

PLAN4ALL

The way INSPIRE contributes to European spatial planning

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Spatial planning has a crucial role in the context of social, political, economic and environmental issues. Sustainable planning addresses the environment where people live and work, the location of social and economic activities, the way in which the resources we possess are exploited, etc. Spatial planning acts in bottom-up and top-down directions between all levels of government. National, regional and local authorities face important challenges in the development of territorial frameworks and concepts every day.

The heterogeneity in spatial planning limits its use in decision-making in a transboundary context, including impact assessment and evaluation of plans. The situation is complicated by the diversity and overall complexity of spatial planning. Spatial planning is a holistic activity. All the tasks and processes must be solved comprehensively with input from many various sources. Several authorities are in charge of single spatially relevant topics (e.g. water management, transport, cadastre, geology, etc.). To combine these sources, to perform an analysis and to ensure valuable results are big challenges in spatial planning, especially when talking about digital data. We cannot achieve any high-quality results without taking all the inputs into account. It is necessary to make the inputs interoperable and therefore comparable. This will allow the user to search the data and services, view them, download them and use them with the help of IT technologies.

Even if the INSPIRE Directive does not directly refer to spatial planning, it addresses the issues regarding the availability, quality, organization, accessibility and sharing of spatial information as common constituents to a large number of policy and information themes and experience across the various levels of public authorities.

The current European recognised definitions of spatial planning reinforce this spatial data oriented approach. One of them is mentioned in the European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter (1983) that was adopted by the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT). This definition is wide enough to cover the complexity of spatial planning.

***Regional/spatial planning** gives geographical expression to the economic, social, cultural and ecological policies of society. It is at the same time a scientific discipline, an administrative technique and a policy developed as an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach directed towards a balanced regional development and the physical organisation of space according to an overall strategy.*

At the European political and social level, the term territorial cohesion is also becoming more widely used for addressing spatial characteristics. It is mentioned in the Lisbon Treaty, in the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion [1], where the following sentence describing this term is stated, and other documents and initiatives.

Territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all diverse territories and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories. As such, it is a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU. [1]

Plan4all is a European project co-financed by the eContentplus programme of the European Commission. The main aim of Plan4all is the harmonisation of spatial planning data according to the INSPIRE Directive. The project is based on the existing best practices in EU regions and municipalities and the results of current research projects in this area. The expected results are European forums for SDI (Spatial Data Infrastructure) in spatial planning, a database of best practices and analysis of best practices in terms of organisation, sharing, harmonisation and SDI building recommendations for spatial planning. The whole sector should profit from the availability of understandable and more transparent planning information in Europe.

Considering the previous definitions of spatial planning, it is clear enough that the application of the INSPIRE principles and practise may highly facilitate the planning process but on the other hand it has to be openly recognized, as was already confirmed in the first months of the Plan4all project, that they may represent a bottleneck because a completely new way of considering data and information. Realistically the current situation of spatial information in Europe presents problems of fragmentation of datasets and sources, gaps in availability, lack of harmonisation between datasets in different scales and duplication of information collection, loss of time and resources in searching for needed data.

In spatial planning, it is absolutely fundamental to take into consideration the flow of data, information and cartography from the local level (regional, province, township,..) to upper level (national, etc.) and vice versa. INSPIRE may be seen in these situations as a facilitator for opening the process of using a wide universe of data other than the data produced or owned by the single planning authority. This data flow also affects the development of collaboration between the private and the public sectors.

The cross border aspects (even within the same nation) have been already outlined within the project as particularly relevant and that on which the project may demonstrate how useful is to use INSPIRE approach for spatial planning.

Plan4all is a challenging test bed for INSPIRE which includes the cooperation of different actors with the involvement of both public and private sector. Relevant and challenging coordination among public administrations on different levels is needed in order to guarantee shared solution to improve and solve current problems such as the spatial planning.

References

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