of all, it provides evidence of the heterogeneity of the EU cohesion policy management models. When considering the 2007–2013 programming period, the largest number of countries is characterised by a regionalised structure dedicated to funds management and implementation, featuring either elected or non-elected NUTS2 regional institutions. In several cases, as in the Central and Eastern European Member States that entered the EU in 2004, NUTS2 regional levels were created *ad hoc* through more or less successful regionalisation processes occurring from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s (Cotella, 2007, 2014). However, there are some exceptions to this pattern: that applies to small countries, for which the introduction of autonomous NUTS2 regions would not be of much added value (i.e.

[11] These have been classified as Convergence (2007–2013) or Less Developed Regions (2014–2020), and feature GDP per capita lower than 75% of the EU average.

Cyprus, Malta, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia); Romania and Bulgaria, which only joined the EU in 2007 and for which regional administration reforms were still ongoing; and Denmark which centralised the management of the EU cohesion policy through Operational Programmes (OPs) drafted at the central level.

Table 2. Institutional level prevalently managing EU cohesion policy in the Member States

Programming period	**Level at which EU cohesion policy is prevalently managed**			
	Central level	Non-elected sub-national institutions		Elected sub-national institutions
		Central influence	Mixed influence	
2007–2013	BG, CY, DK, EE, LT, LV, LU, MT, RO, SI	HU, PT, SK	CZ, FI, GR, IE, NL, SE, UK	AT, BE, DE, ES, FR, IT, PL
2014–2020	AT, BG, CZ, CY, DK, EE, FI, HR, HU, LT, LV, LU, MT, RO, SI, SK, UK	PT	GR, IE, NL, SE	BE, DE, ES, FR, IT, PL

Source: own work.

At the same time, the table also shows that a relatively large number of countries opted for a recentralisation of the programming and management of the Operational Programmes in the 2014–2020 period. This phenomenon witnesses once more the unstable, and partially contested nature of the EU cohesion policy governance model, and its continuous redefinition as an outcome of the complex interaction between the political interest of European, national, and subnational institutions and actors (Adams *et al.*, 2011).

Various sub-national institutions established during the 2000s succumbed to the national versus local negotiations on the distribution of EU funds. Similarly, the regionalisation processes that were still ongoing in some countries (e.g. Bulgaria and Romania) were hampered and eventually neutralised. Only those countries traditionally characterised by a strong sub-national level (federal or regionalised states) maintained the distribution of resources firmly in the hands of these levels, somehow advocating the efficiency of this approach.

When it comes to the actual extent of the overlap between EU programming activities and domestic spatial planning, recent studies have shown how specific attempts to improve the coupling of spatial and strategic-programming

documents in terms of timing and investment priorities have been sporadic (Dabrowski, 2014; Dotti, 2016; Schmitt and Van Well, 2017). Most countries have made little or no effort in this direction and linkages between the EU cohesion policy and domestic spatial governance and planning mainly relate to the embracing of multi-annual perspectives in domestic spatial development policy (ESPON, 2018). Be that as it may, since in all Member States domestic funds and EU funds coexist, although, in different proportions, it is interesting to investigate the distribution of spatial governance and planning competences at the different levels in each country, and to highlight the existing overlap between the management of the EU cohesion policy and domestic spatial planning tools (Table 3).

Table 3. EU countries' levels provided with spatial planning competences (In Bold when overlapping with the level prevalently managing EU cohesion policy in the country in the programming period 2014–2020)

EU countries' level that present spatial competences			
NUTS0	**NUTS1**	**NUTS2**	**NUTS3**
AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, **DK, EE,** FR, GR, **HR, HU,** IE, **LT, LU, MT,** NL, PL, PT, **RO, SI, SK**	**UK**, **BE**, **DE**	AT, BE, BG, **ES, FR, IT**, **PL**, **PT**, **NL**	BG, CZ, DE, FI, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, RO, SE, SK, UK

Source: own work.

The results of the ESPON COMPASS project show that most EU countries feature at least one autonomous sub-national level responsible for spatial planning (ESPON, 2018). In this light one can assume that when a sub-national level plays a role in both domestic and European regional development, potentials exist for the fruitful integration of programming activities within domestic spatial planning. On the other extreme, the absence of correspondence between domestic spatial planning instruments and EU programming activities might limit the effects of the EU cohesion policy, virtually depriving the latter of a spatial dimension. Countries managing the EU cohesion policy centrally show heterogeneous behaviours. Most of them are also responsible for the preparation of one or more spatial planning instruments at the same level, defining general provisions for the spatial organisation. The specificity and concreteness of these instruments are inversely proportional to the dimension of the country, as are the chances of establishing relevant spatial synergies between EU cohesion policy programming and domestic spatial planning priorities. Additional differences emerge between countries featuring non-elected and elected regional institu-

tions. When the institutions deputed to manage the EU cohesion policy correspond to an elected administrative level featuring spatial planning competences (i.e. Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and, although at a different scale, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom) it may be possible to exploit synergies between domestic planning and EU programming activities, in turn strengthening the spatial dimension of the EU cohesion policy. In a converse situation, when the EU cohesion policy is managed through non-elected bodies, except for Portugal, no correspondent spatial planning tool exists with which synergy can be established.

5. TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF MULTI-LEVEL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE IN THE EU

Building on the evidence presented above, it is possible to position individual EU countries as a consequence of (i) the operational models that each of them adopted to programme and manage the EU cohesion policy in the 2014–2020 programming period, and (ii) the level of the quality of their governance. When analysed in light of the systems of spatial governance and planning that characterise each country, the resulting representation enables the identification of a typology of multi-level regional development governance in the EU, composed of groups of countries that show similar potentials for the integration of EU and domestic actions towards economic, social and territorial cohesion (Fig. 3).

Firstly, there are those Member States that display the highest potential for exploiting synergies between domestic spatial development policies and the EU cohesion policy (group A). In these countries, the sub-national level plays a crucial role in domestic spatial governance and planning, as well as in the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy (e.g. France, Poland, and Germany). They are characterised by mature, comprehensive integrated spatial planning systems moving towards a neo-performative model (e.g. the Netherlands, and Sweden). A similar situation also exists in those Member States that have traditionally adopted a land-use management approach to spatial planning, where both the central and the local levels play important roles in promoting spatial development (Ireland, and partially Belgium). In all these countries, the respective regional NUTS 2 levels (or the Lander at NUTS1, in the case of Germany) are responsible for the preparation of regional spatial development documents, which contribute to enriching the EU cohesion policy regional operational programmes with a spatial dimension, as well as to exploiting relevant synergies between the programming of domestic and EU resources.

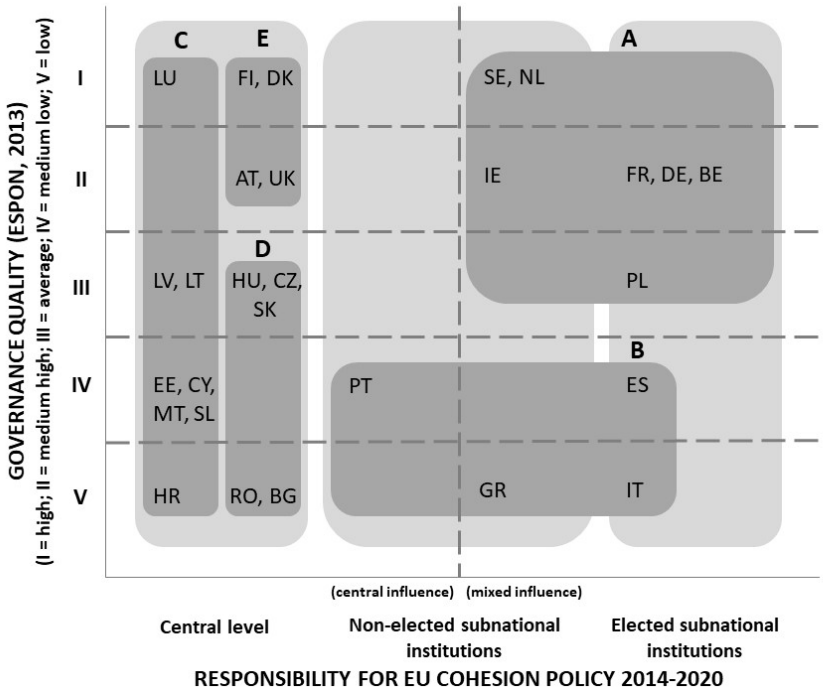


Fig. 3. A typology of multi-level regional development governance in the EU
Source: own work on ESPON (2017).

The second type includes those countries where, despite strongly regionalised programming and management of the EU cohesion policy, the development synergies are limited by the relatively lower level of governance quality (group B). This is the case of Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, where the spatial governance and planning approach is less comprehensive and often characterised by vertical and horizontal coordination gaps between levels and sectors. Portugal is an exception here, as the EU cohesion policy is partially managed at the regional level, but simultaneously influenced by the central government in the definition of development priorities. This may be a direct consequence of the country's spatial planning tradition, which is often associated with the regional economic approach rather than with the Mediterranean urbanism approach. Evidence collected from recent studies has confirmed the described situation, with regional authorities that are not always capable of coordinating domestic spatial development priorities and tools with the EU cohesion policy programming activity, and eventually subordinate the former to the latter for pragmatic reasons (Stead and Cotella, 2011; ESPON, 2018; Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2015).

The third type applies to the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Croatia, where cohesion policies are managed centrally (group C). Each of these countries corresponds to a single NUTS2 region, except for Slovenia and Croatia, which are divided into two units. Due to their relatively reduced sizes, they have not deemed it necessary to delegate the management of EU resources to subnational units, as spatial development priorities are in most cases defined and pursued through national-level documents, and the sub-national level is either non-existent or constrained between the national and the local (Adams *et al.*, 2014). The successful promotion of regional development mostly depends here on two issues: (i) the vertical coordination, enabling an accurate representation of local development instances into centrally developed spatial development strategies and programmes, and (ii) the horizontal coordination between the central bodies responsible for the definition of national development strategies and those deputed to the EU cohesion policy programming and management. In this light, countries characterised by more mature, integrated spatial governance and planning systems and higher levels of the quality of governance appear better positioned (e.g. Luxembourg).

Central and Eastern European countries that are characterised by a wider territorial extension belong to the fourth type (group D). Excluding Poland, where autonomous regions are a traditional administrative element and which were reintroduced in 2000, all these countries have not yet succeeded in establishing autonomous meso-level institutions, despite the regionalisation processes undertaken in the second half of the 1990s and in the 2000s. On the one hand, Romania and Bulgaria have been managing the EU cohesion policy centrally since their accession. On the other hand, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary have delegated the task to NUTS2 regions instituted for this purpose in the 2007–2013 programming period, eventually favouring a more centralised approach in the 2014–2020 period. These countries are traditionally centralised and characterised by a dominance of the capital region over the rest of the country territory. Development trajectories are defined centrally, as is the programming of the EU resources, which accounts for the major share of public investments (Cotella *et al.*, 2012). As a consequence, the promotion of balanced regional development depends here on the actual will of the central government to prioritise territorial cohesion over economic growth (Camagni and Capello, 2014).

Finally, the fifth type (group E) includes those countries which while being characterised by mature, comprehensive integrated spatial planning systems and scoring good levels of the quality of governance opted for a (re)nationalisation of the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy. While in Austria the development of a national programme for the distribution of EU resources was negotiated with the Lander to exploit synergies between domestic and EU priorities, in Finland, a country traditionally featuring a weaker regional level, the renationalisation led to the almost exclusive control of the central level over EU

resources. The same occurred also in Denmark which, despite the introduction of five NUTS2 regions in 2007, has continued to manage EU cohesion policy centrally. It should be mentioned that all three countries are characterised by a high level of development well over the EU average, hence obtaining a quota of funds that is scarcely relevant in comparison to domestic public investments. The United Kingdom is a partial exception in this case as it also renationalised the programming and management of EU resources in the 2014–2020 period. However, due to the peculiar administrative configuration of the country, the competences for drafting national programmes have remained in the hands of the NUTS1 governments of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Gibraltar.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The proposed contribution has shed light on the multi-level governance challenges that characterise the promotion of regional development in the EU and, in particular, on the actual chances for coordination and cross-fertilisation between domestic spatial governance and planning and the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy (Cotella, 2018). This issue is of particular relevance in a historical period that has been characterised by the incremental cut of public investments, a situation further aggravated by the global financial crisis and, most recently, by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the start of the new EU cohesion policy 2021–2027 programming period, and with the governance models that will govern the management of the EU recovery fund in the making in all Member States, the successful promotion of regional development appears to be strongly dependent on the coordination between domestic development strategies and initiatives, and the programming and management of EU resources, all to be tailored in the most functional way to the actual development potentials and challenges that characterise each region.

Building on the evidence collected through a number of pan-European analyses of the institutional heterogeneity that characterises the EU in relation to administrative traditions, the quality of governance, and spatial planning approaches, the authors have developed a typology of multi-level regional development governance and used it to reflect on the potentials for establishing synergies between the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy and the domestic national and sub-national spatial development tools. This activity enables one to partially unfold the complexity that characterises the multi-level governance of regional development in the EU, while highlight how the latter depends not only on the institutional framework in place to enable coordination of EU and domestic priorities and resources but also on the different spatial governance and planning traditions as well as the overall quality of governance.

Moreover, the proposed typology helps one formulate a number of hypotheses concerning the actual capacity to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion in European regions, which should be tested and validated through future research. First of all, the chances of an effective 'spatialisation' of the EU cohesion policy seems to depend on the actual level of (vertical and horizontal) coordination between the institutions responsible for its programming and management and those in charge of the development of spatial strategies and policies. In turn, the potential for effective coordination between levels and actors is higher in those countries which are characterised by more mature, comprehensive and integrated spatial planning systems, and which feature higher levels of the quality of governance and institutional capacity. In particular, effective coordination appears hard to achieve in those countries where the magnitude of the EU cohesion policy support overshadows that of domestic resources, and its programming and management is often subject to pragmatic reasons that act to the detriment of any spatial coordination of their impact. Conversely, when regional development priorities are defined centrally, smaller countries are in advantage in effectively promoting regional development, as it may be easier for national governments to address regional development dynamics upon which to build EU cohesion policy programming, also in coordination with subnational/local actors. Also in this case, the maturity of the spatial governance and planning system and the quality of governance play a crucial role, and the magnitude of resources may lead to a marginalisation of the spatial dimension in favour of more pragmatic logics aiming at maximising resources' absorption.

In general, the study highlights the scarce stability that characterises the EU's multi-level governance, especially in relation to contested fields such as spatial development, governance, and planning. As already introduced above, under these conditions multi-level governance is subject to the influence of the national and/or regional political attitudes, and any change in the equilibrium of those may impact its future configuration. In this light, additional research is required into the actual influence that national and regional politics have on the redefinition of the programming and management procedures that characterise the EU cohesion policy within each country and, more in general, on the overall European framework. As already highlighted by the results of the ESPON COMPASS project (ESPON, 2018), this instability ultimately indicates the need for some kind of an institutional formalisation of the interlinkage between the various spatial governance and planning systems and the EU cohesion policy, aiming at a further 'spatialisation' of its programmes and management procedures. After all, according to EU treaties, economic, social and territorial cohesion is a 'shared competence' between the EU and Member States, which should find agreement on this point.

Acknowledgements. The authors are grateful to all partners involved in the transnational groups responsible for the ESPON projects that constitute the foundations of the present contribution (i.e. ESPON TANGO – Territorial Approaches

for New Governance, ESPON ReSSI – Regional Strategies for Sustainable and Inclusive Territorial Development and ESPON COMPASS – Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe), as well as to the ESPON EGTC personnel and the members of the Project Support Teams involved in such projects (in particular Michaela Gensheimer and Gavin Daly) for the continuous support. Moreover, they would like to thank the other members of the Politecnico di Torino research units involved in the projects: Francesca Governa and Nadia Caruso (TANGO), Marco Santangelo (ReSSI) and Erblin Berisha, Bianca Maria Seardo and Alys Solly (COMPASS).

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